

CQ WW SSB – Second Time Unlucky

This was G2EC's second entry into the CQ World Wide SSB Contest, widely regarded as the biggest SSB contest in the amateur radio calendar.

This year's event took place over the weekend of 24–25 October, starting at 00:00 UTC on Saturday and finishing 48 hours later at 23:59 UTC on Sunday. Our team of nine operators, drawn from the ranks of the Royal Signals Amateur Radio Society (RSARS), would work in shifts to cover the duration.

In 2025, we were QRV on five of the six HF contest bands. For 2026, we planned to be QRV on all six, with the addition of an experimental 160m inverted-L antenna supported by two 22m Spider beam poles.

All that remained was to execute our plan and hit our target. Or so we thought!

Storm Austen Arrives

On Thursday 22 October, the advance party of Stuart M0TTQ, Anthony G4AAV, Chris G1VDP, Paul G0ILO and myself, Ady G6AD, arrived at Blandford Camp, where we were greeted by Cole Block's Station Manager, Martin 2E0HVE, and an unwelcome visitor – Storm Austen!

Work began in atrocious weather as we attempted to construct the combined 80m vertical and 160m inverted-L monster antenna, which we had affectionately nicknamed **L-Zilla**.

With considerable difficulty, we managed to erect the two 22m poles, but it soon became apparent that the design was not fit for purpose. Alternative arrangements were quickly improvised using whatever parts we could scrounge, but eventually the decision was made to abandon the 160m build. This left us with the proven 80m quarter-wave vertical standing alone in the field.

As we retreated to Cole Block to dry out and take refreshments, none of us relished the prospect of returning to the field to erect the 40m four-square antenna in the fading light and worsening weather.

When Tom G2NV arrived with the antenna, we agreed that attempting the four-square build in the increasingly severe conditions was neither practical nor safe.

With two ICOM IC-7610's and ACOM 1000's already in the shack Thursday evening concluded with work inside Cole Block, setting up three additional operating positions:

- **10m:** RSARS's Icom IC-7600 driving G4AAV's ACOM 1000 amplifier.
- **80m/160m:** G6AD's Elecraft K4D driving an Expert 1K-FA amplifier.
- **40m:** Icom's generously loaned flagship IC-7760 driving an ACOM 1000 amplifier.

Final Preparations

On Friday morning, the advance team enjoyed breakfast in the Officers' Mess before heading back to Cole Block to welcome Eddie M8EVM, Jeff G4ELZ and Tim G5TM, who arrived to complete the team.

By Friday evening, the station was finally ready for the contest start at 00:00 UTC.

We had also managed to improvise a 160m antenna by using an antenna tuner with the existing Zepp wire antenna suspended between the north and south towers.

Stuart M0TTQ tuning the Zepp on 160m. Eddie M8EVM and Jeff G4ELZ looking on.



Operating shifts were allocated, final checks completed, and we crossed our fingers that the storm would spare our antennas.

00:00 UTC – And We're Off!

At the start, Eddie M8EVM kicked things off on 80m, while Tim G5TM took charge of the 40m station. Anthony G4AAV worked 20m and 15m, although both bands had all but closed by the time the contest began.

The lower bands were extremely busy, making it difficult to establish a run frequency. Despite this, plenty of QSOs were being made using the search-and-pounce technique until a suitable run frequency could be secured and defended against the competition!

At 06:00 UTC, the next shift of operators arrived.

Stuart M0TTQ took over the 80m station, Chris G1VDP moved onto 40m (Pictured left), Tom G2NV took charge of 15m and Paul G0ILO fired up on 20m (Pictured right).



Our score continued to climb as the QSOs accumulated, along with those all-important multipliers.

Murphy Joins the Contest!

Unfortunately, not everything went according to plan. Murphy was clearly determined to make his presence felt throughout the weekend.

In no particular order, we suffered software problems, brief power outages and inter-station QRM, despite the installation of new HyEndFed band-pass filters.

Interference associated with the 40m antenna on the north tower was particularly troublesome.

Chris G1VDP suggested using components from Tom G2NV's unused 40m four-square antenna to construct a single quarter-wave vertical with elevated radials, positioned as far away from the other antennas as practical.

Tom G2NV, Chris G1VDP and I donned our outdoor gear and braved the storm once again to erect the new 40m vertical.

The result was a very effective antenna. Although it did not completely eliminate the inter-station QRM, it reduced the interference significantly.

Of course, it blew down later!

Fortunately, once repaired, it survived for the remainder of the contest.

The Battle to Save the 80m Vertical

Speaking of antennas blowing down, the 80m quarter-wave vertical was beginning to lean alarmingly as wind gusts reached an estimated 50–70 mph across the field.

A rescue party was quickly assembled, and thanks to their efforts, the mast remained standing.

I have a short video of this epic rescue operation. Unfortunately, I failed to capture the moment when Tom's hard hat blew off and was last seen heading east at a considerable rate of knots!

Despite the heroic efforts, the top two sections of the Spiderbeam pole eventually snapped, leaving the wire element at the mercy of the storm.

The solution was to secure the upper part of the wire element with an additional guy line, stabilising its movement and allowing us to get back on the air on 80m.

Another problem solved, another band saved!

More Than Just a Score

Despite the storm, Murphy's constant interventions and various equipment faults and failures, I believe everyone involved should be proud of the G2EC contest team.

Their ability to improvise, adapt and overcome everything thrown at them was impressive.

Of course, it would have been nice to achieve our points target, but a contest score is not the only measure of success.

A team that demonstrates perseverance, grit, determination and a willingness to pull together when things go wrong deserves recognition.

Below Team G2EC - Left to right

Anthony G4AAV, Stuart M0TTQ, Tom G2NV, Eddie M8EVM holding the 20m bandpass filter that let out the magic smoke, Martin 2E0HVE, Jeff G4ELZ, Paul G0ILO, Tim G5TM, Chris G1VDP and me G6AD



They're winners in my book.

Well done, Team G2EC!

73 de Ady G6AD

RSARS #4421

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