

earlier disappointment. In the midst of my self-congratulation I had left the damned repeater offset in. Having rectified this error, which I freely admit to having repeated on a few occasions since, I soon found myself in conversation with two fellow novices and we were all delighted by the friendly reception and encouragement which we received for a few older hands during the course of our chat. Probably the strongest single impression I have gained during my first few weeks on the air is of the strong camaraderie which exists among radio amateurs and the lengths to which they will go to extend a warm welcome to a newcomer.

The next task was to construct and erect a suitable antenna system for use at home. Armed with what seemed like miles of aluminium tubing, a rotator and an odd assortment of tools it was not long before I was finally in a position to attempt something more ambitious than the mobile contacts which were all that my log contained up to now.

A quick CQ call on two metre sideband met with instant response. At last I had my first real opportunity to work DX as all the LEDs began to dance at once and a voice came blasting through the speaker. If you regard two miles as DX then maybe I had achieved my objective. Undaunted, I tried again. This time the result was far more encouraging and I found myself in conversation with an experienced sidebender over a hundred miles away. What's more I did so without the half-expected howls of protest from the XYL, watching the box in the next room.

HF near disaster

My first visit to the HF bands was a near disaster. Hearing a Russian station calling CQ on ten metres I waited for a pause then eagerly attempted to answer his call. So nervous was I and so anxious to pronounce both of our callsigns accurately, that it took me a few moments to realise that, despite the pressure of my thumb on the PTT, my Russian had begun calling CQ yet again and what was more I could clearly hear him.

A quick dash for the soldering iron and we were soon back in business, faulty microphone lead

reconnected just in time for a further break in transmission from the UK7 station. My answering call was returned immediately, accompanied by an irate delegation of avid commercial watchers from the front room. Promising to look into the TVI as soon as my contact was finished I called my Russian again. Within seconds of his coming back to me the entire ten metre band fell flatter than my chances of winning the pools. I can only assume that the KGB did not want an innocent comrade to be corrupted by talking to a trouble-maker like me.



At this stage I had not attempted to use CW on the air, though, like a number of my colleagues I had continued to attend the local Morse classes in the hope of increasing both my speed and confidence. It rather surprised me to learn that I was not alone in my reticence to appear on the key for real and so a small group of us decided to try a few short QSOs among ourselves. It is one thing to read and send simple messages in plain language and quite another to understand the shorthand of the airwaves, so we kept our messages short and simple to begin with, venturing into more detail only as our confidence began to grow. These simple experiments were perhaps the most valuable form of self-instruction we could have devised and certainly did a great deal to ensure that when we finally took our courage into our own hands and joined the rest of the CW fans we would not simply clutter

up the bands with a load of unintelligible rubbish. It is a method which I would recommend to anyone interested in CW, perhaps the most rewarding of all modes of transmission. To those who see the Morse test as some kind of hurdle I offer the observation that it is far easier to pass than you might think. Nobody could be less certain of their abilities than was I when I arrived at the test centre, only to find yet again clear evidence of the genuine friendship which exists among radio amateurs. Those conducting the tests do everything in their power to create a friendly, relaxed atmosphere, in which the test is far less of an ordeal than I had imagined possible.

Repeaters are not really my scene though, since I use the roads a lot I have made use of them on a few occasions. A trip into the heart of London brought me considerable amusement, as the inhabitants of GB3WL guided me through unfamiliar streets, ably assisted by one or two squeakies who, upon hearing that I needed some assistance, promptly stood aside until I reached my destination. They even had the cheek to ask 'Ave yer dun?' as I signed. My thanks go out to all concerned.

One of my rare visits to my local repeater, GB3BM, in search of a friend who could not be located on S20, found me talking briefly to a Dutch station. Though this is certainly not what repeaters are all about, I was very pleased by the occurrence, since at the time I had spoken to nobody outside my own town, much less overseas.

First impressions

So what are my first impressions after only a few weeks as an amateur? Frankly, I reckon I wasted fifteen years. I should have become an amateur at my first encounter with the hobby. I have not yet fully grasped the range and the scope which my licence has put at my disposal and each attempt to use a new mode of transmission brings its own fascination. I have yet to try either RTTY or ATV but I see amateur radio as a hobby which I can develop over the next thirty years. My station will develop as my finances permit and as my knowledge increases. ●