Thanks for Your Feedback

I have been an occasional shortwave listener in recent years and have gotten copies of MT at either Hastings or Borders. Borders is bankrupt now, and Hastings has stopped carrying MT!

I now am semi-retired with some more spare time for shortwave listening, so I am happy to order the 1 year subscription. I have dusted off my old Zenith TransOceanic and it works great, picking up many of your listed stations in the Shortwave Guide. I also have the Sony ICF 2010 which is still in great shape and getting most of the stations well, with an external wire antenna. I can of course listen via internet, but not as challenging as actual off-air reception via radio. Thanks for all the good info in MT.

Norm Delamater

Norm, I’m glad you discovered the best way to read MT and save money at the same time by subscribing. Fewer and fewer newstands are carrying the magazine, so having it delivered to your door is the way to go. Even less expensive is the pdf version we call MT Express, and for a shortwave listener who is interested in other languages, it comes with the added benefit of MTXtra – a separate download of schedules for all non-English broadcasts via shortwave.

Irv Sanders mentioned the difficulty he has deciphering the internet addresses in the printed magazine. This is also remedied by a subscription to MT Express; as you are reading the magazine on your computer screen, a simple click of the mouse takes you to the linked website in your browser – no typing required!

Monitoring Times wishes to thank our readers for a record number of responses to our recent survey, which is now closed. Your feedback will be of enormous help in planning future articles and direction. Congratulations to reader Steve Williams for winning the $100 gift certificate from our publisher, Grove Enterprises.

Rachel Baughn, Managing Editor

Satellites and New Tech

Great magazine and great news column (Communications). I believe the problems with over-the-antenna television are the new technology (internet and smart-phones) and program quality – not that cable TV is much better. With the current multicasting technology, we could get by with fewer channels and better programming, say twenty-five to thirty channels. Oh, will this so-called MOBILE TV be any better than regular TV or was it better put on internet and smart-phones?

Norman W. Hill

Someone, in a recent MT article, commented on the drawbacks of satellite internet service, such as Hughesnet and others, in your rural NC area. Can you supply a reference for this article? My daughter also lives in rural NC and could use the information.

Dave Crowley N0HMI

Yes, it was in my Beginner’s Corner for October 2011 and it has gotten the most email of any column recently. I mentioned that:

While many customers are happy with HughesNet and WildBlue, many others are not. I urge readers to read reviews of each service before signing up. Consumer Reports ranked both services at the bottom of all broadband Internet Service Providers nationwide.

I have a friend who signed up and couldn’t get any better service than he had with dial-up. He ended up paying hundreds of dollars to get out of the contract. The service was poor, the installation poor, the customer service was poor. Just Google either service and you’ll get mostly bad reviews. Compared to 24 kb/s it may be faster but barely. On a wireless broadband modem, which costs less than half of what satellite Internet charges and is available just about anywhere, I get 1 Mbs.

Ken Reitz KS4ZR

I really liked the article on the Handy Video Tuning Tool: Your Wireless Camera (On the Bench, Nov 2011). What a great idea; which brings to mind all sorts of ways to use this idea. For hams they could use it to watch their antenna rotate without having to go outside or you could watch your TV antenna rotate, you can use it to watch your FTA dish movements. Many more… just use your imagination. Thank you for publishing this article.

Jim Stellena KA8ZXJ

Thanks, Jim. Hope you enjoy the same author’s review of the Satlink Finder tool in this month’s issue.

Rachel Baughn, editor

Views from an Old-Timer

I am indeed an old in the tooth hobbyist, a Brit who has lived on Salt Spring Island, British Columbia, Canada, 22-years. I earned my living in the UK as a national news reporter and also as a BBC news reporter and news reader. Since the age of 10 I always had a wire entanglement antenna somewhere in the house, often hidden under the bed.

Over the years I have met many amateur radio enthusiastic and yet somehow never became one myself. In the UK it is possible to listen to what is going on, but a punishable offence to use the content. I ran the gauntlet and produced many a first class story. My story concentrated mainly on ships and the sea; in fact I contributed to a BBC program of that name.

I suppose my mind retains graphic images of hearing Mayday calls by the score, one in particular from a Dutch ship named the Divinia which sank with all hands on board during a North Sea storm. The last words of the captain were … oh my God we are capsizing. They were never seen again.

Over the years I have made friends with and written about many an amateur. During WW2 in the R.N I learned Morse and still do remember it to some extent. While I in no way am setting out to condemn amateur radio enthusiasts, if I were a young person and introduced to the boring conversations of some (not all) of the older set, would I truthfully want to become involved?

You will point out to me no doubt your recent photo-story of the young people… But technology has advanced so quickly – men communicating to and from outer space, and all that – the old set, the pioneers of a golden age have been left behind. At 93 I am lucky to be alive and have full control of my mind and body, but in terms of satellites, what I can do to introduce them in my hobby? Don’t forget us. You obviously have some very knowledgeable columnists, but they have the tendency to present facts that the layman sometimes finds hard to interpret and put into operation.

I bought a Diamond discone and got a tree climber to anchor it 80 feet above ground. It worked of a sort for four years until the strapping broke and it hung halfway down the tree upside down, which improved my reception considerably. Higher the better, advised an amateur. Considering I live within sight of Vancouver Port I find the reception very poor. No hills, just sea. I can just about hear Seattle Coast Guard some 50-miles away as the crow flies. The air band reception is better for understandable reasons.

I have ordered another discone and can only rely on the honesty of the Vancouver amateur supplier that my Ic-R7000 needs specials plugs and coax. He will supply me with 50 feet of coax and stresses I should not go beyond 75 feet high because of coax loss.

I am aware that I have a fault on my Dell laptop, which is close to my Icom, but when it is on, it seems to cause a harmonic on the air band while I am monitoring Whidbey air base about 40-miles distant. Why? All very well to sell your electronics, that is business sales, but make technically clear what should be done to achieve the claims made.

I conclude by pointing out that Monitoring Times is published mainly for U.S consumption and your attempt to sell in Canada fails to a great extent simply because we because we can’t read enough about where to listen in Canada.

Admittedly I don’t have a subscription and buy MT off the shelf when I go to the local book shop, but only after looking through the pages. It is well produced undoubtedly, and it is obviously must be a struggle to produce a high
class magazine in these inflationary times, but I feel convinced Monitoring Times has a job to do in Canada and we will buy it providing we don’t just read about the frequencies to be heard across the great and almighty USA. As the familiar words ring out God Bless America, that is sincerely my wish.

George G. Clogg

Thanks for sharing your memories and your opinions with us regarding your hobby, and how MT does or does not contribute to it. I readily admit that a several years ago we made a more concentrated push to include Canadian content in the magazine. One column was even dedicated to Canadian topics. However, when finances forced us to cut pages in the magazine, and analysis showed that increasing Canadian coverage had not resulted in significant increase in Canadian subscriptions, that column was one of several we reluctantly eliminated.

Our maritime columnist, Ron Walsh, writes primarily about the Great Lakes area and is Canadian, but that’s of much help to you in BC. He would be delighted to get West Coast input for his column, however, so your area can be represented. He has had difficulty getting feedback from other coastal areas (including the US), and from his inland location he has difficulty hearing much HF. He would be quite jealous of your experiences!

We always strive to address technical topics in plain English, but I’ll admit that this new digital world (including satellites) makes it hard to write without lots of new acronyms and new-fangled jargon. Thanks for reminding us to keep it simple!

Rachel Baughn, Managing Editor

George, There are actually three technical questions that you have implied.

First, The fact that you are on flat land near the ocean is an advantage. You don’t need considerable height for your antenna, just high enough to clear nearby obstructions between you and your target. If you use low-loss coaxial cable like RG-6/U, you shouldn’t have a problem hearing the boats. You could enhance that reception even more by using a beam antenna like the popular Grove Scanner Beam. Or, if you’re feeling flush, the Create 5130-2N is a huskier antenna for sea breezes.

Second, computers and their peripheral devices use oscillators, and their harmonics may fall anywhere in your listening spectrum. To be sure it’s the computer and not the video display, turn that display off while you hear the interfering signal. If it’s the display, sometimes putting a ferrite bead on the connecting cable will help attenuate the interference, or you may even consider another brand of display. If it’s the computer, try relocating the antenna. If you’re using a poor grade of coax to the antenna like RG-58/U, replace it with coax with better shielding like RG-6/U mentioned earlier.

Third, it’s very possible that the upside-down position of the discone making it work better reveals an interesting fact about discones. The higher the frequency, the higher the takeoff angle. That would explain why it initially heard aircraft just fine, but when it turned upside-down, it was directing its signal reception more downward. Were the boats coming in better then?

Bob Grove W8JHD, Publisher

Shack Cat

Every time I go to listen on my radios, my cat likes to participate as well. Thought I’d send in a picture of this phenomenon. She recently got her ham license KB9CAT...just kidding!

Brad KB900Q

Weather Radio Tip

RE: The NOAA article in Sept 2011 MT.
A Texas supermarket chain — H-E-B — has been selling the Midland WR-100 for about $30 for several years. They do this because TX has “exciting weather” from the mouth of the Rio Grande to the top of the Panhandle, east to the Sabine River and west to El Paso and the Upper Rio Grande.

H-E-B — bless ‘em — wants their customers to be as safe as possible. These babies usually come out in March and stay around until Turkey Day or Christmas and the end of hurricane season. Good for H-E-B!!!

We have a WR-100 in the kitchen and one in the office. Neat radios. I guess they are “dated” now, but they will “answer an alert”.

Morgan Little

Bravo H-E-B! Thanks for the interesting info, Morgan. Readers should know that the WR-100 can still be found at many retailers though it has been replaced by the WR-120, essentially the same product but the MSRP is $50.

Ken KS4ZJR

New 5th Edition!

by John Figliozzi

This new 5th Edition of John Figliozzi’s Worldwide Listening Guide includes completely updated listings of popular radio programs that can be heard using traditional shortwave receivers, as well as today’s newer listening technologies. Program listings are classified by genre and tell you the time of day and day of the week they are on-the-air, and how to find them on your shortwave receiver, WiFi radio, computer, and other listening devices.

This new edition updates and reviews all of the ways programs can be heard — “live,” on-demand, WiFi, podcast, satellite, internet, digital and, of course, analog AM, FM and SW.

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Happy monitoring!
Rachel Baughn, Editor