

more spectacular openings to Europe are very short lived, and the fact that you were tuning around at the right time could result in some very nice QSO's

Try not to bore your contact! He (or she) will no doubt want to know where you are and the rest of the normal details, and the fact that you received all his information OK. If you leave it at that then the QSO is probably already over, so try telling him something that you would like him to tell you (within licence regulations...) and you may have a longer contact with a more conversational note, which will help put you at ease.

American stations have this latter knack, in some cases to excess, so be prepared for more of a chat with this part of the world.

Sayqueue Dog X-ray...

The term 'DX' is relative and depends on a number of factors. On HF, it is often taken to mean a rare station, when it really means that contact is required with a station outside of the calling station's Continent. Many USA stations call CQ DX, meaning they don't particularly want to talk to other Stateside stations. Unfortunately, Europeans often give it another meaning, usually that they will talk to anyone other than their own countrymen, especially if the station they hear is calling Pacific only — it is surprising how many European countries have dreams of grandeur along the Tropic of Capricorn. If you really want to work DX in the sense of rare stations, then you will have to listen for it, and be prepared to do battle with many other stations, but that is another subject.

On VHF, the term DX is generally restricted for use during openings, and then indicates someone more distant than would be normal for that station, or if the band is open to the Continent then the operator is probably looking for contacts in that direction.

With the advent of repeaters (and usually a love or hate relationship with most people) VHF openings bring a multitude of additional repeaters into your grasp. Cries of all the DX worked through them can be heard when the lift has died down. But is it really DX? At best, you have worked the repeater itself, as that is as far as the signal has

travelled unaided, but far more is achieved if the contact is made direct — harder no doubt but much more satisfying. Repeaters were evolved to aid the mobile stations, not as an aid to fixed station pseudo 'DX' working.

Bashing The Key

To really raise a controversial subject, how about a few words on the subject of morse. Not whether it serves any purpose or should be scrapped (of course it shouldn't...) but the best way to learn it. There can be little doubt that learning CW is easier than learning to talk — if you have the will to try it. If it is regarded as a chore to get to the Class A licence then it will become a chore. Try looking at it as another means of communication with its own benefits and method of operating, like RTTY or SSTV. If properly mastered, the art will never be lost, even after a period of disuse, when a few minutes back on the key will kill the rust. If anyone has a pet method which worked in their case then let everyone in on the secret via this column.

If you do operate CW and are still battling along at relatively low speeds, don't let the other half of your QSO get away with sending too fast for you. If he is half an operator he will have slowed down to match your speed anyway. If not, tell him to slow down (pse QRS) — if he doesn't then forget it and look for someone more considerate. More intelligence is probably passed in a slow 10 minute CW QSO than half an hour of average chat on 80 meters phone, where many stations seem to have special Home Office permits for permanent occupation of the frequencies they use. "Sorry old man, you just called CQ on the Old Groaners Net Frequency — we will be using this tomorrow at ten so please QSY" (it really is almost true).

Bandplan

Bandplans — to accept or ignore? All amateur bands have a bandplan or a gentleman's agreement as to what modes should be used in which sections of the bands. On today's heavily populated bands it seems sense to accept them, although you will always have the non-conformists, as in society. Unlike

society, there aren't any penalties for infringing them, but despite this they do seem to work in the main. On HF, the divisions are reasonably easy between CW and phone, with the odd RTTY and other specialised allocations. Few people infringe this convention, and hardly ever the actual band edges, although for some reason there always seems to be someone to be found on 6.999 MHz...

At VHF the position is more complicated with additional modes vying for space (with the MOD possibly vying for 70cm in its entirety). The newcomer can be forgiven for not knowing all of them, what with RTTY, SSTV, FM RTTY, Satellites, Meteor Scanner, Repeaters, Moonbounce, Beacons, Raynet, Calling frequencies and assorted other paraphernalias, not to mention those nasty "spot frequencies" we must avoid. To overcome this deficiency, we have published all the bandplans up to 23cm.

Satellites

One specific part to avoid, and which has now been internationally accepted for a number of years is the portion 145.8 — 146.0 MHz. This is no longer allocated to FM (believe it or not) but to Amateur Satellite Service. Satellites do not have large high powered transmitters and the downlink signals and beacons are generally fairly weak.

This will become even more important when the first (or second if you count the first disaster) Phase III satellites are launched early next year, bringing a new era of communications to the VHF/UHF bands. The engineering beacon will be transmitting in this band, not to mention the fact that UOSAT already has its general data downlink Tx on 145.825. Although you may not currently be using the amateur satellite frequencies, you might find that your example of keeping clear of these frequencies pays dividends some time in the future. Remember that an awful lot of people put immense efforts into getting these satellites up, with little monetary reward, so help as much as you can by taking FM off to the dozens of other channels available.

On that thought, I will leave you to take pen to paper and see you next month with some more thoughts on the subject of operating. ●