

NEWCOMER'S

There is a vociferous section of the amateur community which maintains that the two metre band is now no more than an extension of 27MHz (legal or illegal) CB. Some of the reasons given are that the majority of operators are black box users, that they have little technical knowledge of the equipment they use, the use of channelised frequencies, simple ('inefficient') aerial systems, pointless conversations with no technical content, plus "ever since the Class B's got the band..." (I am quoting from letters in various magazines, not expressing my opinion!).

There is no doubt that the past 15 years have seen a bigger change in the 'modus operandi' of this band than any other VHF/UHF allocation. I doubt that many of the newer licencees have any knowledge of what changes have taken place, and for what reasons. On the other hand, many older licencees probably don't stop to think of why it all has gone the way it has, and forget that their lack of use of the band partly prompted the Class B licence in the first place. (Letters on the subject to the Editor!)

Having a look at the background to all this may give you some clue as to why these comments are made, and why some of the practices that have now fallen into obscurity may be worth reviving for practical reasons.

Self-training?

Firstly, one of the arguments advanced against black box operators is that there is no element of self-training involved in pushing the PTT switch on a piece of commercial gear. Well, that is true if taken out of context. You will no doubt experiment with aereals and feeders, learning about their types and characteristics, using power and SWR meters, learning by experience about propagation, building some accessories for the station, and a multitude of lesser items. All this is self-training — the licence doesn't require that you pass an MSc in

Electronics/Electrical Engineering after a given period!

I feel that those who rabbit on about this lack of self-training are confusing the technical aspect of the hobby with the operating part. They are forgetting that both are important to the hobby and that it couldn't exist without both. Because of the things I mentioned in the preceding paragraph, I doubt that even the inveterate appliance operator has no technical knowledge at all. On the other hand, even the person who builds and designs everything himself, and who revels in the technical side of the hobby, will go on the air sometime to try it all out, and thus fulfil the other aspect.

Incentive licencing

Where I would agree that the system falls down is in the method of selecting Class A and Class B Licencees. The Morse Test should not be the vehicle by which this is achieved — the acquisition of the skill to use the code is a purely mechanical process and does not demonstrate an inherent ability to be let loose on HF. What is needed, is some form of incentive licencing, as adopted in the USA. With this, you can demonstrate to the satisfaction of your fellow amateurs that because of your technical and operating knowledge, you have more right to certain facilities than someone who does not have these attributes.

At present, we have a form of incentive licencing where with no technical or operating knowledge — you can get a CB licence, and with some technical but still no operating experience you get everything else going!

Enjoy yourself

However, as things stand amateur radio is still, and always will be, a hobby, and like most hobbies the idea is that you enjoy it. If you get your enjoyment by just chattering about the weather, or what you worked in the last lift, rather than

propagation delays in CMOS circuits, so what? We still live in a democratic society, with freedom of choice, providing our activities are not against the interests of the rest of the community. So, like the television set, there is a channel/on-off switch/the HF bands/RTTY/satellites/data/SSB/TV/SSTV/CW/contests (more letters!)/the local pub if you don't like what you hear.

In the beginning...

Well, not quite, but prior to the introduction of the mass produced Japanese transceiver, which is the heart of the problem as you will see, two metre operation was a totally different thing, with no channels (other than the one on your favourite 2m crystal), and a bandplan totally different in concept to today's. There were also a lot less stations, mainly due to the fact that with little commercial gear around, everyone had to build their own equipment. As constructing for VHF is a bit more demanding than HF, there was a natural limitation on the number of active stations. Possibly, if a lot more people had built their own and got on the band, the changes which occurred may not have been as devastating as they appeared to some eyes.

Prior to February 1974, the two metre band would have caused today's operator to puzzle at how stations contacted each other. If you look at Fig. 1, you will see that before 1974 the band was split into a number of Zones, with each county in the Country allocated a specific Zone, with adjacent counties in the same Zone. Depending on whether you wanted to work local stations or DX, you would transmit on a frequency within your own Zone (often crystal controlled) and look for a reply. If the other station was local, you would be called on either your own channel or elsewhere within the part of the band for your Zone. If you were called by a DX station it would be in the section of the band for his Zone. If you were