

The Power of QRP

Welcome to our first (in a long time) QRP special! The title above, “The Power of QRP,” may seem something of a contradiction in terms at first glance. After all, QRP is all about using *less* power. But its unique power, as you will see in this issue’s articles, is its ability to increase our enjoyment of ham radio. For the uninitiated, “QRP” is “ham-speak” for low power, specifically making contacts with five watts or less. But why would anyone want to operate with *less* power than his/her station is capable of producing?

First of all, like gravity, it’s not just a good idea, it’s the law! FCC rules require us to use the minimum power necessary to establish and maintain contact with other stations. For some of us, that means a kilowatt at all times (don’t want to take chances, after all), or perhaps cutting back to a few hundred watts if signals are very strong. But the reality—as this issue’s articles will demonstrate—is that it is often quite possible to establish and maintain contact with very little power.

Second reason: It’s a challenge. Many of us come into ham radio for the challenges it presents—making lots of contacts in faraway places, making more contacts in more places than the next guy over the course of a weekend, contacting every county in the United States, designing and/or building your own equipment and having it work, providing communications during an emergency when all else has failed. Meeting these challenges provides a sense of accomplishment, and operating QRP is one more challenge on the seemingly never-ending list that our hobby provides.

Third reason: Camaraderie. QRPers form one of many subgroups within ham radio (like DXers and contesters), and when they get together on or off the air, they enjoy swapping stories or working together on group projects (like DXers and contesters). It’s a great group of people (they’re hams, after all!), and they’re always ready to help out somebody just getting started or trying something new.

Reason #4: It’s “green” ham radio. Putting less power out means that you need less power going in from the electric grid. Plus, there is little to no concern for potential RF safety issues (see this month’s “Washington Readout” column).

Reason #5: QRP is good for your health. The small size and portability of most QRP transceivers encourages users to get out of their shacks and operate from hilltops and hiking trails, or local parks within walking or biking distance of home. No other part of ham radio (perhaps besides tower-climbing) offers so much regular encouragement to combine ham operating with healthy exercise. And finally...

Reason #6: It’s fun. We must never lose sight of the fact that amateur radio is a hobby, and it is supposed to be fun. Yes, it is a hobby with responsibilities—in exchange for the use of the public airwaves, we are expected to provide public service and emergency communications, help advance the state of the art in telecommunications, provide self-training for our fellow hams in order to create and maintain a pool of trained communicators and technicians for times of national need, and to help promote international

goodwill by conducting one-on-one diplomacy with citizens of other countries. We do all of this, regularly and well. But in between the times that our skills are needed for the “service” part of the Amateur Radio Service, we keep our skills sharp by embracing the “amateur” part—something done for the love of it. And we love it because ham radio is *fun*. It is the combination of hobby and service that makes amateur radio unique, and keeping a balance between them is essential for our continued success in both areas. QRP is just one more way of having fun with ham radio.

Less is More?

As you read through this issue’s articles, you will see how operating QRP opens doors to getting on the air from antenna-restricted locations, from vacation spots and more. In addition, QRP is inextricably tied up with building—the two have always gone hand-in-hand—and you will see how the potential for success at low power is motivating hams with no building experience and no CW experience to try their hands at both (see “The ‘Splinter’ QRP Trans-Receiver” on page 22).

If reading this editorial is your first exposure to QRP operating, I’d suggest that you begin your journey through this issue in the middle of the magazine, starting out with K7SZ’s “QRP Primer” in his “Learning Curve” column on page 66, then come back up front to read about the variety of QRP experiences that we’re able to share with you in this issue. (Since QRP is also inextricably tied up with portable operating, look for more QRP/portable stories in June’s “Take it to the Field” special.)

Of course, we realize that not everyone will find low-power operating to be something that gets their ham radio juices flowing, so we also have both features and columns in this issue that are *not* about QRP. Plus, since this is April, we have our annual visit to these pages by Professor Emil Heisseluft, who this year checks out a group of entrepreneurs who will happily help you get the vanity call sign of your choice ... even if someone else already has it!

Hamfest Season

The 2012 hamfest season is under way. I’m just back from Orlando as I’m writing this, and by the time you read this, we’ll have been to Charlotte as well. And we’ll be starting to think about Dayton (see “Magic in the Sky” on page 86, but keep your tongue planted firmly in your cheek).

At Orlando, the feedback on the digital edition of CQ was overwhelmingly positive, and there was quite a bit of discussion on things we can do to make the digital edition experience even better than it already is. One thing clear is that it is a work in progress, and likely always will be, and we’re all learning together about its capabilities and its limitations. My thanks to all of you who took a few moments to stop and chat with us at Orlando. The best part of going to hamfests (besides hamfest food, HI) is the chance to chat with our readers. I always come home with a renewed sense that what we’re doing here is important and valuable to all of you. Thank you for your ongoing support and encouragement. We will continue to do our best to meet your very high expectations.

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