Common Problems at the Start

Missing description for the start in the control descriptions.

This is very common - if I had a pound for each time I see this at an event, I'd be a rich man! It's something that Controllers should definitely pick up and correct.

The start location is on a decision point, or is not even on a line feature (for TD1-3 courses).

Elementary mistakes, but they have to be controlled out surprisingly often.

First controls are backwards from the start, or at a large angle to the left or right (so starters would waste time going to the start kite).

Ensure that all first controls are located in a forward direction out of the start, preferably in a reasonably acute-angled cone.

A good route choice to the first control is 180 degrees back through the start, through the waiting pens and/or through the call-up area.

I think this happened at a race at the Scottish Six Days in 1983! It also occurred at a large 2-Day event in England where there was a chasing start, and starters had to barge their way back through the line of runners in the chasing start call-up lane, causing great confusion!

This falls foul of the "no catching out" rule and creates serious unfairness, e.g. some runners gain an advantage by seeing other runners come back through the start, and so are alerted in advance to the abnormal route choice option, and thereby save time. It might well be grounds to void the course.

Competitors waiting in the pens or in the call-up area have a good long view of departing Starters, and can see the initial navigation decisions chosen by Starters.

Take advantage of the topography of the land, and the vegetation visibility, to select a start position so that waiting runners cannot see Starters after they leave the start. An excellent example of a good start location with no view of departing runners was the recent Affric SOL3 (far start).

The start kite is not clearly visible from all points on the start line and the map boxes, but the run-out to the start kite is not taped.

If in doubt, tape the run-out to the start kite. Continuous tape is much better here, rather than a few hanging tapes.

There's a very narrow or highly constricted run-out, before and immediately after the start kite.

There should be sufficient space to overtake other runners on the run-out (without barging people over!) so narrow single-track passages through dark green, or through windblow, or very rocky ground, should be avoided.

If the ground is quite rough, brashed or boggy, bear in mind that the first few starters can create a fast trod which then makes it very difficult to overtake (as it's much slower 'off-line') Doing some gardening to widen the run-out, or using pre-runners to create several parallel fast trods, can sometimes solve the problem.

There are dangerous trip hazards on the run-out, before and immediately after the start kite.

Competitors have just picked up their map, and will understandably be looking down at their map to plan the first leg, rather than looking where to place their feet. Watch out for wire trip hazards, heavily brashed areas, and ditches or pits.

There was a serious incident at the VHI Relay in 2008, where runners had to cross a ditch soon after the start. One of the English team members in the mass start was looking down at their map, failed to spot the ditch, and suffered a broken arm.

At Moray 2003 Six Days, one race had a ditched stream a few metres after the start, which had to be crossed by all starters. A small wooden plank bridge was built, which promptly broke in half when it was tested pre-race! The M21s jumped the stream without trouble, but there were plenty who had more difficulty.

The start line and part of the run-out to the start kite are off the map, and/or the start kite is right on the edge of the printed map area.

Be very careful about this. It can be very disconcerting to competitors and might be regarded as trying to catch them out (outlawed in the Rules). This occurred at one of the starts at a Scottish 6 Days race in 2011. It clearly increases the risk of competitors running off the map.

Common Problems at the Finish

There's no flag hung on the finish control stakes.

An orange/white control flag must be hung on the finish punch. If there are two or more finish punches, hang a flag on each one of them.

This is a common mistake seen at all sizes of events.

Have an adequate number of finish punches, on strong stakes that won't easily be knocked over.

Especially important for relays. If necessary, re-inforce each finish stake by firmly attaching it to a second metal stake securely driven into the ground. (You might also do this for the final control stakes at the start of the run-in).

The map shows a dashed line from the last control to the finish (indicating a taped route to the finish) but the route is not taped.

This is an exceedingly common mistake. For those using Condes course planning software, the default setting for the finish is "taped route to the finish". Planners who want to choose "navigate to the finish" frequently forget to change this setting (or may not know how to change it).

Conversely, when using Purple Pen course planning software, the default setting for the finish is "navigate to the finish" which may also need changing.

"Navigate to the finish" is chosen, but the route options from the final control(s) are not trivial and might lead to competitors failing to find the finish easily.

Although the rules (for non-IOF events) allow for the "navigate to the finish" option, there are also rules to ensure that this navigation should be entirely straightforward (even for technical courses). Para 5.1.3 of Appendix B states "There should be no possibility of a competitor being unable to find the finish."

When interpreting the rules, it should be borne in mind that the control descriptions do not offer much help to competitors as, although they indicate the distance to the finish, they do not contain a description for the finish point. (And indeed the finish point may not be on a normal clear feature typically used for controls.)

Example situations where “navigate to the finish” would be acceptable:

- The last control is placed on a forest road or track, and the finish is not far away down the same track.
- The last control is at the gate to a field, and the finish is in the field, and is visible from the gate.

In other words, the element of navigation involved should essentially be trivial, and taping is unnecessary.

Note that having a prominent finish banner hung near the finish punches is not necessarily sufficient to ensure that the finish will easily be found by every runner.

There should not be a long leg from the last control to the finish. Instead, add in an extra control just before the finish, and have a short taped finish run-in.

If in doubt, the Controller should require that the route from the last control to the finish be taped.

Remember that competitors and spectators all enjoy there being a common last control and a short sprint into the finish! It adds excitement, and runners on different courses can compare their finish splits.

Runners who have just finished are not led away from the finish punches, and congregate around them (perhaps chatting together about their runs), obscuring the flags from incoming finishers.

An example of this was the finish for the 2009 VHI in Yorkshire. There were no finish run-in tapes, and although there were two or three finish punches, only one had a flag hung on it. The flag was obscured by a crowd of earlier finishers.

To manage this issue:

- Hang a flag on each finish punch, and have a finish banner,
- Avoid tightly congested finish locations,
- Use signs and plenty of tapes to make it obvious which way runners should move away from the finish towards download or back to assembly,
- The Organiser can place a marshal at the finish, to usher finishers (and any spectators and supporters) away from the finish punches. The marshal must be careful not to obscure the finish flag themselves.
- A taped finish funnel can be used. Spectators generally stay behind tapes. Runners tend to recognise the tapes and may naturally tend to move away, out of the mouth of the funnel.

This problem becomes more difficult to manage if runners approach the finish from different directions (in which case the finish flag needs to be kept unobstructed across a wide angle of vision). This is another good reason why having a common last control, and a short run-in to the finish (possibly with a fully or partly taped funnel) is often the preferred arrangement.

SOA/RH

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