

Chequered flag discrepancies:

A few drivers were disappointed or disconcerted that the chequered flag was not correctly displayed at the end of the 2nd Donington Sigmax/Supers race. There is an MSA rule covering use - and mis-use - of the flag, of which we should all be aware:

"(Q)17.4. Should the end of the race signal inadvertently or otherwise be displayed before the leading car completes the scheduled number of laps - or before the prescribed race time has been completed - the race will nevertheless be deemed to end at the moment the signal is given. If the chequered flag is given to the leader, then the result should be drawn accordingly, but if the chequered flag is given to a competitor other than the leader then the result should be given at the end of the last completed lap of the leader. Should the end of the race signal be inadvertently delayed, the race will nevertheless be deemed to finish at the correct moment and competitors be classified accordingly."

To summarize - if the flag is waved prematurely, you'll get a shorter race than you should have done. If it's waved late, it does not lengthen the race.

You will realise that these occasional errors are inevitable when you consider that the flag is waved by a person (in our club racing, a volunteer) and that it is therefore subject to the vagaries of human error - mind you, if it was automatic and down to a computer to do it, the scope for cock-ups would be even larger... CGRC has made representations to BARC, asking them to try harder to get it right, but mistakes are made at all levels - in 2002, Pele omitted to wave the chequered flag at Michal Schumacher as he won the Brazilian Grand Prix (<http://tinyurl.com/pele-F1>)! In club racing, the most common reason for a late chequer is that there are backmarkers just in front of the leader and that it is difficult to correctly pick out the leader. Occasionally, the leader will be just a few feet short of lapping a backmarker as he crosses the finish line and it is almost impossible to show the flag to the leader without, incorrectly, also showing it to the backmarker.

The need for the rules to be as they are is obvious really, if you think about it: for example, any driver might have fuelled his car, deliberately or otherwise (and ignoring how unwise that might be), so that he/she has just enough fuel to complete the full race distance, but not enough to complete one extra lap - it clearly would not be fair if that driver was disadvantaged by the race being erroneously extended for one lap; and bear in mind that a major cock-up could result in the chequer being shown 2 or 3 laps too late, possibly only when all the cars have run out of fuel! (Consider an extreme case, when the person responsible for waving the flag has suddenly been taken seriously ill on post; and be aware that it's not practical to have one rule covering such an eventuality, but a different rule if the flag is not waved due to, for example, forgetfulness.) So it is clear that the only rule which makes sense is the one we have - the race ends when it should end, even if the chequer is shown later than that.

How are you supposed to deal with this? The easy thing is to just keep on racing until you do see the chequer - or in the extreme case, until you see a marshal stood in the middle of the track waving you into the pitlane! Occasionally, it might mean that you race one more lap than you should have done, but so what? All you need to be aware of is that, if the chequer has been correctly shown but you failed to see it, the clerk might invite you to take your cheque-book up to his office for a chat about you wasting track time (and potentially endangering marshals) by doing an unnecessary and unscheduled lap. Alternatively, you can decide for yourself that the race has reached full distance and that you can stop racing, secure in your knowledge of the rules and that the result will be the correct one, regardless of the fact that the entire field might pass you as they complete one more superfluous lap. Your decision might be based on your confidence in your own in-car timing system, or on signals from the pit-wall; it's up to you.

Following that, the need for the first part of the rule also becomes obvious, since drivers are advised to keep racing until they see the chequer: if a driver does not have any in-car timing system, nor any signals from the pit-wall, and he sees the chequer, he will assume that the correct race duration has been reached and he will stop racing. It would clearly be unfair if he is then given a worse finish than he deserves because he is subsequently passed by another driver, one who perhaps does have an in-car timing system and who knows that the full race duration has not yet been reached.

Similarly, if the chequered flag "misses" the leaders but is shown, say, to the driver in fifth place, it would be unfair if that driver - and all those behind him - has no opportunity to improve his position on the last lap, while the four leading cars do have that opportunity; clearly, the fairest solution to that error is for the result to be "counted back" to the the last time that the leader crossed the finishing line. This particular rule explains why a delayed chequer can occur, unavoidably, if the leader is about to lap a backmarker - it is important that the backmarker is not shown the flag, because the result would then have to be counted back one whole lap.