

Northwest Indiana DX CLUB

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President's Corner

Repeat- We have been challenged! Carl, K9LA from the Fort Wayne DX Club wants to have the members of all three DX Clubs in Indiana compete in one of the CQ WW contest this fall.

I have two members say they would be glad to participate in the above contest. You don't have to be a big contester to participate.

I am still waiting for more information. When more is known, I will email everyone.

K9W is about 5-6 weeks away. I hope we all hear them from here in the Midwest. West Coast pile-up wall may be hard to break.

Remember next meeting is to be in October. Still taking recommendations for a place to meet.

I want to thank those that send in articles for the newsletter. If you have something to share please email it to me.

John, W3ML

DXCC CARD CHECKING

Doctor Richard Lochner, K9CIV has been appointed an Official ARRL DXCC Card Checker. Contact Rich to schedule an appointment for card checking.

You may email him at k9civ@arrl.net for details on how to mail your cards to him, if you desire to go that route.



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Member News

If you have any news to tell, please send it to me so I can send it to the group.

Some random thoughts regarding the Elecraft K3

Steve Mollman, KD9HL

After 30 plus years of using my faithful Drake TR-7 (purchased new) and 344 countries worked and confirmed, I felt it was time to upgrade to a “modern” rig. Much time was spent reviewing the specs of the various pieces of equipment that were available and after meeting with WA6HHQ-Eric Swartz, one of the founders of Elecraft, I ordered a K3. The following are just impressions that I have and are no way intended to be an in depth technical review.

The K3 is a software defined modular radio that is available as a kit or factory assembled. The radio is available in many forms with the options installed depending on one’s needs and budget. My K3 came with the 100 watt module, internal ATU with 2nd antenna jack, the general coverage receiver, 1.8 and 2.8 eight pole filters, and a IF interface (needed for using a Panadaptor). The Panadaptor was added later. Current pricing for the “bare bones” 10 Watt kit is \$1599.95. As options are added the price goes up. It is quite possible to spend over \$6000.00, if one selects all of the possible options. It is the choice of the buyer.

Conclusion: Elecraft offers a variety of pricing and accessory options. Pricing seems to be competitive with the big three Japanese brands.

The K3 is an amazingly capable radio. In a compact box, it is loaded with features such as 100 memories (4 customizable), built in CW, PSK and RTTY reader, USB, LSB, AM, FM,CW, Data (FSK), AFSK, PSK. Computer interface, remote control capability, dual VFO’s, Digital Voice Recorder, etc, etc. All of the ham bands are covered through 2 meters (with add on module)

Conclusion: With the proper modules installed, the K3 will do just about anything that can be asked of a rig.

Elecraft’s support of the unit includes periodic free upgrades of the software that can be downloaded from the Internet. Since the unit has been in production for nearly five years, the software seems to be “mature” and operates well. The company offers technical advice via telephone or e-mail. My experience with the telephone service has been good. Calls were answered promptly, there was little or no wait for a rep and the rep was knowledgeable.

Via e-mail was another story, I have attempted to e-mail the service department three times. Twice I never received a response. The third resulted in a telephone call ten minutes after I threatened to return the unit and demand my purchase price back.

This is compared to my only previous Ham Radio failure experience, which was with Drake after a ring-diode failed at 13 years. I called Drake and they told me to return the unit, which was repaired at no charge except shipping. Turn around was less than a week! While Drake is still in business, they have left the

amateur market and no longer support the 30 plus year old TR-7. Except for the ring-diode problem and a VFO knob that needed friction adjustment (a DIY job), the Drake has been trouble free. Since I have never owned one of the Japanese rigs I have no comparison with them to offer.

Conclusion: I would rate Elecraft's support as good but don't try an e-mail.

This is not a "plug n' play" radio. It is absolutely imperative that the operating manual be read before attempting to use the K3. Because it is a Software Defined Radio and with the physical size of unit being small, practically every button and knob has a multiple purpose. To make a change in many settings is best to use a computer program such as Ham Radio Deluxe or K3-EZ. Alternatively changes can be made using by bringing the proper menu item up on the LCD screen. This way can be somewhat awkward, as some menu items are three deep. Fortunately, I have found that once most parameters are set or optimized they don't need to be changed. However there are always a few controls that will be fiddled with constantly as one tries to optimize a poor signal.

Compared to the physically large rigs that have indexed knobs for most functions, the K3 falls short for ease of operation.

Conclusion: This is not an easy radio to setup and use. Many of the functions are not intuitive and the operating manual must be often referred to when attempting a change.

One of the reasons I selected the K3 was the receiver performance numbers published by the ARRL and Sherwood Engineering. Because of my "tin ears", receive performance was important. "If you can't hear them you can't work them". MDS (Minimum Discernible Signal) numbers of the Elecraft are top notch. Reality is that it probably doesn't make much difference. I prefer to use what I call "Minimum Intelligible Signal". I.E. a signal that one can understand. Using the Drake, several side by side comparisons were made with both receivers tuned to the same weak signal. Invariably, I was able to understand what being said with the Drake TR-7 but often could not with the K3. A weak signal is sometimes visible on the K3 Panadapter and you can hear something in there but it is unintelligible. The MDS numbers of the K3 are real but that won't make every contact possible.

Another receiver observation is that the K3 is plagued with "White Noise". This has been a complaint of many K3 users. My QTH is in a fairly quiet semi-rural area. A number of postings have been made on the web offering solutions to the problem (Google: W3FPR, WW2PT, W2BLC). To date none have had much effect for me. While usually tolerable, it is tiring and a distraction.

The ergonomics for some functions are awkward. Probably the worst is trying to operate split with two VFO's in a pileup. This involves holding a momentary button down using one hand while tuning a VFO with the other. Of course this removes your hands from the keyer, microphone or keyboard so you will be jumping back and forth. Using this method, it is easy to transpose frequencies and end up transmitting on the DX station's frequency. The DX cops will be on you fast, but you can't hear them because you are now listening off frequency. Elecraft's solution is for you to buy the 2nd receiver.

Occasionally, I am bothered by intermod on 20 meters from other stations. With the Drake the entire band can be wiped out. The K3 happily does not seem to be bothered as much. The interference is still there but greatly reduced.

Conclusion: The Elecraft K3 is an outstanding radio but it is not without its weaknesses. That being said, In my opinion there isn't a "perfect" transceiver. All have their strengths and weaknesses. The questions are: How much money do you want to spend and what features do you need? The K3 will fill the bill for many, but beware of its idiosyncrasies.

The Psychology of DX Operators

Jerry Hess, W9KTP

As tough as it is to work DX in a big pile up, a lot depends on the operator on the DX end. A good operator can make things a lot easier and you are sure that you worked them. It helps to know something about the current operator. Here is my list some of notable types and how best to react to them.

1. "The Ace"

The "Ace" operator works at a smooth, predictable pace and always verifies the calls of whom he has worked. He moves his listening frequency every 3-5 times and can be depended on to the return to known frequencies. He is efficient but not so fast that you can't follow him. He regularly sends his call and always repeats his instruction like, "Up 5-10" or "EU only" often. This keeps people from transmitting on his frequency asking for his call or calling him there.

You have your best chance of working the DX with this guy. Stick to standard phonics on phone and use a memory keyer on CW. You don't want your contact credited to the wrong call.

2. "The Super Q-Man"

Mr. Super "Q" is all about racking up lots of contacts. He is so quick that people get out of sync with him. You wind up calling when he is answering someone else. It is super critical with him that he gets your call right the first time since he won't give you a chance to correct him. On CW he is blasting away at 30 wpm or more and it's tough to be sure he's calling you. When he's bouncing around so fast, it's really difficult to determine where he is listening.

This guy drives me nuts! First of all, he's responding on single calls, so only send your call once and then listen. You are better to wait until he works the next station before you call again otherwise you are going to double. Also, you are probably better off picking a frequency and staying there for at least five calls. Try different strategies after making five calls (say; Low in the spread) then moving up 5 and calling five times (Middle) then moving up another 5 (High). Then try middle, low, high. Then high, low, middle. Etc. The warning about standard phonetics and memory keyer is really important with this guy.

3. "The Flub-a-Dub"

It's "Howdy-Doody" time, kids. Well, he is alive and well in the Dxpediton world. This is the guy who is just along for the ride. Five minutes after he is on the air, he loses control of the pile-up. He's having trouble copying calls and there is lots of dead time between contacts. I pity this guy because the pile gets really nasty.

Stay calm. Don't be screaming at this guy, it just makes him worse. Stay off his transmit frequency. Best bet is to find a clear frequency and drop your call two to three times. You may double on him no matter what you do. You probably want to move around a little quicker because if he

doesn't copy you in 2-3 times, he's not listening there. Best guess he is not using memories and just spinning the knob.

4. Mr. "Twofer"

Usually there is at least one operator in the bunch that has the habit of picking off the last two letters of a call. It slows him down a little since he has to wait for the rest of the call. The good thing is he does get the calls correct. Another good thing about him is he usually listens on the same frequency for many calls. Find that and you are half way there.

Now is the time to get creative on phone and try some catchy phonics like "Dead Skunk" or "Pink Sky". This is more likely to get his attention with a little chuckle. It makes you different than all the other callers. On CW, drop you last two (or first two) once or twice.

DX News

K9W Wake Island coming in October 2013

They have a website up now with their Band Plan.

<http://www.wake2013.org/pages/bandplan.html>

Easter Island is coming in November.

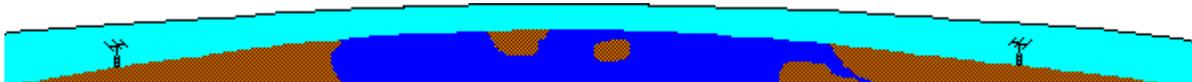
Watch the announcements on the Web for more information.

I tried to go to the Easter Island page that the ARRL had listed, but it is not working.

For checking on the latest DX announcements, one spot is:

<http://www.ng3k.com/misc/adxo.html>

Don't forget to send in any information you would like to share with the Club members.



Until Next Time,

73

John
W3ML