

URBAN EVENTS – Some thoughts and advice

- If you aren't familiar with Sprint/Urban orienteering already, go out and try it before attempting to plan or organise. Get to as many events as you can.
It's only when you have experienced a variety of these races as a competitor that you really appreciate the differences, and the particular problems involved.
- Find a reasonably interesting area. It doesn't have to be a historic city centre or university campus, but it does have to have plenty of possibilities for interesting legs/route choices, plus if possible, something a bit special or different to make the event memorable. Recce the area carefully first to assess its suitability.
- You need a very good map/mapper. Urban/sprint maps are very detailed and have to be accurate to very rigorous International Specification for Sprint Orienteering Maps (ISSOM) standards at 1:5,000 or better still 1:4,000 scale. They are very time-consuming to survey and draw, so it's a waste of time if the area isn't up to it.
- You will need to get permission for every control in an urban race. Whether it is the Council, a housing association or private landowner it is best to do this early on in the planning process, as if a permission is not forthcoming, you'll have to change the affected courses.
- Also early on, have a good look round the area on the same day of the week and at the same time as your race will be held, so you can be aware of any thing unusual/unexpected that always happens on that day that you might not be aware of, perhaps if mainly visiting midweek.
- Try to find some scenic/unusual/interesting control sites. The majority will probably be down little alleyways/in yards or generally tucked away from main thoroughfares, but try to avoid really grotty areas with litter/bins/lots of cars parked etc
- As you are going round the area planning your courses, you're bound to attract some attention from locals. It's useful to get them on your side! Let them know what you're doing. Tell them when the event is, explain what will be involved and suggest they are welcome to have a go themselves. Keep some BL leaflets with you to hand out.
- On the day, add a small label to every control stating that permission has been given for the control to be sited there for an orienteering competition with your mobile number/contact details.

- You will need to constantly revisit your area and be prepared to update the map. There is always some unforeseen work going on in town centres: digging up roads, redevelopment, flood defences etc, so you need to be vigilant and check that anything like this will not affect your courses on the day.
- Vandalism of control sites is a major concern, so all SI boxes and kites in the urban environment need to be securely attached. The standard method is to use metal gripples. Choose only control sites that have somewhere sturdy to attach a wire eg drainpipe, lamppost, widow grille etc. Try to attach the controls tightly so it's easier for competitors to punch – if the wires are loose through the control it can be tricky to get the dibber to register.
- Safety of competitors should always be the number one consideration in planning of urban sprint events, but you have to think about the safety of other pedestrians, cyclists and motorists too. Plan courses with a minimum of road crossings and in towns don't have any route choices along roads without pavements.
- Dog-leg controls are actually OK in urban events (not for every control!) as they require concentration, quick-thinking and tricky reorientation of the map. Don't use them if the only access to the control is down a narrow alley, as there would be a risk of collision between incoming and outgoing runners who will be studying their maps rather than looking ahead.
- There are certain to be areas of OOB on your map. Make sure these areas are clearly marked and try to ensure that your planning doesn't tempt competitors to stray into these zones.
- If you have any areas where gates are used as routes, make 100% sure that these will be open on the day (have a contact phone number to hand in case they are not) and conversely where you specifically require that a gate will be closed, check that this will be the case. Otherwise, it's safer and less hassle to choose legs that don't involve such issues.
- In the heat of an urban/sprint race it's usually the case that you quickly identify a suitable route to a control and go for it. It is not worth wasting valuable time studying the map to see which one might be slightly quicker. Therefore try to identify all the possible route choices a runner might make, including the longer, less obvious ones, and ensure there are no dangers involved in any.
- If you are incorporating controls in areas of parkland or small areas of woodland that's fine, but remember that most competitors will be wearing trainers, and many will be wearing shorts. Avoid steep slopes, muddy paths and thick undergrowth etc.
- Take a great deal of care with your control descriptions and placing of urban controls on the day, to ensure that they are 100% accurate. Your controller should check these carefully too. In general you

will have to work very closely with your controller on lots of issues, so try to choose someone you get on with!

- In the Final Details mention anything specific to the event that might cause confusion to runners. Explain: reasons for important OOB areas, road-crossing procedures, map exchanges, taped routes etc. It is the competitors' responsibility to read these Final Details. Have written details in the start lanes too or ask the start team to point out any last minute important issues.
- Inevitably in Urban/Sprint races there will be lots of controls sited quite close together. This is fine as long as they are on different features as in any orienteering, but it would also be fair to ensure that they have quite different numbers ie not 96 and 69 or 15 and 51 to avoid mispunches and disqualifications.
- There are so many constraints to urban planning that you can't always be as creative as you'd like. It can be a bit frustrating. But that's life!
- Sprint/urban racing is growing in popularity with a solid core of very keen, experienced and competitive runners who participate regularly. Mapping/planning standards have improved tremendously over the past few years, but issues still crop up on a regular basis at almost every event, and these are always discussed in detail on the Nopesport forum. Be prepared for this but don't let it put you off!

Paul and Judy Johnson

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