

LONDON TROPHY PAIRS – 2011

by Michael Hill

The Royal Automobile Club in Pall Mall was once again the venue for the London Trophy Pairs. The event is open to pairs from teams who won at least one match in the London Trophy or in the Della-Porta Plate and there is no entry fee. This year, it took place at on 27th February, earlier in the year than before, in the hope of encouraging a larger entry but the numbers (seventeen pairs) were up only fractionally on the previous year.

The wide variety of scores achieved on each board, for which the event is renowned, was down somewhat on previous years. Only eleven of the thirty boards had at least six different scores in the eight times they were played. But curiously enough, as last year, it was board 4 which provided the first opportunity to display good card-play technique.

Board 4

Dealer West. Game all.

	S 6	
	H AJ852	
	D Q7	
	C KJ975	
S Q873		S AK1094
H KQ64		H void
D AJ65		D K42
C 43		C A10862
	S J52	
	H Q10973	
	D 10983	
	C Q	

At most tables East played in 4S on the lead of the CQ. It should be simple to come to eleven tricks – win the club lead, duck a club, win the return, cash the DAK and cross ruff hearts and clubs. However, only one pair managed to make eleven tricks and that was on a mis-defence (establishing a long club when North chose to discard one). One pair even managed to make only nine tricks.

Much of the rest of the first half was a catalogue of missed opportunities. There were two good 25-point 3NT contracts missed by most pairs (interestingly both with the points split 18-7) and a good slam also missed by most pairs, although all but one of them made all thirteen tricks. There was one interesting hand for the collectors of statistics – it was passed out at four tables but the other four tables provided two plus scores to North-South and two to East-West! You pays your money.....

Board 7 was something of a curiosity. It was another 25-point 3NT contract, bid at every table but one, but there the similarities ended.

Board 7

Dealer South. Game all.

	S J10	
	H 542	
	D Q107	
	C K10654	
S AK98		S 653
H 6		H AKJ109
D K9543		D J2
C AJ7		C Q93
	S Q742	
	H Q873	
	D A86	
	C 82	

With North-South silent, the bidding generally began 1D-1H-1S, after which East either bid 2NT and was raised to game, or bid 2C allowing West to become declarer in 3NT. When West was declarer, North generally led a fourth highest club. The way for West to succeed is to win this with the ace! Now, after losing a trick to the HQ, the CQ provides an entry for the long hearts and a chance to lead towards his DK for the ninth trick and, with a well-placed DA, this succeeds, North having no entry for his long clubs. If West wins the first trick cheaply, he can never reach dummy after losing to the HQ. Alas, all the declarers who got a club lead did just that and duly went one, two or even three off. (One declarer did make nine tricks but that was without a club lead). The lead on the two occasions that East was declarer is, alas, not recorded. But one East escaped for one off, whilst the other contrived to go four off. Even assuming declarer took a first round finesse in hearts, it is hard to see how the defence managed to come to eight tricks.

Board 14 provided a fair amount of interest.

Board 14

Dealer East. Love all.

	S J7643	
	H J103	
	D 96	
	C 654	
S Q		S AK
H AQ98762		H K4
D AQ105		D K8732
C K		C A1072
	S 109852	
	H 5	
	D J4	
	C QJ983	

This time, everyone made thirteen tricks but no one bid the grand slam, even though there are fourteen top tricks in diamonds, hearts or no trumps. The small slam was bid twice in each of those denominations, while two pairs stopped in game (4H and 4NT). One pair got close to bidding the grand slam, their sequence being

1D-2H-2NT-4H-4NT-5H-5NT-6D-6NT.

Once West had shown the missing two aces and one king via the Blackwood responses, East might have bid 7NT on the basis that West would hardly have jumped to 4H on a bad suit – i.e. one not headed by at least AQ.

Board 18 contrived to produce a different score at every table but perhaps the most interesting hand of the day was board 22.

Board 22

Dealer East. EW game.

	S 98	
	H K7643	
	D J	
	C Q10764	
S J1065		S AK4
H 108		H AQJ952
D A5432		D K97
C K8		C 3
	S Q732	
	H void	
	D Q1086	
	C AJ932	

Apart from one table where South bought the contract in 4C (undoubled), all the Easts played in the heart game and all failed. It's hard to see how this happened at every table. If South leads the likely CA, then the CK provides an immediate parking place for a small diamond (or a small spade) and declarer runs the H10, and then the H8. He then crosses to a top spade, plays trumps from the top, wins in hand whatever North returns when in with the HK, draws the last trump and cashes his remaining winners to make ten tricks, conceding whichever small card he didn't discard on the CK at trick 13. If South instead leads a spade at trick 1, that provides a third spade trick and an early entry to dummy for declarer to draw trumps as above. Declarer still has the DA as an entry to dummy, so should now make an overtrick by leading towards the CK after drawing trumps. The only way the defence can make declarer's life difficult is if South finds the unlikely opening lead of a diamond. Declarer wins in dummy and starts on trumps in the same way as before but now, when in with the HK, North can play a club to South's ace for another diamond lead. North can ruff (although it's ruffing a loser) and exit with a spade, leaving declarer with a spade loser at the end for one off. However, declarer can thwart this by cashing the SAK before exiting to the HK. Now when North takes his diamond ruff, he has only clubs with which to exit, so providing declarer with access to his CK to discard his spade loser. But that's not the end of the story. North can thwart this line by declining to ruff the diamond. Declarer can win the DK and draw the last trump but is still left with a losing diamond and a losing spade. Did the play really go this way in practice? Somehow I doubt it.

When the dust cleared, the holders of the Trophy emerged winners again, albeit by a considerably smaller margin than last year.

Winners:	Bob Bowman & Arun Suri	62.29%
Runners up:	Andrew Kisiel & David Glass	60.23%