Over 3NT do you use Gerber?

By Neil H. Timm

Over the bid of 3NT how do you ask for aces (e.g., 1♦-3NT? For example:

Opener: ♠A52 ♥A64 ♦KQ987 ♣J8 Partner: ♠KQJ ♥KQ8 ♦AJ54 ♣Q62

Many uses either the original Gerber 4♣ bid introduced by John Gerber in North America in 1938 or the more modern version of Gerber.

The original responses to the 4♣ asking bid are:

- 4♦ = 0 Aces
- 4♥ = 1 Ace
- 4♠ = 2 Aces
- 4NT = 3 Aces
- 5♣ = 4 Aces

More Modern Gerber Version

- 4♦ = 0/4 Aces
- 4♥ = 1 Ace
- 4♠ = 2 Aces
- 4NT = 3 Aces

In both cases the king-asking bid is 5NT or one may use the next available step. Response's mirror those agreed for the ace-ask.

In the above example missing 1 ace using Gerber, many may bid 6NT for down 1!

Larry Cohen is on record by saying that "Gerber (original/modern versions) should only be a baby food". During his 2009 Regional at Sea cruise, he gave his "anti-Gerber" lecture.

Director Harry Falk loved it and told him that next to Gerber on the convention card he used to write: NITLFY. What does it mean? Not In The Last Forty Years!

Why does he take this position, because Gerber is used by many to just locate Aces and in NT a slam requires more than just aces to make slam; it requires 33/34HCP (e.g. 16+17 or 17+17) not 31/32HCP which may be fine for a suit contract!

However, many experts use "expert" Gerber, in place of a 4NT quantitative bid, which has variations, so the agreement requires some discussion.

1430 Gerber – Option 1

4♦ = 1/4 Aces

4♥ = 0/3 Aces

4♠ = 2 aces with a minimum 11/12-16

4NT = 2 aces with a maximum 17

And 5♣ is the king ask.

      5♦ = 1/4 kings

      5♥ = 0/3 kings

      5♠ = 2 kings

3014 Gerber – Option 1

4♦ = 0/3 Aces

4♥ = 1/4 Aces

4♥ = 2 aces with a minimum 11/12-16

4NT = 2 aces with a maximum 17

And 5♣ is the king ask.

      5♦ = 0/3kings

      5♥ = 1/4 king

      5♠ = 2 kings

3014 Gerber – Option 2 (Aces only following the modern version- less useful)

4♦ = 0/4 Aces

4♥ = 1 Aces

4♥ = 2 Aces

4NT = 3 Aces

And 5♣ is the king ask.

      5♦ = 0/4 kings

      5♥ = 1 king

      5♠ = 2 kings

      5NT= 3 kings

Returning to our example after 4♣, opener bids 4♠=2 aces with a minimum partner next bids 4NT, not 6NT.

Playing 2/1 and a strong 1NT=15-17 or 2NT=20-21, I hear many say they use "Gerber" over first and last! Very bad advice, slam in NT is more than just Aces, NT contracts tend to fail with balanced 4333 hands. And the quantitative bid of 4NT is of no help. Consider the following hands:

Opener: ♠AJ10 ♥K97 ♦K53 ♣AQ95 Partner: ♠KQ5 ♥AQ2 ♦A1072 ♣J84

All the Aces and 32HCP, slam fails as does the bidding sequence 1NT-4NT- 6NT!

South opens 1NT and north bids 4NT; south next bids 6NT and the opening lead is the J♦. There are only 10 top tricks and south cannot hope to generate 2 extra tricks for down 1! Quantitative bids do not work with 32HCP.

Using expert Gerber 1NT-4♣- 4♠-4NT- a winning auction.

	♠ AK	
	♥ Q82	
	♦ A652	
	♣ K1053	
♠ J76	**N**	♠ 10983
♥ 9764	**W E**	♥ K1076
♦ J10983	**S**	♦ 7
♣ Q		♣ J876
	♠ Q542	
	♥ AJ	
	♦ KQ4	
	♣ A942	