

Comment

Amateur Radio – “from a dynamo of inventiveness and improvisation to a machine of sterility and tediousness”. So said Frank Ogden in his farewell editorial in these very pages two months ago. The new editorial staff say “not so -- but complacency could be dangerous”. It will not be the off-the-shelf syndrome that will kill our hobby (as Tony Bailey points out in this issue, commercial ready-made amateur radio equipment has been available for a very long time), nor will it be the multiple choice RAE examination. No, the danger is from the lack of awareness that exists between the two groups of radio amateurs – those, usually of long standing, with a ‘traditional’ point of view, and the newer amateurs, often with a very sharply contrasting viewpoint.

Let us first address ourselves to the problems facing the newly licenced amateur in getting ‘on the air’ and making contacts. The complexity of knob-twiddling needed to operate the average 2m multimode (let alone an FT726!) is something that G3ZZD would not take lightly. He writes: The commercial ex-public service and home-brew gear available when I was licenced, some 12 years ago, was certainly simpler to operate (and maintain) than many ‘black boxes’ of today. I am not ashamed to admit that it took me at least a month to make a successful contact using the second-hand home-made gear I first got ‘on the air’ with (let he or she who is without sin cast the first stone . . .). Without the advice and assistance of the other more experienced enthusiasts, in particular those in the local radio club, I would probably have given up the hobby quite quickly. ‘Am I tuned up? Is my SWR OK? Am I on frequency?’ – and all this without worrying what to say to the person at the other end, even, in my case, after two years as an SWL. New licencees have always been afraid of calling CQ, Frank.

In those days, though, the amount of newcomers was due to a small but steady trickle. Largely, but not entirely through the interest in radio communication generated by CB, this has become a flood and the time honoured fraternal spirit of amateur radio is in danger of drowning. The danger, we believe, stems not simply from the sheer increase in numbers, but from the resulting tendency of the new and old radio enthusiasts to form into separate camps. Long standing licenced amateurs can appear rather smug and safe in their technical know-how and societies to a newcomer. Fairly recently, we heard of a group of CBers who visited their local radio society and demanded that an RAE class be run for them. Clearly, one set of attitudes feeds the other -- so let us all beware of intolerance and try to see the aspirations and needs of all other amateurs, no matter how different from our own they may be.

As Frank said in his very first editorial, amateur radio is a broad-based hobby and “means different things to different people and those people will themselves be different”.

The new editorial staff at HRT will continue to lead the magazine in the direction established by our predecessors – the magazine’s identity transcends the editorship. We shall continue to cater for all kinds of interest and all degrees of expertise. We shall continue to publish the best equipment reviews and the best constructional articles. Rather than sweeping changes, we shall be reforming and refining the magazine in its original form -- and to this end, the comments we receive from you are invaluable.

One very definite change that we can make, and that we think will be very popular, is the introduction from next month of a free readers’ classified ad. service.

And finally, we haven’t forgotten that amateur radio is a hobby, and people do it for the enjoyment.

73

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