

From the Editor

As far as I am aware, this is the first issue of *NCJ* to span two different calendar years, though I think others have come out at the peak or between two peaks of a solar cycle. In any event, this seems like a good time for a look back and a look ahead, though the financial warning of “past performance is no guarantee of future results” certainly applies!

Another wise old saying is “a rising tide lifts all boats” — increasing sunspot numbers bring more entries and higher scores in most HF contests. Of course, on the downside slope from a solar maximum, the higher bands cease to float anyone’s boat. The ARRL 10 Meter Contest in December should still be exciting, while the 2026 edition may be more like a VHF contest. It won’t be too long before 15-meter openings get shorter in both length and distance.

But let’s look back at 2025 first, as there were several clear contesting trends that are worth noting:

- Remote operation of contest stations became mainstream.

- FT8/FT4 contesting began to mature, with separate contests for those modes becoming the norm (though NØJK’s column in this issue summarizes one proposal with a different approach).

- The groundwork was put in place for real-time contest log adjudication and scoring.

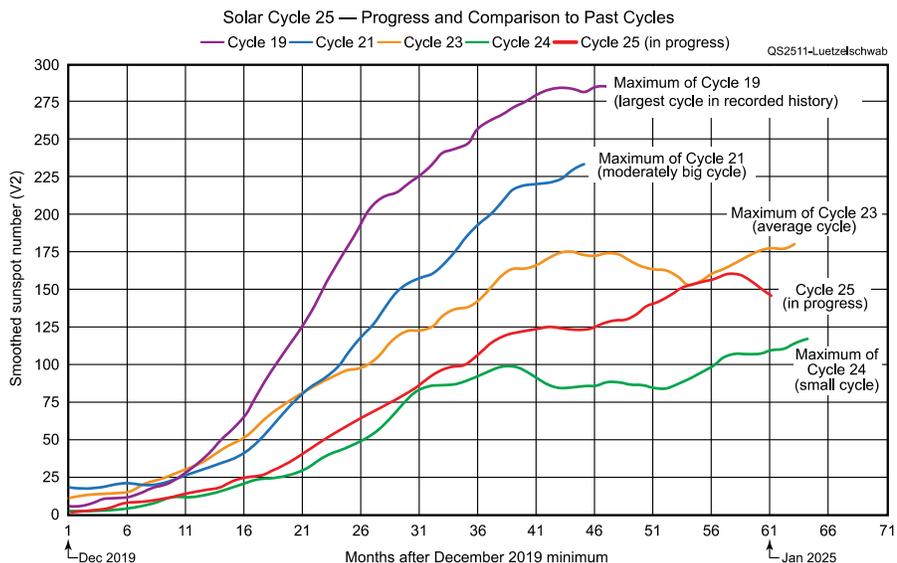
- AI-generated digital voice files began to go mainstream — no cables needed, but still more complex to make work than 40 years ago, when digital voice keying made multi/multi rooms much quieter.

These trends likely have a positive impact on attracting new ops to contesting and possibly bringing new ops to the amateur radio hobby. Anecdotally, membership in contest clubs was stable to increasing this year; clubs are key to stability and growth in amateur radio overall and to contest participation in particular.

Looking forward to 2026, the World Radiosport Team Championship (WRTC) 2026 in the UK will be a showcase for contesting and for many of the advances made in 2025. I’d like to see some youth-friendly social media feeds and real-time graphics for the event — shots of ops in tents typing will only go so far. Something like a real-time Reverse Beacon Network graphic showing the lines from the WRTC stations out to the locations of the QSOs they are making might be of interest. Another possibility is to highlight any WRTC calls with the numbers six or seven in them (search “Doot Doot (67)” if your kids or grandkids haven’t made you aware of this meme that has been sweeping youth social media)!

Many initiatives have been launched that should lead to measurable downward trends in the average age of the amateur radio population. It would be nice to see ARRL Sweepstakes 2026 have an increase in ops sending checks beginning with 2. Hopefully, we will also see some rule updates in SS come out for 2026 to reverse the years-long decline in participation.

Overall, despite many issues and challenges, progress is being made that will increase both the number of hams entering contests and the average number of QSOs made by each entrant. If you are a non-contester reading this, give one of the winter contests a try while we’re still enjoying near-peak conditions. Experienced contesters, give a talk at your local club or invite a few non-contesters to be part of a “Fresh Meat Sunday” Sweepstakes multi-single effort or DX contest.



Solar Cycle 25 monthly mean data, compared against a small cycle (Cycle 24), an average cycle (Cycle 23), a moderately big cycle (Cycle 21), and the largest cycle in recorded history (Cycle 19).