

NEWCOMERS FORUM

By Tony Bailey, G3WPO

In the short time since Frank G4JST's parting 'COMMENT' in the October issue, and the deadline for this piece, I have received a number of letters mostly agreeing with his sentiments, but of course others which violently disagree. (*Readers may see that we received rather more of the latter if they care to turn to the letters page — Editor.*)

Whilst not agreeing entirely with some of his statements, I think that the underlying theme is undeniably true. The transition from the Radio Amateur who built his own gear entirely, and could place his finger on a fault within a very short length of time, to the black box appliance operator has taken place in a fairly short time. It is a consequence of modern techniques which allow mass production of consumer items, and a vastly increased amateur population providing a market which would not have been worth catering for some twenty years ago.

Coupled with an examination which is undeniably much easier to pass than the old RAE written answer technique, amateur radio has taken off to an extent which no-one could have forecast. The migration from CB is a recent phenomena which has added more acceleration to the process.

The Future

In another twenty years, some further innovations which we cannot predict will not doubt have taken place and more controversy will be raging. In the meantime, if the majority are getting what they want out of the hobby then it cannot be a bad thing. Given time, even the black box operators will find an awakening interest in the technical side of the hobby. I suspect that even in 'the good old days' there were those who bought what equipment was available rather than built it, or who scrounged second-hand home-brew gear from



others. There was commercial equipment about 50 years ago you know, as witnessed by the advert shown!

Emergencies

I added this piece because of over-hearing one of those QSOs which you may at sometime be involved in yourself, and that is receiving a request from someone in a foreign country for drugs or medical assistance. You must bear in mind that not all countries are as well equipped for such events as we are, and that the local amateur in, say, a South American country may be the only quick contact with the outside world.

The correct procedure if you ever get into such a situation is NOT to get involved directly yourself. Any such requests must be passed to the Police or to the Home Office, and left at that.

The other possibility is a request for assistance by a ship or aircraft in distress — most of their equipment can be used on the amateur bands and it may be the only way of getting a quick reply. Again, don't get involved yourself directly but IMMEDIATELY contact the Coastguard (see telephone book) or Police (999). It is obviously advisable to stay in contact with the station involved in case more details are required. Your licence permits you to pass third party traffic on behalf of the user services in an emergency, and although direct contact with a non-amateur station is theoretically not allowed, the possible saving of life far outweighs this in practice.

If you do have an interest in actually being able to help during more widespread emergencies, and would like training, then you should consider joining Raynet, the amateur emergency service. This is co-ordinated by the RSGB, from whom further details may be obtained.



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