Orbits 4 SP1 Easy

Welcome to Orbits 4 SP1 (let's just call it SP1). These directions are designed to help you set up and run a timing session, and a race weekend, and produce results that please everyone. A more complete explanation of Orbits 4 SP1 is available with the Orbits program. Choose Help on the pull down menu. You can view or print any and all sections you need.

We're going to assume that you've seen Orbits software before, even if it's an earlier version. So you're already familiar with AMB terminology. And we KNOW that you're going to back up your Orbits files to a "thumb" drive before you set up a new event, and after you're finished with that set up. And at the end of every day of racing, and definitely at the end of the weekend when all the results are official. An extra precaution would be to take the thumb drive out of the timing room each evening.

At the top of the opening Orbits screen, there are 5 pull-down menus: File, MyLaps.com, Tools, Scoreboard, and Help. Below that are the tabs: Event Setup, Registration, Timing, Processing, Championship, and TNetX Display. There are function choices down the left side of the screen which change as you change tabs. When we say "pull-down menu," "tab," or "function" in the rest of this document, we're referring to these items. So, let's get started.

EVENT SETUP

It's a good idea to set up the event before you get to the track — makes your early morning much easier! (Back up your files when you're done, and bring that thumb drive to the track.) Keep in mind that almost every piece of information you feed into SP1 will appear on the results. If your region has a standard setup for results, that will be your goal. If your region is using SP1 for the first time, you can ask your Divisional Administrator for samples of results and other pointers.

Defaults

First, go to the Tools pull-down menu at the top of the screen, choose Options, and enter what you want in the fields based on what you want to import from Registration, and what you want to appear in the results (the names you give your additional fields become the column headings in the results). This is usually hometown/state, region/member #, car make/model, sponsor, and group. The other information (car number and class, and driver name) are already fields in SP1. You will need to coordinate with the Registrar so the file you are given has the items and combinations you want.

While still in the Options screen, choose the "Run defaults" function. This screen let you set the basics for any run, so you don't have to keep entering them. A standard setup would show:

- Type of run: Qualifying (or whatever type of run you have most)
- Start on flag
- Minimum lap time (just a little below your track record)
- First passing: choose what is appropriate for your track
- Don't stop the race clock
- Do not use Auto Finish (although you can for race runs)

Create a New Event
Now we are ready to set up a new event. Click on the Event Setup tab, then choose the function "Create a New Event." This brings up the Create a New Event Wizard. The first screen asks for the event name. We suggest something informative: Atlanta National or Arizona Double Regional, for example. Drivers tend not to remember the kitschy name of an event, but they know they went to a National in Atlanta. Also, the results on MyLaps are easier to find and understand if your event name is "normal." If your event has a special name, use the header on the results page. (More on that later.) Continuing with the setup screen, choose Car Racing as the type of event, and put in the beginning and ending dates.

There are 4 lines of footer available. The first one is generally used for the T&S Chief's name; the second for the Chief Steward. Use the third and fourth lines for the sanction number of the event and any other information you want to appear on all the results. Some regions put the special event name here. Click the "Next" button at the bottom of the screen, and the track information screen appears.

Track Definition
If there were other events run with SP1 on the computer you're using for setup, and those events haven't been deleted, you can choose the track from the pull-down list. If the right track isn't in the list (or if prior events have been deleted), you will need to enter the track info again. Type in the track name and the length of the track in miles (be sure to choose miles!). Check the box if race traffic goes clockwise, then click in the "Use Photocells" button. The default values for the photocell are probably what you need. Click on the "Next" button.

The next screen shows you a virtual picture of a track, and lets you choose how many and where the timelines are. Many tracks use 2 timelines: 1 at Start/Finish and 1 at the S/F line in the pits. You can find that choice in the pull-down list. (We assume that you know how many timelines are used at your track, or you've called AMB to find out what you're registered.) Click on the "Next" button.

You can ignore the Sections screen; click on the "Next" button. You can also ignore the Apply setup screen; click on the "Finish" button. The wizard should say "Successfully Created the Event." Now you need to create the Groups.

Create a Group
Click on the Registration tab, and you should get a pop-up box to create a Group. The name should be the group number and the classes that are included, such as Group 1: GT1, GT2, AS. The description box under the Group name in the pop-up box sounds promising. Unfortunately, at this point any information you enter here doesn't appear on the results or elsewhere. Only the Group name appears on the results. Click on the "Next" button.

You now have a screen inviting you to set up a run. Name the run something descriptive but not overly long, like "Group 1 Qual 1." Use a short name if you're going to combine the results from 2 or more runs. You have 3 characters, so P1, Q1, etc. works well. Choose the type of run, Practice, Qualifying, or Race. (If iCard is used in your region, the type must be either Qualifying or Race.) Enter the date of the run, and the anticipated time that it will start. This time does not have to be exact; AMB uses this information to create a file name for the run data. You cannot have 2 runs with the same start time.

See the "Advanced" button next to the start time box? Clicking this button brings up a screen with more options for the run. These are the same options you set as the Run defaults from the Tools pull-down menu. If you're not sure those defaults were set correctly, check them now with the "Advanced" button.

Create a Run
When you're ready to add the next run, click the "New run" button. Repeat until all your Group 1 runs are entered. Then click on the "Next" button.

The next screen enables you to create another group or to exit the Wizard. You can continue setting up groups and runs with the Wizard, or you can choose those functions on the Registration tab menu. Whichever method you use, you should create all the groups and runs for the entire event. For a double event weekend, wait until the first event is finished (if possible), the files have been backed up, and the track record file exported. When you set up the second event, you can copy the groups from the first event and the track records can be imported.

When the runs are set up and you have exited the Wizard, go back to the Event Setup tab. Choose the Track records function. The pop-up screen enables you to import, export, or type in lap records. If you have an .xml file that was exported from a previous event, import it to the current event. (The track records stay with the event, not with the track description.)

Importing Competitors
Go to the Registration tab, and choose the "Show competitor database" function (you could also hit the F3 key). This screen lists every car and driver in the event. Choose the "Import competitors" function. Click the button that describes what you are importing, usually a file. You can import either a .txt or .csv file, which you should have received from the Registrar. On the next screen, you need to browse the computer to find the file you want to import.

At the "Select the Columns" screen, there is a pull down arrow connected to each field. If your file had a header row, it's easy to match the fields to put the driver information in the correct places. Check the "Skip first row" box (that's the header row). On the next screen, select the drivers to import. You really want all of them, of course. Click "Next" and you have drivers in your database.

You also need to have the drivers in the Groups, as only cars in the group will be recognized in the run. If your imported competitor file included the group number, and one of your additional fields was "Group," then populating the groups is pretty easy.

In the competitor database, click on the header of the Group column. This sorts the database by group number. On the Registration tab screen, click on the Group 1 folder picture to highlight the group name. Then go to the competitor database window, highlight all the drivers in Group 1, right click somewhere in the middle of that highlight, and choose "Add competitor(s) to the selected group." Repeat this with the rest of the groups. [An easy way to highlight several lines in the database is to click on the first line you want to include, then Shift+click on the last line.]

Once you have groups and runs, and competitors in the groups, you're ready to start timing.

To Populate the Run, or Not
There are 2 schools of thought on this question. If you drag all the competitors from a group into their runs, there is less confusion when assigning unrelated transponders and photocells. However, you get all those competitors on the results, even if they never appeared on track during the session. This makes it harder to distinguish between the entrants who never actually appeared on track, and those that completed only part of a lap. The former (did not show) should not appear on the final results; the latter (turned a wheel at some point during the event but didn't start the race must appear on the final results as DNSs.

Some regions drag all the drivers from the group into all the runs; some do not drag any driver into the run. The correct procedure will be the one that makes the most sense to whomever in your region is generating results, and therefore needs to track did not shows and DNSs.

TIMING A SESSION

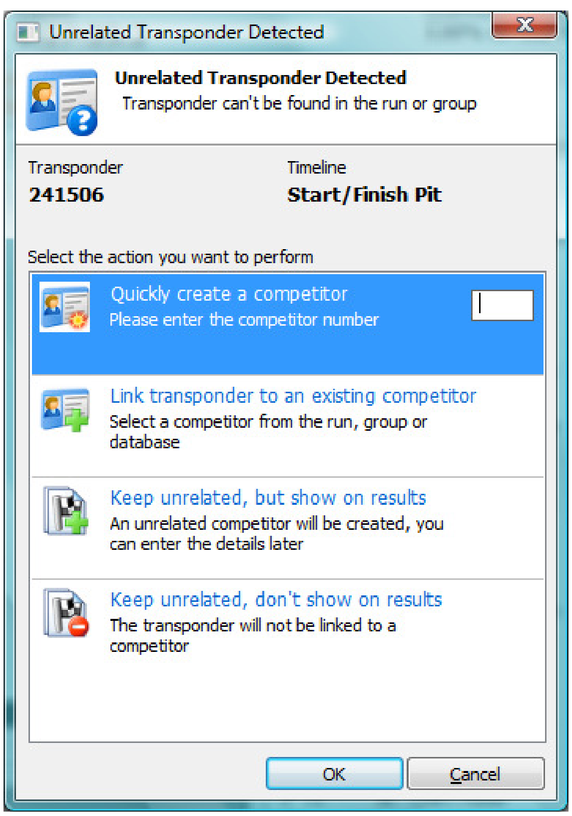
Click on the Timing tab, then select a run from the pull down arrow above the function list. They will appear in chronological order. Once the run is chosen, you'll see the name of the group and the name of the run immediately to the right of that pull down list. It's always a good idea to confirm that you've chosen the right run.

Start the clock on the session by hitting the F5 key (or clicking on the green flag picture). Do this at the same time as the other timing devices in the room are started. As soon as cars cross the control line, you should see car numbers in the boxes at the bottom center of the screen, and passing information above that.

It is vital that you pay attention! Be sure that the car number on the track is the same as on your screen. Having a taper near the SP1 systems is very helpful. If you have a car with an unrelated transponder, or without one, take the time to get the correct car number and any other information that may help you identify the car. Don't panic!! Many Orbits operators wear a headset that is plugged into the decoder. When a car crosses the control line, the decoder beeps. The absence of a beep when a car is seen crossing the line is a signal to the operator that a car has been missed. This is always a situation that needs to be addressed (see "A Car with No Transponder" below).

Unrelated Transponder

If one of the cars has an unrelated transponder, the SP1 box that pops up has 4 choices:



Don't give to the temptation to simply enter the car number you saw on the track in that box! You probably already have the car in the database, and don't need to create a new competitor. Instead, choose "Link transponder to an existing competitor." This expands the screen to show (in tabs) Run and group, Run, Group, and Database. Often, the car is already highlighted, with the other choices grayed out. This means that the car is in the group, but the transponder number does not match what SP1 saw from the loop. Typographical errors are common when entering transponder numbers. Choose the car number/driver you know to be correct. Clicking on it associates the transponder with the car. Be sure that you have chosen to update both the group and the database (little check boxes in the lower left).

If the car is not in the group, click on the Database tab. It is possible that the car just didn't get put into the group. If you can't find the car/transponder number, then go back to the "Quickly make a new entry" box, and put in the car number. Be sure to tell the Chief or timing captain about this problem, both verbally and with a quick notation on paper.

A Car with No Transponder

If a car passes the control line without a transponder and SP1 has a photocell hooked to the decoder, you will get a pop-up box inviting you to assign the photocell. The screen contains a list of all the cars that are in the run. If you populated the run with all the cars in the group, then simply choose the car number you need and click the "Assign" button. If you did not populate the run, you will need to bring the car into the run — click on the Registration tab, click on the group folder, click and hold to highlight the car in the question, and drag the line over to the appropriate run. Then go back to the Timing tab, and the car will appear in the box to assign the photocell. You can close the photocell window while you're doing this. Simply double click on the photocell line in the passing screen to open the "assign" box.

If a car without a transponder is bracketed with another car and therefore fails to get a photocell, hit the F10 key to give a manual time. You can then assign this manual time to the car. You also are able to change the manual time to match the photocell time, if desired. Or you can drag the manual time to the appropriate spot.

Any time you have a car without a transponder, be sure to tell the Chief or timing captain about this problem, both verbally and with a quick notation on paper.

Customizable Columns

As with the Registration and Processing tabs, what you see in each area of the screen is somewhat customizable. Right clicking in either the passing or results window will give you the option of choosing columns. In the passing window, it's logical to choose the car number, transponder number (with colored bars to indicate strength), lap time, photocell time (if you're using a photocell), and hits and strength (if there is room on your screen).

The columns in the result side of the screen should include car number, driver's name, best time, diff and/or gap, and any other information that fits. (Diff is the margin between the fastest time and any other car; gap is the margin between a car and the one in the next position down.)

Ending the Session

Hit F8 or click on the Checkered Flag at the end of the session. When all cars have taken the checker, click on the Stop sign to stop the run. Print results using the Print function (this may be done from the back row).

RESULTS

Once a run is completed, it's time to generate results. This is usually done from an Orbits Remote computer in the back row, so that the next session is not delayed while results are produced on the main computer. Click on the Processing tab and choose the run for which you are doing results. By right clicking in the results portion of the screen, you can choose which columns you want to see. If you export the SP1 data to an Excel spreadsheet to produce results, you'll need to set these columns to match your spreadsheet. If you use Orbits templates for results, these columns are less important.

Qualifying Results

From either the Timing tab or the Processing tab, click on the Print function. (If you are in the Processing tab, be sure you have chosen the appropriate race run.) The pop-up window that appears gives you the choice of things to print. If the run was a practice or qualifying session, choose the Sorted on Best Time (Reduced) button under the header "Qualifying Results." This reduced version will allow any announcements you added to the run to appear on the results. You can choose Preview/Edit template, to check and/or modify your template, but keep in mind that what you see on that screen is not really what your print-out will look like. When you're ready, click the "Print" button.

Race Results

If the run was a race run, choose the "Official Race Report" button to print, even if they are provisional results. The word "official" does not appear anywhere on the results, but any announcements you have put in the run will print.

Template Problems

The subject of Orbits templates is, alas, a sore point with most SP1 users. AMB has been encouraged to give SP1 users more flexibility in designing a template, but there has been no new software to date (Feb. 2009). It is possible, however, with a little creativity and trial-and-error, to design a results template that is GCR compliant and will satisfy almost all of a region's qualifying and race results needs. Once you have a template you like, you usually have to print it, see what changed without your input, and fix it again. This second print will normally give you what you asked for. And that template will stay fixed. Be aware that the header and footers are separate templates from the body of the results, so they stay with anything you print. AMB has already created a template for every print choice you have. When you edit a template, you are saving a new version, but with the same name (you don't actually have a naming choice). Once you design a template you like, it will give you that design as long as you choose the same button on the print screen.

MyLaps.com

The last step of a race weekend (or after qualifying is complete, or at the end of each day – your choice) is to upload the qualifying and race results to MyLaps.com. This can be easily accomplished using the MyLaps.com pull down menu. After choosing Upload from the pull down menu, you will be asked to enter the region's username and password. Once this information has been verified, a pop up window appears with a list of groups and runs. Simply click on the runs you wish to upload.

While this document isn't complete by any means, we hope that it gives you a better understand of Orbits 4 SP1. We wish you good times!