“When you open a good preempt at the one level, do you bid again if partner passes?”

This is a good question, as it brings up the need to constantly re-evaluate the hand as the auction progresses.

Let’s say South deals with ♠x ♥Qxx ♦AKJxxxx ♣xx. Playing a loose preempting style, opening 3♦ risks partner passing with several hands that will make 3N on balance. This hand also has 7 losers, which qualifies it has an opening hand in terms of LTC. It makes more sense to open 1♦, planning to rebid ♦s after partner’s response. This hand is closer to opening values regardless of preempting style – since 3♦ might be opened with x xx QTxxxx Jxxx, it’s even more imperative to start at the one level.

Sometimes, however, partner’s response is a pass. Other times, the opponents interrupt and turn the auction into a competitive one. Determining whether or not to bid requires hand evaluation on a case by case basis.

If the auction continued

N E S W

-- -- 1♦ P
P 2♣ ?

South has an automatic 2♦ rebid, based on both the Law of Total Tricks and the playing strength of South’s hand. The only real danger in bidding 2♦ is if it helps E/W evaluate their chances at game (4♠ or 4♥, realistically). Change the auction:

N E S W

-- -- 1♦ 2♥
P P ?

Now South’s hand doesn’t offer very much. North is likely sitting on a flat 7 or 8 while East has a strong hand without a heart fit or a shot at 3N. Bidding 3♦ will make only a few times, and go down many more. If the bidding were instead

N E S W

-- -- 1♦ 2♠
P P ?

3♦ would still be questionable for the same reasons as mentioned after 2♥. The difference is that there are no wasted values with this hand. If partner has the ♥KJ, 3♦ makes or goes down one while 2♠ makes 2 or three. In this auction, it is more likely that partner is making a penalty pass (due to our short ♠s), which should caution us in reopening anything other than a double. In short, this hand is very unclear in terms of what is right.

Sometimes, it’s possible to bid again more than once! Consider the same hand with this auction:

N E S W

-- -- 1♦ 2♣
P P 2♦ 3♣
3♥ 3♠ ?

What can partner have? Partner probably doesn’t have 6♥, or 3♦, or some kind of ♣ stopper. 3♥ should look like a hand with 5♥, a doubleton ♦, and concentrated values in those suits just short of an initial 2♥ bid. 3♥ is an offer to play in a ♥ partial/game instead of 3♦. Given that the suits line up so well, South should raise 3♥ to 4.

This would be a possible hand for this rather poorly bid auction <http://tinyurl.com/ycll654m>.