

LONDON TROPHY PAIRS – 2009

by Michael Hill

On 21st June, the London Trophy Pairs took place at the Royal Automobile Club in Pall Mall. This event, started only in 2008, is open to pairs from teams who won at least one match in the London Trophy, the LMBA competition for teams from sports and social clubs, or in the Della-Porta Plate, the competition for first round losers in the London Trophy. The entry of only seventeen pairs was disappointing given that there was no entry fee and at least eighty pairs were eligible.

A completely flat board is a very rare event in pairs and this event was no exception. Indeed, only two boards out of the twenty seven played had all the scores in one column! Board 3 provided an interesting early opportunity.

Board 3

Dealer South. EW game.

	S Q93	
	H 109	
	D Q97	
	C KJ862	
S KJ10864		S 7
H A8		H KQJ762
D AJ104		D 86
C A		C 9753
	S A52	
	H 543	
	D K532	
	C Q104	

Only two pairs managed to play this in hearts, where eleven tricks are readily available, and both bid the game. In fact, bidding it didn't really matter, as everyone else played in spades, where nine tricks are the limit (and to make nine tricks declarer must make the not very obvious play of the DJ from hand at the first opportunity and then read the position in the suit).

The rest of the first third was fairly dull (although the one pair who scored over 75% on the first seven boards might not agree) but then things began to hot up.

Board 12

Dealer West. NS game.

	S J62	
	H Q10643	
	D J98	
	C 64	
S 954		S K10
H 2		H AJ9875
D AKQ3		D 742
C KQ852		C AJ
	S AQ873	
	H K	

D 1065
C 10973

East-West can always make at least ten tricks in no trumps because they have the pips to block the spade suit for the defence but, strangely, only three pairs played in 3NT. All the rest played in hearts, only two at game level despite a combined 27 points. The bad trump break ensured that nine tricks was the limit, although most declarers made only eight. This board generated six different scores in the eight times it was played!

Then, after another lull, came this.

Board 20

Dealer West. Game all.

S K864	
H AJ95	
D AQ1093	
C void	
S AJ10953	S 72
H 83	H Q764
D K5	D J
C KJ3	C AQ9764
S Q	
H K102	
D 87642	
C 10852	

At several tables, with everyone in the action, the bidding began
1S-2D-3C-3D-3S-4D-4S

Twice this ended the auction but on three occasions North decided to double and each time, South removed the double to 5D, once passed out, twice doubled. We'll gloss over how one North managed to buy the contract in 4D, how one West stopped in 2S and how, after North began with a take-out double of 1S (!), one West ended up playing in 3C, although the play in 3C was not without interest. South led the D7 and North won with the DQ and switched to the H5, won by South's H10. The HK was cashed and South got off play with the SQ. Declarer ruffed a diamond, ruffed a heart, cashed the CKJ and got off play with the SJ (not covered by North) ruffed by South.. Declarer could ruff the diamond exit but had to concede a trick to the HA in due course. This was just one of numerous ways to eight tricks but there was no way to a ninth.

Against 4S, North led the DA and switched to the H5. South won the HK and returned the H2 to the HA. North switched to a spade and declarer ducked South's SQ. This allowed South to give North a club ruff but North then, for some unaccountable reason exited with the S8 (did he really believe that declarer's failure to take the SQ meant that his partner had the SA and West had opened the bidding on an 8-count with just J10953 in spades?). This enabled declarer to draw trumps and cash out for just two-off. Curiously enough, when the contract was only 2S, North led a trump at trick one and declarer won and continued trumps. North won the third round and switched to the H5 to the HQ (!) and HK. South rather woodenly continued with the H10 and a third round, so declarer ruffed, drew the last trump, threw his diamonds on

the long clubs and claimed ten tricks. Against 5D, East led the S7 and West won to switch to the CK. Declarer ruffed, ruffed a spade and drew trumps with the aid of the finesse. He then threw a heart on the SK, cashed HK and HA and led the HJ. He was sure of eleven tricks but, when East covered, he could ruff and claim the overtrick as well.

This led immediately to perhaps the most interesting board of the event.

Board 21

Dealer North. NS game.

S 875	
H QJ9	
D QJ8	
C AK84	
S 2	S QJ1096
H 10865	H 7432
D K972	D 65
C 10652	C J9
S AK43	
H AK	
D A1043	
C Q73	

This was an interesting exercise in hand valuation. Twice, North opened 1NT, South bid an invitational 4NT and North, in spite of his good intermediates downgraded his hand because of the pudding shape and passed. In a sense he was right, because he went on to make eleven tricks, as did the one declarer in 3NT and two of those who bid the slam. Declarer in 4NT won the SQ lead, crossed to a top club and ran the DQ. West won and exited with a heart. Declarer cashed dummy's other top heart then the rest of his top winners, conceding a spade at the end. All the other tables reached the no-trump slam, some by virtue of North accepting the try, some directly (1NT-6NT), both either with or without a Stayman enquiry en route. Only one table (where a strong no trump was in use) had a more thorough investigation (and they were the eventual winners!). Their auction (with opponents silent throughout) was:

1C-1S-1NT-3D-3S-4NT-5D-6NT

Against this 6NT, East led the H2, won in dummy. As before declarer crossed to a club to run the DQ. West won and exited with a heart and declarer cashed his diamond winners, East discarding spades. When he cashed the CQ, felling the J, he was fairly sure that West had the remaining cards and he duly finessed the C8 to bring home his slam. It would probably have been technically better to have cashed the HQ whilst in hand with the DJ and then cashed the top spades before playing the CQ. This would have shown the spade position and made the layout he played for almost a certainty given the opening lead – but you can't argue with successful guesswork.

Winners:

Andrew Kisiel & David Glass (RAC)	60.12%
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Joint runners up:

Bob Bowman & Monty Krimgoltz (RAC and OStG)	59.82%
Alex Allan & Roy Westwater (HM Treasury)	59.82%