Guidance Note No. 2

Date: July 2015

Handicapping

Many time trials still offer prizes to be awarded on a handicap basis. For this reason and despite the availability of the Standard Handicapping Tables, there remains a demand for the services of traditional handicappers. It is therefore essential that there should be recruits to replace those handicappers who retire. This guidance note is intended to provide assistance to those aspiring to become handicappers, or to those who have recently started handicapping. If it should also prove to be of value to those already experienced so much the better.

There is no quick way to success as a handicapper, and no substitute for experience. Most handicappers gain their early skills from club events. Once having embarked on a handicapping career they should study results over all distances so that when they aspire to handicap association and/or open events they will not be without some experience.

"Manual" handicapping is not merely a matter of arithmetic; it is a very personal art in which judgement and opinion play a large part. There is already a Standard Table for setting handicaps, but because in the opinion of some there are too many variables to be considered for such a system to operate successfully, this paper is prepared to enable those who wish to use a judgmental system, to do so. Hopefully, this guidance note may assist in the formulation of sound judgements and opinions.

Because handicapping is such a personal art it follows that not all handicappers think alike when dealing with details. However a handicapper may approach his/her task, it is certain that he/she thinks and acts the way he/she does because he/she considers his system to be the best. Nevertheless there are certain underlying principles which every handicapper should follow, and it is with these that this guidance note aims to deal.

A properly framed handicap should result in all riders' performances in this section falling within a spread of 60 seconds or thereabouts, but this will rarely if ever occur because the problems facing a handicapper are numerous and of widely different character. The entry form in current use gives only a minimum of information about the entrant's performances. This may well be insufficient to enable the handicapper to make an accurate assessment. Among the entrants there will be absolute novices, those who have ridden only once or twice before and those who ride in time trials only once or twice each season. There will also be the rider returning to the sport following a lay-off of two or three seasons. Other factors possibly beyond the knowledge of the handicapper will also be present, such as the effect upon the individual of weather conditions, the severity of the course, a recent illness or a long lay-off as a result of which a rider is unlikely to perform at the standard set. On these occasions a handicapper has to be less than generous to one rider in order to be fair to those comprising the remainder of the field.

There remains a further hazard for the handicapper: that occurrence which cannot be known, or which takes place after the handicap has been framed. These usually arise from illness, accident, or domestic distress. Such occurrences usually result in a poor performance and a handicap time outside the acceptable spread of times. There are the unforeseeable factors that can lead to greatly enhanced performances. For example as when a rider changes employment, resulting in easier working conditions, or perhaps a long ride to work and back; or at long last, a rider has decided to seek advice and train both properly and conscientiously.

Any of these circumstances can result in a handsome beating of the handicapper with a handicap time well within competition record. Nevertheless, week after week, handicappers are producing good handicaps. To achieve this it is necessary to possess the ability to relate the value of performances at all the most commonly ridden distances e.g.: 23 minutes, 60 minutes, 2 hours 5 minutes and 4 hours 25 minutes; for rides at 10, 25, 50 and 100 miles respectively.

It may take several years of patient and painstaking observation of racing results to acquire this ability. Indeed an essential part of the handicapper's preparation is to read the weekly list of time trial *and* road race results in the cycling

press or the CTT website. The study of the season end BAR tables is a useful practice to assist in evaluating equivalent rides at different distances.

Some handicappers use a rule-of-thumb of their own devising, but the most successful handicappers construct tables or graphs for their own use (see example in appendix). While the tables should prove adequate for a high percentage of riders it is necessary to identify the "odd man out". There are the stayer types who can beat 250 miles for a "twelve" and the speed-rider type who can beat the hour with ease but cannot get inside 4 hours 35 minutes for a 100. This is something all handicappers must look for. It is possible, by observing an improvement at 50 miles to forecast accurately an improvement at 25 or 100 miles as the case may be.

Not only must the handicapper distinguish the speed-rider from the stayer, but must also pick out the youngster from the rider in their prime. He must also identify the rider who is past his/her best, and the veteran. All this is necessary if all the riders are to be given an equal chance of winning a handicap award. With the "up-and-coming" youngster considerable improvement may be expected, whereas the established top class performer probably will be consistent or improve but little and the old timer may become progressively slower.

So far it has been only the problems of handicapping that have been considered, but no apology is made for this as it is only when the problem is understood that is it possible to seek a satisfactory solution. In fact, to understand a problem is in many cases to be half way towards solving it, and this is certainly true in the case of handicapping.

Having assessed the task to be undertaken, now is the time to tackle the mechanics of producing a handicap. All the forms to be handicapped should be sorted into order, and here appears a choice of sorting them according to the best time recorded at the distance during this and the preceding three seasons, or the best time in the current and previous season. By using the latter method the order is determined by the more recent times and is usually preferable. Sorting out the forms in order of speed ensures that all riders of comparable ability are considered at the same time and against the same criteria.

The next stage is to scrutinise the forms closely. The date of birth will indicate the age of each competitor. It is necessary to study the form as a whole, to establish whether a rider is a newcomer to the sport, experienced and in their prime, or an old hand gone "over the top".

It should be borne in mind that a time recorded early in the season is generally of greater value than a similar time returned later in the season. Note upon which course the reported rides were achieved, as some courses are so much faster than others, and note what relationship the rider's times bear to those of the winners. The winner's ability probably will be known to you, if not at first hand at least through the press reports. If the course is far afield, reference to the previous year's Handbook may be of assistance. Assess whether the rider is "average", a "speed-rider", or a "stayer", by reference to a Comparison Chart (see appendix). If the chart shows that the average rider could be expected to record:

10 miles	**25 Miles**	**50 Miles**	**100 Miles**	**12hrs**
23 m	58 m.	2h 30 secs	4h 15m 50 secs	254Miles

and if a rider's best times conform to a pattern such as:

24m	lh lm 0s	2h 5m	4h 25m	265 Miles

The rider is obviously a stayer type and an improvement to 2.3.30 for 50 miles would suggest that improvements were imminent at 25 and 100 miles to, say, 1.0.40 and 4.17.0.

If, on the other hand, the entry form revealed a pattern:

10 miles	**25 Miles**	**50 Miles**	**100 Miles**
21m30s	59m	2h5m	4h 31m

the rider is obviously a speed-rider and therefore an improvement to 2.3.30 in this case would justify a prediction of say, 58 min for 25 miles and 4.28.30 for 100 miles.

In most instances the important times will have been recorded within the current or preceding season, but it must be borne in mind that after three years, fastest times are less significant. This is especially true of riders whose best days are behind them, and of veterans.

Another problem is what to do with the absolute novice (i.e. one with no previous performances). This problem will arise most frequently in connection with 10 and 25 mile events, (especially with events limited to long-markers or middle-markers), only occasionally in 50-mile and 100-mile, and very rarely in 12-hour events. Some people hold that such riders should receive half the allowance given to the slowest, but this is unsatisfactory because the rider's handicap is determined by the chance entry of the slowest rider. It must be borne in mind that many so called "novices" of today will have already ridden a number of club events and do not enter open events until they consider that their performances will meet a standard they would hope for. There is also the case to consider of someone entering their first time trial with no obvious form but who is a good performer in road races.

On the other hand there are still some novices who will *not* reach very high standards and probably a handicapper will have to wait until they have performances on their form before they can be handicapped properly. The rider with two or three times on their entry form also poses a problem. If the times show a consistent level of performance there is no difficulty, but where there is a pattern of improvement this must be allowed for and further improvement anticipated.

A cause of concern to a handicapper is the rider who has temporarily lost their form because it cannot be foreseen when he/she will return to fitness. Therefore, it is wise to handicap using their best performance in the current and preceding season. Bearing in mind the performances at all distances and all the surrounding circumstances, mark the entry form with the time forecast for the rider if riding to current form.

Having treated all the accepted entries in a like manner, the forms should now be re-sorted in order of the times indicated. The fastest forecast time will be on top of the pile and slowest at the bottom. The fastest time will identify the scratch rider and the time from which the handicap is to be framed. Now it would be possible to run through the forms allotting an allowance by simple arithmetic, but this would not give all riders an equal chance of winning the handicap prize.

Generally speaking the long-markers have greater scope for improvement and some can be expected to reduce their time by several minutes, whereas a short-marker can only expect to improve by seconds. Thus, a 2-minute man must work just as hard to improve by 30 seconds, as a long-marker has to work to achieve a reduction of 2 minutes. Hence handicap allowances must be adjusted to account for this by the application of a sliding scale of reductions. Here again the handicapper must arm themselves with some form of scale to ensure uniformity - see appendix. Now run through the forms adjusting the allowance in accordance with the scale.

Selected examples are:

a) A young and improving rider showing promise of further improvement would, according to circumstances, be pulled more than the scale.

b) An established rider who usually is consistent would be subject to reduction according to scale.

c) A man who has seen their best days cannot be expected to improve, so no reduction would be applied.

d) A veteran cannot normally be expected to improve and may be getting progressively slower. If he/she rides infrequently it might be reasonable to increase the allowance.

The adjusted figure represents the handicap.

It is useful in those cases which have received special attention to note the form with an indication of that treatment, e.g. "Novice", "Near Novice", "Not ridden for a year", "Veteran", "Only ridden three times", etc. This would act as an

aide memoir for use when dealing with improved performances or in case of queries at the start or at the finish of the event concerned.

It is necessary to consider practical units in which to express handicap allowances. In view of the fact that handicapping involves estimating and forecasting it cannot be accepted that a handicapper expects to be exact. Therefore any unit less than 10 seconds is not realistic, and 10 seconds could well be a practical unit for handicapping 10 miles and 25 miles events. If it is desired to work to a larger unit consideration must be given to 15 or 20 seconds. Therefore the following are recommendations:

10 miles	**25 miles**	**50 miles**	**100 miles**	**12 hours**
5 or 10 s	10 or 15 s	20 s	30 s or 1 min	½ or 1 mile

Just as "proof of the pudding is in the eating of it" so is a handicap judged by the result. Therefore after the event it is useful to sit down quietly and compare the result with the entry forms. Here one must be honest with oneself otherwise the exercise is valueless, because here you are going to learn from any mistakes.

First, examine critically the prize winners' forms; has the award been earned, have you been generous, or have you in fact failed to read the form correctly and its implications remained unrecognised?

Next look at all those forms for riders whose times fail miserably to come within your estimate. Have you made a mistake or did the rider fail to ride to form, or did the rider experience trouble? It is now that your *aide memoir* will prove useful. It is reasonable to discard the results of those riders honestly accepted as not riding to form or who have experienced trouble.

Then calculate the number of riders who have handicap times within plus or minus 2 minutes of the scratch man or winner's time. If you have about half the riders in this band you are doing well. Do not be disheartened when abnormal conditions occur as this upsets a handicap because riders react differently to such conditions. Handicapping ability cannot be judged on one event alone, analyse each event separately and then review the season as a whole.

If:

a. your scatter of results is not too wide too often;
b. you have not detected too many mistakes;
c. the winners and scratch riders who ride to form are placed high up in the handicap results; and
d. the handicap winner's time is not ridiculously fast on too many occasions;

then you are doing well.

The handicapper's duties usually include arranging the order of start. There is a separate guidance note (GN No 8) on this but a few words on this subject may be relevant. The object of setting out the field is to ensure, as far as possible, that the leading contenders for prizes or honours should have similar conditions. It would be manifestly unfair to put a leading rider off number 1 or number 5, as that rider would not have the same incentive to catch riders as rivals would who started in the middle or end of the field.

It is not possible to arrange a field in such a way that there would not be any overtaking, but the object must be to avoid riders of comparable ability getting together. At the same time, leading riders should not be so far apart that they experience differing weather conditions. Arguments are rife regarding the best way of achieving this. Current fashion dictates that the probable winner is placed last rider off. There is also a case for last year's winner of the event to be placed last.

An event at 12 hours and 24 hours will pose special problems, but it is unlikely that an inexperienced handicapper will be called upon to handle these. As a general rule: it is wise not to put very fast riders in the first ten or very slow riders in the last ten. In the former instance, fast riders may catch the marshals unaware and in the latter the slow riders keep the marshals waiting or find them gone.

If, over the years, this guidance note encourages anyone to take up handicapping it will not have been written in vain. Remember however that ultimate success lies with the individual in painstaking observation, in sincere application of the enunciated principles and in the understanding that there is no easy way to "instant handicapping".

Appendix

Comparison Chart

10 miles	25 miles	30 miles	50 miles	100 miles	12 hours
19.50	50.00	1.00.20	1.44.00	3.41.00	286
20.15	51.00	1.01.30	1.46.05	3.45.45	282
20.40	52.00	1.02.40	1.48.10	3.49.45	278
21.00	53.00	1.03.50	1.50.10	3.54.05	274
21.25	54.00	1.05.05	1.52.15	3.58.25	270
21.50	55.00	1.06.15	1.54.20	4.02.50	265
22.15	56.00	1.07.25	1.56.20	4.07.10	262
22.35	57.00	1.08.40	1.58.25	4.11.30	258
23.00	58.00	1.09.50	2.00.30	4.15.50	254
23.25	59.00	1.11.00	2.02.30	4.20.15	250
23.50	1.00.00	1.12.15	2.04.35	4.24.35	246
24.10	1.01.00	1.13.25	2.06.40	4.29.00	243
24.35	1.02.00	1.14.35	2.08.45	4.33.20	239½
25.00	1.03.00	1.15.45	2.10.45	4.37.40	236
25.25	1.04.00	1.17.00	2.12.50	4.42.00	233
25.50	1.05.00	1.18.10	2.14.55	4.46.25	230
26.10	1.06.00	1.19.20	2.17.00	4.50.45	227
26.35	1.07.00	1.20.30	2.19.00	4.55.10	224
27.00	1.08.00	1.21.40	2.21.05	4.59.30	221
27.25	1.09.00	1.22.50	2.23.10	5.03.50	218½
27.45	1.10.00	1.24.05	2.25.10	5.08.15	216
28.10	1.11.00	1.25.15	2.27.15	5.12.35	213

28.35	1.12.00	1.26.25	2.29.20	5.16.55	209½
29.00	1.13.00	1.27.40	2.31.20	5.21.15	207
29.20	1.14.00	1.28.50	2.33.25	5.25.40	204½
29.45	1.15.00	1.30.00	2.35.30	5.30.00	200