

Know your sport: Mountain Bike Orienteering (MTBO)

Most orienteers participate in the sport because they enjoy the combination of running and being out in the countryside (or navigating urban areas). But there are large numbers of people who enjoy cycling - so why not have a sport which combines cycling with the navigation skills of orienteering? It exists - and here we look at what is involved.

There are two types of Mountain Bike Orienteering events, known as MBO Score & MTBO.

Mountain Bike Orienteering Score (MBO Score) is where an Ordnance Survey Map, usually 1:50,000 but sometimes larger scale, is used. The Map is marked with a number of controls (often 30) with differing point's values. These controls are distributed across the map area & competitors aim to visit as many as possible within a pre-determined time limit. At the Start area the rider is given the map with any final instructions and the clock is started for their ride time. The rider is then free to decide which route to take and which controls to try to reach in the time allowed. The ride culminates in a total Score for each rider. Riders can return to the Finish area any time within their allowed time limit. There are no penalties or bonuses for returning early. If the rider is late returning to the Finish area points are deducted on a rising scale from their total score. The rider with the highest points total after deductions is the winner.

MTBO (Multi-Terrain Bike Orienteering) events use orienteering maps that have been specially modified to show rideability, and are usually held within areas containing a good network of tracks and paths, providing a variety of route choices. Again these events start with a map with marked controls being given at the Start area. Riders then aim to ride from control to control in the numbered sequence. The rider with the shortest ride time from start to finish is the winner. The skill set is similar to that required for MBO score events. The top riders tend to have extremely fast map reading and map memory abilities to enable them to ride and plan ahead quickly. The MTBO events tend to be much shorter in duration compared to MBO Score events.

Equipment - the Bike: A competition bike doesn't have to be state-of-the-art. Weight is an important factor in an endurance event and most MBO competitors are conscious of this fact. You will see all grades of bike on an MBO event, but a flashy bike won't ensure a win. Ideally your bike should be well maintained and prepared so that it is less likely to let you down. Most leading competitors use some kind of Map Board which keeps the map visible at all times. This is much more convenient than carrying the map stuck into a back pocket or in a pouch slung around the neck.



Information and photos taken from the websites of the BMBO and the IOF

Maps for MTBO Events

Foot orienteering usually involves choices between running through wooded areas or following the path network - often with courses designed to try and minimise the amount of path running. For MTBO it is the opposite - in fact going off track is usually prohibited. So whilst foot orienteering needs shades of green to indicate 'runnability' through woodland, MTBO maps need more details on the 'rideability' of the track and path network.

The International Specification for Mountain Bike Orienteering Maps (ISMTBOM) uses the following classification:

- Fast riding 75-100%
- Medium riding 50-75%
- Slow riding 25-50%
- Difficult to ride max 25%

This is shown using different symbols and these are indicated on the right. It also means that many symbols normally included on foot orienteering maps (pits, ditches, rootstocks) are not needed and hence not shown.

There are 3 additional symbols which are important and these are shown using purple.



These indicate important barriers or restrictions and are shown on the right. The top one is used for a 'Forbidden Route' which can not be ridden along. The middle one is for a 'Dangerous object across tracks or paths, stairs'. If the obstacle present a complete barrier (for example a wall) or if it is forbidden to pass that point then the lowest one is used representing 'Uncrossable barrier / forbidden to cross'.

Track Symbols

Track: Fast riding (wide with a stabilised surface)



Path: Fast riding (well maintained but narrow)



Track: Medium riding (wide but some difficult surface features)



Path: Medium riding (narrow but some difficult surface features)



Track: Slow riding (wide but with obstacles - may need to dismount)



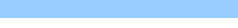
Path: Slow riding (narrow but with obstacles - may need to dismount)



Track: Difficult to ride (wide with difficult obstacles - may be impossible to ride)



Path: Difficult to ride (narrow with difficult obstacles - may be impossible to ride)



More Information

Here are some useful sites for additional information:

- **British Mountain Bike Orienteering (BMBO):** <http://www.bmbo.org.uk/index.php> This is the national governing body of the sport and has lots of detailed information. See in particular their page for 'Your first event guide' at: <http://www.bmbo.org.uk/rider-information/firsteventguide.php>
- Internationally, the sport is administered by the **International Orienteering Federation** but the information on their site is limited. They do however have the agreed map specifications referred to in the box above. This can be seen at: http://orienteering.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/International-Specification-for-MTB-Orienteering-Maps-2010_2.pdf



BMBO