Just how good was that Sprint (or Urban) race?

Whether you're the planner, controller or a humble competitor, your enjoyment of any Sprint or Urban race depends more upon its quality than on anything else; but what do we mean by quality? I think the answer lies in two factors – terrain and planning.

BOF Event Guideline D (Sprint Distance Events) tells us something about what terrain to use "*very runnable park or urban (streets/buildings) terrain. Occasionally, some fast runnable forest may be included*".

However, the focus of this article is on planning quality and I'll take it as read that the relevant terrain is of appropriate standard.

Again, the Sprint Guideline gives good advice about planning:

- *Average leg lengths must be short, 120m to 180m being typical.*
- *Have frequent changes of direction (small crossover loops are good).*
- *Long legs may be set, as long as their execution involves a high rate of decision making along the way.*
- *Dog legs can provide good challenges too; but avoid the possibility that they may cause clashes between incoming and outgoing runners if space is restricted.*
- *Aim to make every leg pose a route choice challenge, especially in urban terrain. Control sites will often have to be positioned with great care in order to achieve this.*

But how easy is it for planners and controllers to check whether these aims are achieved? When we plan or control forest courses we can check the technical level of each course using the well established BOF Technical Difficulty tables, but there is no equivalent at Sprint/Urban level … until now!

Having been involved at IOF level in assessing and approving well over 100 Sprint courses, it became clear that some sort of quality measure would be helpful so the following scale was then devised:

Points	Urban	Non Urban
0	Little or no route choice	Simple leg with minimal navigation needed
1	Two similar routes, easy to identify	Easy route choice leg with little technical detail
2	Several possible routes, or one longer route which is complex to execute – thinking needed	Route choices not immediately obvious and/or some technical challenge
3	Complex route choice/detailed navigation needed – many decision points	Complex route choice/detailed navigation needed

The table describes how the technical challenge of each leg can be quantified on a four point scale (0 to 3). Urban and non-Urban have different types of challenge so the table is divided into two columns accordingly. Examples of each quality are given next (for Urban only):-

Quality 0 example (12 – 13)

“Little or no route choice”

Quality 1 example (9 – 10

“Two similar routes, easy to identify”

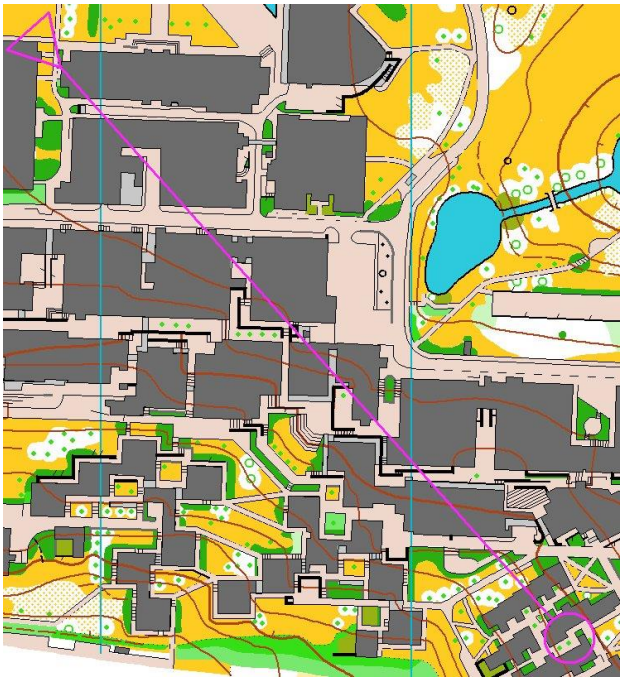
(left or right of the building just south of 10)

Quality 2 examples (13 – 14 and 14 – 15)

“Several possible routes, or one longer route which is complex to execute – thinking needed”

Quality 3 example (Start – 1)

“Complex route choice/detailed navigation needed – many decision points”



The similarity with Technical Difficulty rating for forest courses ends here as the next step is to sum the “marks” for each leg to arrive at a grand total for the course. The bigger the sum, the “better” the course – a rash statement possibly, but one with a good deal of truth in it as a large sum comes from both leg quantity and leg quality.

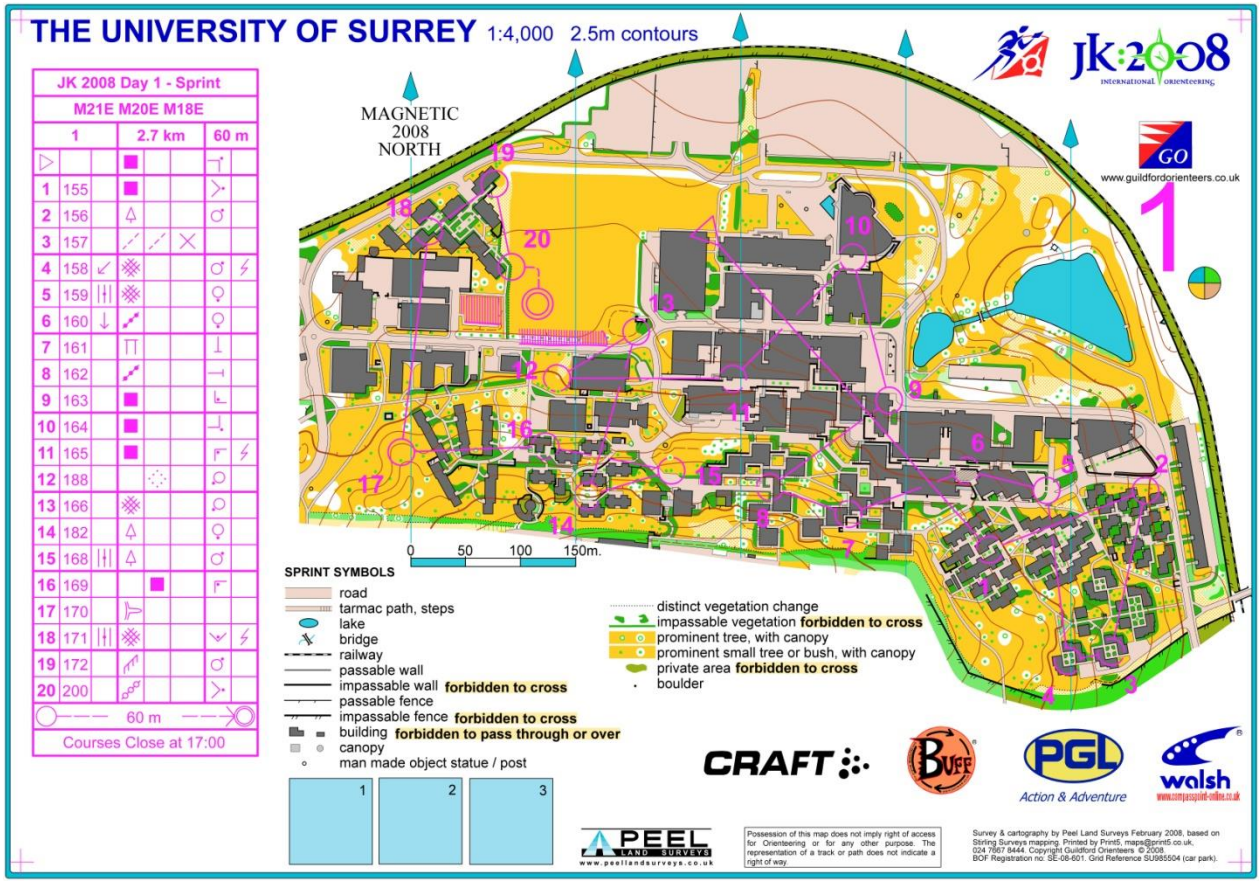
A good Sprint course should have a large number of legs (“average leg lengths must be short”) and it will have much route choice and change of direction too, so both leg quantity and leg quality **are** involved thus the total mark for a course gives a good measure of its overall quality.

It is early days yet, but a total score of over 20 correlates well with courses which are rated as enjoyable and challenging. Under 15 and the course will probably not be.

So, how can this tool be used? Firstly, planners can rate each course they produce to maximise their scores (obviously, where a suite of courses of different lengths is being planned, scores must be adjusted pro rata by length before comparing them).

And of course, controllers can use the tool to judge courses for quality, armed with a quantitative way of advising planners on possible improvements.

Try this for yourselves – rate course 1 at the 2008 JK Sprint according to the criteria above. Five legs have been done for you already in the examples above! Answers given at ???



Answers: 1 (3); 2 (2); 3 (2); 4 (0); 5 (1); 6 (1), 7 (2); 8 (1); 9 (3); 10 (1); 11 (2); 12 (1); 13 (0); 14 (2); 15 (2); 16 (1); 17 (2); 18 (1); 19 (1): 20 (0); Total score = 28.

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