

Taking to the AIR

by Keith Townsend G4PZA

They say that history repeats itself. It certainly did so in my case with what, to me, were surprising results. About fifteen years ago I was introduced to a guy with a peculiar hobby. He spent all his spare time and a not inconsiderable amount of his spare cash in talking to people. Not merely to the neighbours. Not even just to those he knew. Oh no! This guy delighted in talking to strangers. Not merely to the strangers he met in the street but to strangers all over the world. His explanation that he was a radio 'ham' having produced instant mental images of the late, great Tony Hancock, I was greatly intrigued to learn more of the rites and mysteries practised by the devotees of this strange cult.

Taking the plunge

The result of this gentleman's best efforts was that one bright May evening found me lining up with about a hundred other hopefuls, prepared to do battle with the evil genie from the City and Guilds, having sailed merrily through part one, Welsh caravans and all, I sat down to part two, happy in the belief that I could cope easily with almost anything which my inquisitors might dream up... A belief which grew even stronger as I realised that I was able to answer the first few questions at a glance.

My balloon burst with one hell of a bang! Suddenly, from about question seven I was faced with a long string of questions which appeared either ambiguous or impossible and which had me grop-

ing for the right answers. in a state of advanced shock I even attempted to discover the total resistance in a parallel circuit by adding together the individual component values. Somewhat dazed, I emerged from the exam room at the appointed hour and lost no time in joining a number of fellow sufferers in a headlong dash for the nearest tavern in a vain attempt to wash away the memories of the last few hours.

Even worse

Worse was to come. Undaunted by his efforts to impart a basic understanding of radio theory and far more confident of my success than I felt, my erstwhile instructor conned me into accepting yet another challenge. Exhibiting considerably more confidence than I really felt, I accepted his assurances and embarked upon the task of learning Morse before the exam results were published. Again to my surprise his abilities matched his belief and my pleasure knew no bounds when, within a few days of learning that I was indeed entitled to apply for an amateur's licence I received a Morse test pass slip.

Besotted with my new-found power, I decided to spend a few quid, then, armed with my all singing, all dancing, FT480R I discovered the next pitfall. It seems that the Home Office did not share my eagerness for the world to hear my dulcet tones, with the result that a very frustrating ten weeks were to pass before my ambitions were realised. Ten weeks during which I and many of my former classmates

were to develop an entirely new disease which affected the muscles in the thumb whenever it was placed within touching distance of a microphone. All in all I reckon that I spent more time in waiting for the results and then the licence than I did in studying to become a radio amateur.

At long last it happened. I arrived home one lunchtime to find my new licence waiting for me. In the ensuing confusion it took me a good five minutes to find the callsign, which I then repeated silently to myself a few hundred times, just to make sure that it came out right on the air. Since I spend most of the working day in my car I had fitted the rig to it long ago so, lunch forgotten, I returned to the car, plugged in the mike and made my first, very hesitant call. Utter silence! Either the band was deserted during the lunch hour, (was there any thing in the licence conditions to this effect?) or these amateurs were a damned unfriendly bunch. My second and third attempts having met with an equal lack of response I returned, disappointed, to a now cold lunch.

First contact

Fed and rested, I decided to give it one more try before deciding whether to sell the whole issue and buy an exercise bike. Whether I was more cautious this time, or simply less eager I don't know. Anyway I decided to check over the rig before keying the mike. There, right in front of me, was the cause of my