MARA
MERRYMEETING AMATEUR RADIO ASSOCIATION
KS1R

Squelch Tales

AMATEUR RADIO EMERGENCY SERVICE

Newsletter from the Merrymeeting Amateur Radio Association for Sept. 2017

Another $60 Chinese transceiver, worth a look

A review by

J. Bruce Randall, W1ZE

Over the past several months I got the bug to put my two meter packet station together since I already had a working TNC, plus my ham neighbor down the road Donnie Dauphin, WD1F had put his packet station on the air along with Scott Higgins, W3VNE in Brunswick.

All I needed was a small two-meter 10-watt transceiver to get me rolling. I looked on eBay for a working used two meter only FM transceiver and found several. I placed a few bids but when they got above fifty bucks I made no further bids because they all wants about $20+ for shipping. While surfing eBay I noted several offerings for an el-cheap-o Chinese built dual-band FM transceiver under the brand name Leixen and its models VV-898 and VV-898s.

The VV-898 is a 5/10 watt transceiver with the VV-898s is a 5/10/25 watt rig, both have 199 channel memory. The 898 was selling for just under $60 and the 898s for about $75 on eBay and a bit more on Amazon. But both sites offered free shipping.

I did some additional searches for reviews and generally the little throwaway radio got OK reviews. What impressed me was a YouTube review by a chap with colorful language at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_I35WstjL7o . His review gave the little radio high marks for receiver sensitivity which is a real plus for me.

I made a decision that if I couldn't find a cheap used working 2-meter radio for packet, why not try the Leixen. Since a 10 watt radio is all I needed for packet and general local communications I ordered the VV-898 from eBay for $60 + free shipping. The small transceiver arrived in my mailbox four days later. I wasted little time checking it out.

Its overall size is about the size of two packs of cigarettes, 4 ¼"W x 1¼"H x 3¼"D. It comes with microphone, mic clip, power cord, mounting bracket with hardware and a USB to Transceiver Mic programming cable. Programming software is free online from Leixen or the CHIRP site.

Unlike the Chinese dual-band HTs this radio is not difficult to program without the software but the computer method is much faster.

I programmed in the 145.01 packet and 144.39 APRS frequencies and many of the local two meter and 440 repeater plus simplex frequencies. Don't tell anyone but I did program in the fourteen 460 MHz FRS frequencies and in narrow FM too. One can program in the 222 MHz frequencies but in receive only. Oh yah, I almost forgot, the FM broadcast band is programmed into the rigs processor at the factory.

On-air testing with Steve Hanks, WZ1J was a success and he was moderately impressed. The Microphone was a bit tinny on the high end but there is a simple mod I found online that places a small capacitor across the mic element and enlarging the mic pinhole a bit.

No, the VV-898 doesn't do C4FM, D-Star or DMR but for 60 bucks, what do you want? ☺ **73,W1ZE**

Search & Rescue Dogs presentation a big hit at MARA meeting

The July MARA meeting was well attended and the major reason was the presentation by Brunswick resident Mr. Jim Bridge representing the Maine Search and Rescue Dogs organization.

Jim highlighted the successful work that is being accomplished here in Maine and surrounding states by their organization and their well-trained K-9 partners.

Sherlock assisted Ms. Tina Turotte and her assistant Jim in the presentation with a search demonstration. Sherlock got well acquainted with most of the folks in the room.

For more info on MESARD, go to:

http://www.mesard.org/

MESARD is on Facebook also.

George's Good Deals (Ad)

K1GDI Selling his DX Engineering five band (10,12,15,17,20) 2 element Hex Beam.

Turns with tv rotor, easy mount on chimney or house side mast. Low SWR throughout. A transceiver's Internal tuner did it all but SWR is very low without it., 11 foot radius. Very low wind loading due to symmetry.

I can discuss the 35 foot telescoping pole mast also, which may be available. Rotor included.

Moved to small home and XYL Linda would rather not have it so visible. Had to decide between DX contacts & learning to cook if alone, a No brainer. Great gain compared to dipole over 3 db. All stainless, all parts still available if needed and very clean.

I worked 30 countries QRP (4-watts) with the hex. New $750. Sell $450.

POC = George Szadis, K1GDI

207-377-2182 in the Augusta area.

Delivery possible

BRUNS is back!

A Technical Committee Report

PHIPPSBURG: After being off the air for several years The MARA's KS1R-2 "BRUNS" packet node is back up and running from it's new location at the QTH of Donnie Dauphin, WD1F in Phippsburg. It is housed in the KS1R repeater rack with the three club repeaters and feeding a 2-meter antenna on Donnie's tower.

The old BRUNS TNC was stored by the Association Trustee, Bruce Randall, W1ZE. After talking with Donnie about the usefulness of packet for error free keyboard communications, Bruce went into his basement and found the old TNC and delivered it to Donnie the morning of July 30th. Donnie wasted little time putting the TNC on the test/work bench and connected it to the old BRUNS Alinco two meter transceiver. Everything still seemed to be working as it should. The transceiver could hear and transmit OK so the two units were put on the air. Donnie made an immediate connection to the BRUNS node with his packet station and then connected it to the KQ1L-1 node in Augusta; then on to the W1EMA-1 node in Belfast and from there a connection to George Kidder, W3HBN's packet station in Bar Harbor.

Since then Scott Higgins (W3VNE), and Bruce (W1ZE) are back on packet with Donnie and doing keyboard to keyboard communications through the BRUNS node and connected to the statewide packet network.

As before the KS1R-2/BRUNS node is on 145.010 MHz 24/7.

A Quick move to FT8 by Six Meter DXers

As was reported in the last issue of Squelch Tales, many six meter DXers and grid square hunters are using the very weak signal digital mode of JT65a, part of the WXJT suite of weak signal programs that started gaining in popularity in the spring of this year with enhanced six meter propagation. Big Gun DXers like K1TOL and K1SIX took to the new digital mode quickly.

Hold the phone. – No sooner than JT65 got rolling a new weak signal mode called FT8 was introduced to the WXJT list of digital modes that these same six meter DXers jumped to right away.

http://www.arrl.org/news/new-ft8-mode-included-in-wsjt-x-beta-release

Why, you may ask. Well, it is much like JT65a but much faster. If you monitor the DX spotting system, up until July you would see the majority of 6M DX spots were on 50.276 where the JT65 folks were operating. Come early in July the DX spots were now on 50.313 where the new FT8 communications was going on. Now today most of the 6M DX spots are on 50.313.

If you have already downloaded the WXJT-X (free) program onto your computer you may want to upgrade and download the new version 1.8 that adds FT8, available from the following site:

https://sourceforge.net/projects/wsjt/

These weak signal modes are popular on the HF and other VHF bands too, making WSJT-X 1.8 a good addition to your station's capabilities.

ARRL EXPLORES ENTRY-LEVEL LICENSE OPTIONS, WAYS TO FACE FUTURE CHALLENGES

Farmington, Connecticut: At the July 21-22 ARRL Board of Directors meeting, steps were taken to chart a firmer future for Amateur Radio by enhancing the value of the entry-level license and by providing ongoing support for new licensees. ARRL President Rick Roderick, K5UR, chaired the second regular meeting of 2017.

ARRL New England Division Director Tom Frenaye, K1KI, presented the report of the Ad Hoc Entry-Level License Committee. He said the committee's initial, informal survey attracted nearly 7,900 responses. A second random survey drew another 375 resposes. "A clear majority favored a revision to the Technicinan rather than a new entry-level license," the committee's report said, noting that this would require no change to the Technician examination, which already covers more material than necessary for an entry-level examination. "This choice requires the simplest revision to FCC rules," the committee report said. The committee suggested expanded digital access on 80, 40, and 15 meters, where Technicians already have CW access, as well as the addition of Technician phone privileges on those bands. Frenaye pointed out that while the Amateur Radio population is growing, the annual rate of growth has stagnated at about 1%. "There is a general consensus...that 'something needs to happen,'" the committee's report said, noting a generally favorable attitude toward attracting newcomers.

"The general goal here is to have an entry-level license that offers a way for a newcomer to experience multiple facets of Amateur Radio," the committee's report said, "encouraging them to get on the air, meet other licensees, and engage in a lifetime of learning while using Amateur Radio."

Later in the meeting, the Board charged the ARRL Executive Committee with developing a plan to implement the ad hoc committee's recommendation to make the current Technician class license more attractive and useful by expanding its operating privileges on HF to include phone and digital modes. The Board asked the Ad Hoc Entry-Level License Committee to further research and develop the details of a second recommendation to improve successful outreach to prospective radio amateurs and help them through the licensing process.