

THE FEEDBACK

Volume 02, Issue 09

September 2002

A Reluctant Journey Into CW

With any kind of luck my wife will be getting me an HF rig for my birthday or Christmas. I've been an Extra Class operator for over a year now and you can't, or maybe you can, imagine how much thought I've put into selecting HF equipment. I've wavered between buying kits, pre-assembled kits, vintage equipment, or major vendor entry-class rigs. Thanks to the internet my research into the available products and HF operating modes has been very easy. I have found the decision making process on radio equipment to be daunting, yet educational and rewarding. I may have been remiss in not frequenting Ham Fests looking for a buy, or not in using the club shack more often, but my Saturdays and Sundays don't come cheap either.

New entry-level rigs are priced around \$600-\$700. This amount presses the limit of my hobby budget. I've found that quality electronic equipment, even the kit variety (Elecraft K2), costs enough to keep me from being careless with a purchase. I keep hearing that having quality equipment is important and I figure that a big part of quality is implicit in the manufacturer's name and reputation. Alinco, Icom, Kenwood and Yeasu the obvious big names sold by the big vendors, such as HRO, AES, Texas Towers, etc. It seems reasonable to assume each of these manufacturers have consistent quality in their manufacturing processes, regardless of the specific radio's design. So if the design specs meet your basic needs, why buy the highest priced, feature rich radio? Maybe someday I'll find out.

My final decision on a rig is based on manufacturing quality, flexibility in operating modes, upgradability, features such as DSP and filters, and enough transmit power, not to mention that I don't trust my soldering skills. The QRP excitement, and an attractive new 20 watt Argonaut V rig from Ten-Tec, almost carries the day, but not quite. I am wary

of low power without a directional antenna to go along with it. Early on in my life as a Ham, I read in an old ARRL Operating Manual that 100 watts is the benchmark for satisfying amateur operations and I'm reluctant not to listen to this advice. Also, I was influenced in a recent LARC meeting where Brian, N3OC, of the Potomac Valley Radio Club (PVRC), said that CW at 100 Watts is effective for contesting. So, although contesting isn't one of my primary interests at this time, being able to do it effectively seems to make sense. After all, it may be nice to rack up those contacts for an ARRL DXCC Award fairly quickly, at some point. I tend to have a competitive streak, so who knows?

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RiverFest Report

I just returned from the first formal meeting of the RiverFest. All seems to be going well, except the number of vendors is down from last year.

The date is Saturday, October 12. Set-up starts at 0700; the "Fest" will be open from 1000 until 1600 for the Arts and Crafts and food vendors. Unlike Main Street, this is a low-key, family oriented event which was originally started to celebrate the opening of the park by the river, with its walking path basically from "B" street along the river down to Ninth street.

There will be pony rides for the kids, and hay rides for kids of all ages. The Laurel Boys and Girls club will be showing off their pugilistic skills: about ten bouts are scheduled, beginning around noon. We believe each bout will consist of three 2-minute rounds.

I may have more to report after our next meeting in two weeks.

-Pud

President's Ramblings

Upcoming in October are at least four events that LARC members will want to note on their calendars. On Oct 5 from 1000-1600 is the SET '02. Even if you aren't a card carrying ARES member, don't let that stop you from participating. Let me know if you'd like to be involved. Then there is the Riverfest on Oct 12, an event for which we've helped out with the communications for several years. More on that elsewhere in this issue. On Oct 18 and 19 I'm hoping we will have a good turnout for the Jamboree On The Air (JOTA), sponsored by the Boy Scouts of America. Finally, there is the Marine Corps Marathon on Oct 27. For more information email Rick Bunn/ N4ASX at N4ASX@ARRL.NET or to sign up visit the following website http://www.k3xo.net/mcm_form.html.

We all know that the average age of ham radio enthusiasts is steadily increasing. I've often heard the cry that we need to get some younger folks involved. I think that one way to do this is to set up a station at this year's camporee and participate in JOTA. We did this around eight years ago or so and I think the participants found it to be rewarding. The local district, which consists of scout troops from around Rt 50 on up through

the northern end of the county, has scheduled their camporee this year to coincide with JOTA and has asked us to set up a station so they can talk with other scouts on the air. The site for this year's camporee is the American Legion Campgrounds on Surratts Road, which is off Rt 5 (Branch Ave). I've looked at the site, and am willing to set up a couple of our aluminum portable poles on the ends of a 100' long building between which we can string a dipole. We can also mount a two meter beam, fixed, in case we can hook up the scouts thru the internet connection on a local repeater. We would operate outside under our tent, however, we can go inside in case of rain. I hope to have available some ARRL literature to give out. I've requested a list of the Radio Merit Badge Counselors to try to work them in. I'll provide the local clubs with contact points for the troops in the hope that some of the local clubs will follow up with some ham radio demonstrations at their local scout meetings over the following months. We'll never get any young people interested unless we demonstrate the fun of the hobby. I hope that several of our members will step forward to work the Friday night and Saturday operations. I think to do it right there should be people working the rigs and others to explain the hobby. Let me know if you are willing to help out.

73 de Jim/WI3N

LARC PVRC Meeting, July 2002

The LARC PVRC contingent held its quarterly meeting after the regular July LARC meeting. Members present were W3YD/Pud, W3DAD/ Kevin, WI3N/Jim, KT3D/Dennis, K3HDM/HD, KA8YPY/Dan, W3BE/Johnny, and N3XL/Bill --- his first PVRC meeting.

Kevin gave a short presentation outlining the upcoming contest season, and emphasizing those that were PVRC events. He also pointed out the several VHF contests on the horizon, and, since the club shack is "over-crowded" with VHF/UHF equipment, these contests would be a good chance to exercise the equipment and gain other contesting experience.

A short discussion followed concerning "contesting skills", such as when do you search and pounce, and when do "run" a frequency. We also talked about the most efficient way to make the "Q" and continue.

The next Laurel Regional PVRC will be after the October LARC meeting. PVRC still requires you make two meetings before you can be voted in as a member, but they don't have to LARC meetings. For example, the upcoming FallFest will probably have a PVRC sign-up table; if you sign-in there, let me know, so I can give you credit for a meeting. Then, it's once a member, always a member.

73/Pud

A Reluctant Journey Into CW (continued)

Deciding on a primary mode of operation really helps in deciding on equipment.

Having grown up with the advent of the PC and digital communications, the digital modes always interested me the most. In fact as a brand new Ham (about 5 years ago) I did 2-meter packet, even before I owned a microphone for my rig, or had bought an HT. At that time I was looking forward to HF digital comms, but something happened to this little Ham on the way to the market. Namely, I used my packet station, I-link, and Internet Relay Chat on my home computer, and somewhere along the line the intrigue of the digital modes began wearing off and the allure of CW got my attention.

Most assuredly, the economics of the situation had something to do with prodding me into CW, but I sincerely believe that my current interest and enjoyment of Morse Code is for much deeper reasons.

Equipment	Main Reasons
Icom-718 HF Rig	Band coverage, power, upgradability, performance specs, excellent reviews and other features, incl. 5W for QRP.
Hustler 5BTV Trap Vertical	Band coverage, excellent reviews, no tuner required.
MFJ Dummy Load	Need for practicing code and ?.
Kent Iambic Paddles	High quality and rugged. My personal "instrument."
LMR 400 or 9913 Coax	Hefty cable to avoid line loss.

For instance, in getting my code copy proficiency up to 13 words per minute I am reminded of my days, long ago, practicing trumpet. In that venture, I eventually did things like performing Bugler's Holiday and sight-reading just about any piece of music. So, even though I have yet to place my hands on a Morse Code key, I am looking forward to developing the skills necessary to perform the purest, and most robust form of communications.

In my journey into CW, I have decided that I want to get my computer out of the loop. It will only be used for administrative things like logging, DX spotting, call book lookups, and propagation information. It may have a future, digitally speaking, but not for now!

Here's a list of the equipment that I want and the primary and/or distinguishing reasons. I plan to get going under \$1K total:

The October meeting for the Foundation for Amateur Radio will be held on Wednesday, October 9, 2002 at the Historical Electronics Museum, in Lithicum, MD. The meeting will be held directly after a presentation by Mr. Riley Hollingsworth. The presentation starts at 7:00 P.M. with the FAR meeting to follow. Representatives MUST attend the meeting afterwards to get credit for being at the FAR meeting.

For directions to the museum, point your browser to www.qsl.net/w3gr.

**Dan Blasberg
KA8YPY
President
Foundation for Amateur Radio**

Now it's just a matter of time and I'll be pounding brass. Whoda thunk it!

Bill Smith
N3XL

Editor's Corner

This has been a very busy period for me with the anniversary of September 11th and the end of the federal government's fiscal year. Subsequently, I have not had time to devote to many things, including the Feedback. However, now that things are beginning to settle down again, I hope to get publication of the Feedback back on schedule.

The deadline for submissions to the October issue of the Feedback is **October 9, 2002**.

Bob
KB3HGW

Prince George's County ARES/RACES

Summer hasn't slowed up the activities of the Prince George's County ARES/RACES team. In fact, if anything, they have intensified their efforts to link their hospitals and health department with amateur radio communications. Each of the six hospitals and the health department has been given a list of radios, antennas, power supply, tnc's, and coax that they have been urged to purchase with grant money coming to them from the federal government. The plan is to install a permanent radio station in all six hospitals and in the two health department sites. However, until that happens, we have been running tests during our regular odd Tuesday nets to determine what repeaters are available to link them and how they can be linked simplex. These tests began in the parking lots of the facilities and eventually progressed inside. Some of the hospitals have external antennas and others must be operated from within on magmount antennas on the ceiling grid or a file cabinet, or on an HT. In one case we used a temporary pvc pipe, pulley and wire j-pole for an external antenna. All our testing was leading up to a communications drill on August 27 with the hospitals, health department, and EOC. This drill was specifically geared to the National Pharmaceutical Stockpile program and had a bio-terrorist attack as its premise.

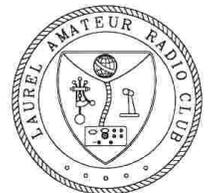
Our function was twofold for this exercise. We were asked to be available to give messages from the master controller at the EOC to the controllers at each facility. This would provide them with information they needed to inject in the scenario to speed it up, slow it down, or change its direction in some way. Our other function was to be available to provide a link for the facilities to pass traffic to each other at the point in the exercise when the phones went down. We had twenty members involved with the facilities, five of whom are retired and fifteen of whom took leave from work to participate. From the compliments we received at the next day debrief it was apparent that we have made a positive impression on our clients. Having staff at the facilities be able to talk directly with their counterparts

at other facilities with us as control operators, impressed upon them our value even when the phones were working.

In September we will be devoting our time to preparations for the upcoming section wide SET '02 scheduled for October 5 from 1000 - 1600. We encourage all amateur operators to participate in the yearly SET even if you aren't an "official" card carrying ARES/RACES member. This year's scenario will be a category 3 hurricane that spawns tornadoes. Along with activating the hospital net and the EOC, we plan to be operating from shelters, airports, and set up a field communications position. We will also be working with other jurisdictions sending Special Communications Operations Team(s) out and or receiving one to operate from our jurisdiction. This is a practice of our mutual aid capabilities. We would also like to incorporate the ARRL OES and ORS stations and MARS into our plans. The National Traffic System will be activated and there will be a certain amount of "canned" messages sent so we can analyze them for accuracy of transmission and reception. This is a large endeavor and will require the help of many people. I hope that you will contact me via email at wi3n@arrl.net to volunteer your service and skills.

I encourage folks to fill out the paperwork and officially sign up with ARES/RACES. In a real disaster it may be the case that only official RACES operators can be used, thus eliminating the valuable services of many volunteers who could have helped. In addition, you won't be on our official list of people to call. Don't miss out on this great chance for training. There isn't time to train during the "real thing".

73 de Jim/WI3N
Prince George's EC/RO



Laurel Amateur Radio Club, Inc.

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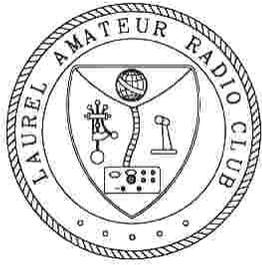
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The Feedback is published monthly (except December) as the newsletter of the Laurel Amateur Radio Club, Inc. **Items to be published in The Feedback** should be submitted by the second Wednesday of the month. Email submissions may be made to kb3hgw@arrl.net

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Amateur Radio Newsletter of the
Laurel Amateur Radio Club



Meetings and Nets:

- 1st, 3rd and 5th Wednesdays:
On-the-air Net at 8:30pm on 147.225+ PL 156.7 (no tone required during nets)
- 2nd Wednesday:
Informal/Social Gathering at 6:30pm at Sullivan's Steak & Beverage Co., located at the intersection of MD Routes 197 and 198.
- 4th Wednesday:
Monthly Meeting at 7:30pm - The Woman's Club of Laurel, 384 Main Street, Laurel
- Nightly: Informal Net/Rag-Chew from 9-11pm on 147.540

UHF Repeater: 442.500+ PL 156.7 Hz

UHF Simplex: 445.975

Laurel Amateur Radio Club, Inc.

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FIRST CLASS MAIL

**Next Meeting:
October 23, 2002**