The Learning Curve

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Singles in Stedman Doubles

In recent months, *Tail End* has received several requests for help with calls in Stedman Doubles. *The Learning Curve* looked in some detail at the structure of Stedman in May 2005 (Volume 3, Chapter 17) but didn't consider calls, so that is this month's topic.

Many ringers are introduced to the single in Stedman Doubles (there is no bob – you can get an extent with just the single) by being told to 'make cat's ears, and go in the same way you came out'. Figure 1 shows 'cat's ears' (left) and the work that fits with it, sometimes called 'anti cat's ears' (right). The tips of the ears (in 5th's place) fit with the tips of the 'anti-ears' (in 4th's place).

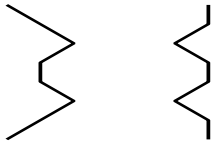

Figure 1: (L) Cat's ears, (R) Anti cat's ears

Perhaps you already know that, but you still trip up, so something else must be confusing you. Let's look more closely at how things fit together.

Where singles fit in the structure

In most methods, calls are made at 'natural joins' – the lead ends. Even in Stedman on all numbers other than five, the calls come at natural joins – the six-ends. But Stedman Doubles is different, and the calls come in the middle of a six. To understand this, let's recap the structure of Stedman. It consists of blocks of six rows (which is why they are called 'sixes') and they are the nearest equivalent to the 'leads' in Treble-dominated methods.

In each six, the front three bells hunt among themselves, but as *The Learning Curve* explained in May 2005 (Volume 3, Chapter 17) they alternate between forward hunting (with leads hand and back) and backward hunting (with leads back and hand). At every boundary between sixes, one bell comes off the front to join in the dodging in 4-5, and another leaves the back to join in the hunting on the front.

What a single does

The single only affects the pair dodging in 4-5, so we don't need to worry too much here about what is happening on the front,.

Figure 2 (left) shows three normal sixes (separated by thin horizontal lines). Two bells dodge together in the middle six. The bell shown in grey has just left the front, and dodges up, while the bell shown in black dodges down, and then goes onto the front for the next six.

Figure 2 (right) shows what the single does. One change is different, the one that crosses the grey strip. All changes before and after this are the same as they would have been. Notice that the altered change comes in the middle of where the double dodge was, and that the bells have already started dodging when it happens. The altered change does not swap the bells in 4-5, as it normally would, but halts them in their tracks, for one blow, after which they then complete what is left of the double dodge. That all seems quite tidy and simple, but you need also to understand a few subtleties.

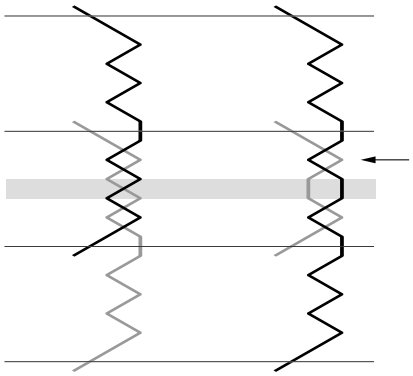

Figure 2: Effect of a Single in Stedman Doubles

After effects

Putting in a call changes what happens after it – that's what it is there for – and these changes can sometimes trip up the unwary novice (and even some not so novice). The most significant effect is that the bells swap onto each other's paths, so they each continue where the other one would have been. So don't be caught out expecting things to feel the same after the single, because they won't. Let's look at short term, medium term and long term effects.

Short term effects

In the short term – the blows immediately after making the call – you find yourself ringing 'the other way up'. Although you are finishing off the remains of a double dodge, you are not finishing off the bit that you started. Swapping places with your dodging partner, means you are now dodging the opposite way. If before the single you were striking over in fifth place at backstroke, then after the single, your over-blow will be at handstroke. Likewise if before the single you struck your under-blow in fourth place at backstroke, then your under-blow after the single will be at handstroke.

Does that matter? In theory it shouldn't – if you count every place accurately, and ring in each as you come to it – but in practice, many people seem to develop a subconscious expectation about which way round to do dodges. For example, when some people are learning Plain Bob, they have far more difficulty with 3-4 down dodges, because they have an urge to strike the over-blow at handstroke instead of at backstroke. People transferring from Grandsire to Plain Bob sometimes have similar problems, because the dodges seem 'the other way up' from Plain Bob. In Stedman Doubles, if anything distracts you at the time of the single, you might instinctively try to do the second cat's ear on the same stroke as you did the first one. That is always wrong, and might create enough confusion for you to forget whether or not you should be going in. If you have difficulty staying two blows in fourths, you are probably trying to dodge the same way.

Medium term effects

That neatly brings us to the medium term – the six following the single. Do you go in or not? With no single it is easy. When you get onto the back you (double) dodge up, the next six you dodge down, and the following six, you go back in. A single changes things by making you go in either a six earlier or later than you would otherwise have done. (It would be nice if it was always one or the other, but it isn't.) Failure to go in at the right time is a common problem when people learn to ring singles.

How do you know whether to go in? Look at the right hand part of Figure 2, and you see that the bell shown grey, which makes (normal way up) cat's ears, is on the back for only one six. So if that is you, head back in as soon as you have rung the last 'ear'. The other bell (shown black) had been on the back for a whole six before the single came along, and after the single, it finds itself again in fifth place at the six end, destined to hang around for another six.

As an added check, which way up are you in the few blows after making the single? If you are under at backstroke (finishing a down dodge) then go down. If you are over at backstroke (finishing an up dodge) then lie and dodge with whoever comes up to you.

Long term effects

Finally the long-term effect – in the six when you next go onto the front. (In fact, if you are the first bell off the back, then the 'long term' is only a few blows after you made the single, so you need to keep your wits about you.) Going in a six earlier or later means that you arrive in a different type of six, since they alternate between quick (forward hunting) and slow (backward hunting). Normally, you go in the opposite way to how you came out, because you spend two sixes on the back. But if a call affects you, then you go in the same way.

Some people think of going in the opposite to what they would have done, while others prefer to think of going in the same as they came out. It comes to the same thing, but if there is any confusion, you might remember what you did, better than what you haven't done yet.

If you look carefully at Figure 2, you will see that the 'tails' of the lines only just reach to thirds place, and don't show whether or not a place is made in thirds on the way in or out. This is deliberate. Singles can be called in any six (quick or slow). If the diagram showed any more, then there would need to be two different versions, one with the call in a quick six, and one with the call in a slow six. (*The Ringing World Diary* only shows a single in a slow six.) It is better to think separately about what you do on the front and what you do on the back.

Calling confusion

One other snare awaits you – the singles might not be called in the right place, because many people are confused about where the call should be. In most methods with dodging in 'even places' (3-4, 5-6, etc) calls are made at backstroke, and in most methods with dodging in 'odd places' (4-5, 6-7, etc) calls are made at handstroke. This is true for Stedman on all numbers except five, but Doubles is different! The call must come one whole pull before the first blow that the call causes to be made in a different place. In Stedman Doubles, that is a backstroke (the grey strip is a hand to back transition) so the call must be at backstroke (shown with an arrow in Figure 2).

Tail End

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