

Prize draw routine

Entries are opened daily. Stamps are cut out and passed to charity.

Submissions are all cut down to the same size, bounded by the frame immediately outside the grid and the bottom line of the address panel; about 98% of entries have to be so treated – solvers are encouraged to send entries already in this cut down form, as this will save some effort.

Each puzzle's batch is continually shuffled from first receipts until the evening of the closing date, when entries are drawn one by one from an opaque container, each being compared with the correct solution until (currently) six winners have been established.

The numbers of single, double and triple winners in any year have been consistent over at least the last 18 years; 1997, with six prizes each week courtesy of Waterstone's, has seen the first four-time winners since the decades when the crossword was of a level of difficulty to attract only dozens, rather than hundreds, of entries (when The Listener also awarded consolation prizes to regularly successful but unlucky entrants).

Statistics routines and 'rules'

Photostat entries are not eligible for prizes (unless from an overseas address). This approach followed an incident in 1992 when 12 entries (9 copies, 3 proper) were received in the same hand permutating 3 names and 4 addresses. That they all contained the same error was irrelevant to the decision.

Photostats are accepted for personal records and annual statistics.

Anonymous entries (usually about 20 a year, but 15 for 3441 alone, which lacked an address panel) cannot win prizes, but if the handwriting is familiar enough for attribution, they will be included in personal records: this is possible more often than not.

Late entries are accepted for personal records, especially if flagged by a note on a submission preceding, e.g., a holiday. Late arrivals for a particularly taxing puzzle are considered as non-entries. Illness cannot be flagged, but is treated sympathetically.

Appeals concerning alternative solutions are not necessary. The vetters, checker (all of whom have also attempted the puzzles "cold") and setter will have given them full consideration; in the very unlikely event that alternatives are acceptable, every effort is made to add a note to the solution panel, though this cannot be guaranteed.

Unexpected non-entries from potential Solver Silver Salver winners will be queried with the solver if entries resume normally thereafter. The Royal Mail ensures this is very rare.