

Black-and-White Radio

Back in April, “Magic in the Sky” columnist Jeff Reinhardt, AA6JR., wrote a column titled “Color Radio,” in which he encouraged hams to add some “color” to their QSOs by engaging in real conversations about activities and interests beyond the traditional basics of signal reports, weather, and station setups. I was reminded of this recently after getting back into keyboard digital modes for the first time in several years. Clearly, most of the people I’ve contacted on PSK-31 did not read Jeff’s column, because virtually all of the QSOs I’ve had so far have either been traditional DX-style “599, 73” quickies, or slightly longer ones that add a laundry list of station items. This is commonly called a “brag tape,” harking back to the days when digital meant RTTY and radioteletype involved the use of big noisy teleprinters with ribbons, ink, rolls of yellow paper, and, if you were real lucky, a paper tape puncher on which you could “record” commonly-sent messages to send without retyping. Today, sending a “brag tape” usually involves pressing a key or clicking on a screen icon.

Typically, today these brag tapes include not only rig and antenna info, but also what kind of software and computer the person is using. C’mon, folks. . . . Does it really matter what kind of computer you’re using, unless it’s a Commodore 64 or something else unusual that can be a conversation-starter? Do I also need to report that my shack desk is from Ikea and desk chair from Staples?

What really bugs me, though, is that there generally is very little follow-up. The QSO usually ends after we’ve told each other what type of computer and software we’re using. What if we replace the time and bandwidth occupied by this data of dubious significance with something real, maybe about our careers, families, cities, or other hobbies? It would certainly add more “color” to our contacts.

(I did manage to *almost* have one interesting QSO, with a station in rural Mississippi. After mentioning that I live 15 miles from New York City, we started discussing the differences in our environments, and that I wasn’t likely to be able to see the Lyrids meteor shower, which was peaking that night. But either propagation changed or he didn’t like the direction the QSO was going, because after one of my transmissions, he was just gone. I still don’t know what happened but it’s too bad, since I was enjoying the discussion. Plus, it prompted my wife and me to go out later that night in search of some dark sky. . . . Unfortunately, a bank of clouds found it at the same time we did!)

Speaking of Bandwidth...

Among the things I *do* like about digital modes such as PSK-31 are the fact that you can actually *see* the signal on the computer screen’s waterfall display, that you can have a solid QSO with a station whose signal you can barely hear, and that so many discrete signals can fit into a small amount of bandwidth without causing interference.

I must admit to being a bit overwhelmed by the number and variety of digital modes out there today. I saw and heard an unfamiliar pattern, so I clicked on my software’s mode button to try a different mode and was presented with a list of a couple of dozen options. How

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to tell what I’m listening to? Some software will listen for you and identify the mode (mine probably does, too, but I’m still learning it and haven’t found that feature yet). But if yours doesn’t, there’s a great article in the April issue of our sister magazine, *WorldRadio Online*, “Diving Into the Alphabet Soup,” by WB8NUT, which includes links to the audio for 15 different types of digital modes, allowing you to match up what you’re hearing with the samples online.

The ability to have live links directly from an article (or an ad) is one of the great benefits of an online edition of a magazine. No, you can’t roll it up and swat bugs with it, but it can be very useful in other ways. If you haven’t checked out our digital edition yet, or *WorldRadio Online*, I strongly recommend it. I think *WRO* is a perfect supplement to *CQ*.

To the Field, Alice!

Well, it’s not quite *The Honeymooners* (and that’s probably a good thing, HI), but this is our third annual “Take it to the Field” special! This year, we take you to some pretty remote fields, from the Appalachian Trail in the eastern U.S. to the Pyrenees in Spain and the far western Aleutian Islands. Along the way, our authors educate you about the leading edge in aurora research, provide some ideas for enhancements to the popular MFJ-9200 portable HF transceiver, and continue April’s discussion on simplifying the Wilderness Protocol. Plus, we have the results of last year’s CQ World-Wide Fox Hunting Weekend, a great way to get outside with ham radio that doesn’t necessarily involve through-hiking the Appalachian Trail! Enjoy!

Hamosphere Follow-Up

Last month in this space, I wrote about the emergence of ham radio into the popular culture, with a decidedly positive portrayal, including one episode of *Last Man Standing* on ABC and a commercial for Velveeta macaroni and cheese. While the May issue was in the mail, one more ham-focused commercial began to air, this one for Burger King (**Watch it at <<http://bit.ly/15C1k0o>>**). Again, it paints amateur radio in a very positive light, and gives hams the opportunity, when asked, “Can you really talk to astronauts?” to answer yes, and begin a real ham radio conversation . . . just like the ones we should be having on the air.

73, Rich W2VU

Dayton Goodies!

For the past several years, we’ve published annual guides to new products introduced at the Dayton Hamvention®. Due to production schedules, the earliest these guides could appear is the August issue and most have stretched into September as well . . . making these “new” products several months old by the time we can tell you about them.

To get this news to you more quickly, we’re moving our Dayton new product coverage onto our website and plan to have the page available by the end of May. We’ll include a brief listing of all new products that the manufacturers have told us about, along with links to either their product announcements or the companies’ websites. Look for a link to the Dayton New Products Guide on our homepage at <<http://www.cq-amateur-radio.com>> after May 25.