

## Navigation in ringing

When you are ringing a method you of course need to know your route (the “blue line” or circle of work), but that’s not enough.

Imagine:

1. You’re driving a memorised route in a car, but with a blindfold on. You know you have to turn right, and you guess when you’ve got there by how long it has taken you – fancy trying it? Would a ‘clash’ be inevitable, either with another vehicle or some stationary object?

2. Take this thought further: imagine driving one of 2 cars side by side round a race track, having agreed with the driver of the other car beforehand that you’ll swap sides after each 100m. You are wearing blinkers so you can’t see the other car & you can’t manage to take your eyes off the road ahead to check the distance counter in front of you due to your nerves. So you try to guess how far 100m is, and veer to the other side when you think it’s about time……!

3. Now imagine a marching band with a difference – as you go along the route you’re all going to swap around into different formations at the end of each section of music. You, however are the only member doing it with such effective earplugs that you cannot hear the others and you’re far too nervous to watch others’ feet marching for any clue as to their rhythm. So, you play your part in the music at about the timing you guess is right and you hesitantly move off to your new location when you finish the section – what will it sound like while you’re playing and how likely is it that you will move at the right time?

Can you see how this is similar to ringing? When you are ringing you are one member of a band which is hopefully trying to ring with rhythm so as to produce a pleasing sound with the bells changing places smoothly and at the right time. As in any musical performance there is a conductor, but in ringing s/he has a different role. There is no baton being waved to indicate the rhythm, instead the band all try hard to develop a rhythm together. Whilst ringing rounds it’s not so difficult. Small errors can be absorbed within the ringing and everyone knows their place and it is a familiar place. It is when the conductor says “Go X” that the trouble begins and the ringing becomes choppy or worse. All the ringers need to memorise the “blue line” or circle so they know the place in each row where their bell needs to strike but they also need to have some way of telling that their bell is actually striking precisely in that position in the row.

Why is it so hard to do this in ringing? It is because of the delay between your physical action and the result, ie the sound being produced. Think what it’d be like if you had to turn the car steering wheel then wait briefly before the car turned. Or if the drummer in the marching band hit the drum then had to wait 2 seconds before hearing the sound. It’d be pretty hard to get the timing right.

So how do you learn to compensate for this in the tower? You have to strive to focus on the key part of the whole event, which is the sound made by your bell amongst the others. That is the objective – a pleasing rhythmic sound. Eventually the pull and the time delay become to you an integral part of producing the sound. Only practice will perfect this skill, there are no shortcuts. A good time to really focus on this is when ringing rounds and call changes, as you get repeated opportunities to put your bell in the same place and can experiment and correct its positioning. Use your eyes to tell you approximately when to pull, but fine tune this by listening to your bell sounding in its place. Try to predict what your part of the ringing should be like – evenly spaced sounds. Is it right? If not, pull a little earlier or later and listen again. It may seem to you that some experienced ringers do not look at all, but ring staring at the pattern on the carpet. Most are not focussing on the floor at all, but are using their peripheral vision to be aware of the other bells without directly looking at them. This is a habit which is not at all helpful to inexperienced ringers in the band, but one which can allow you to concentrate very deeply on the sound. With experience you know which bell you’re following when and need very little visual input to confirm this. The main emphasis is where it should be, on the sound.