

The Uniden BCT15 Bear Tracker

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If you would like to have a scanner like the BCD996T and enjoy some of the new Uniden technology, but the \$539.95 price tag leaves you a bit breathless, then maybe you could look at a lower cost alternative – the Uniden BCT15 Bear Tracker.

Released hot on the heels of the popular Uniden BCD996T base/mobile scanner, many of the innovative features included in that scanner are incorporated into this new Uniden release.

❖ Case, Controls, and Antenna

If you check out our *First Look* at the BCD996T in the July 2006 issue of *MT* or on our website (www.monitoringtimes.com), then you will be comfortable with technology and terminology used on the BCT15 Bear Tracker. This radio is built on the same technology and lineage of this unit's firmware and RF construction also comes from the BCD996T.

The BCT15 case is the same size as its predecessor, measuring 7.24 (W) x 6.06 (D) x 2.20 (H) inches and it weighs in at 3.5 lbs without mounting bracket.

While the 996 had two colors to choose from for the backlight display, there is only one color (orange) on the BCT15's 1-1/8 by 2-1/8-inch (64 x 128 full dot matrix) liquid crystal display. The keyboard backlight is also orange.

Front panel controls/switches on the BCT15 include a knurl rotary encoder knob with push switch used for function operations, a volume control with power on/off switch and push switch for alert mute on/off, and a squelch control with push switch for the Bear Tracker state select.

❖ Looking under the Hood

Inside the radio we found a world of scanning capability. Here are some of the features that BC246T/BCD396T/BCD996T owners will be familiar with:

- Close Call RF capture technology can set the scanner so it detects and provides information about nearby radio transmissions. In a head to head test we performed between the 246/396/996, the Close Call function test results were equal to those of the 996.
- Dynamically allocated channel memory was first introduced in the BC246T. This type of scanner memory can be organized so that the scanner operation more closely matches how radio systems actually work, making it easier to program and use the scan-

ner. The BCT15 has 2,500 memory locations for programming frequencies, talkgroups, and alpha tags.

- 100 Quick keys let you quickly select systems and groups by using the keypad. This makes it easy to listen to or quickly lock out those systems or groups to scan or not to scan.
- There are 13 frequency ranges preprogrammed for searching the following radio services: Public safety, news, amateur radio, marine, railroad, military and civilian air, CB radio, FRS/GMRS, racing, TV broadcast, FM broadcast, and special searches.
- Personal computer (PC) control allows you to transfer programming data to and from the 996 and a PC, or actually control the scanner's operation using your computer. Uniden has available for download their UASD PC control/programming software and a free registration key via their company website at www.uniden.com.
- The BCT15 has a wired clone function like its predecessors, but does not do over-the-air cloning. Cloning includes all programmed data, the contents of the scanner's memory, menu settings, and other parameters.
- Fire tone-out standby lets you set the scanner to sound an alert if a two-tone sequential (250.0-3500.0 Hz, 0.1Hz programmable steps) page commonly used on fire dispatch frequencies is transmitted. You can set up to 10 settings (transmit frequency, tone frequencies, tone duration and tone gap), then select one of the programmed positions for standby monitoring and alerting.
- Broadcast screen sets the scanner so it ignores Close Call or search hits on FM/TV broadcast frequencies, including known pager frequencies. The custom screen lets you input up to 10 frequency ranges that the scanner will ignore during Close Call or search operation.

Some of the other features found in the BCT15 include: Scan/Search delay, a 20 dB attenuator, repeater reverse, channel alert, search with scan operation, enhanced custom alerts, better automatic channel step selection (frequency steps of 5, 6.25, 7.5, 8.33, 10, 12.5, 15, 20, 25, 50 or 100 kHz for manual mode and search modes), text tagging, data skip, duplicate frequency entry alert,

MT First Look Rating (0-10 scale)

Audio Quality.....	9
Audio Levels.....	9
Backlight/Display	9
Ease of Use	7
Feature Set	8
Keyboard/Control Layout ..	9
Overall Construction	10
Overall Reception.....	9
Owners Manual	9
Sensitivity.....	9
Selectivity.....	9
Spectrum Usability	8

memory backup, frequency and talkgroup auto store, and priority scan/priority channel scan.

Like many of the recently released Uniden scanner models, the BCT15 can perform a NOAA weather band search, SAME weather alert, and weather priority scan. There is also a nearly instant CTCSS/DCS tone search capability that can identify up to 50 CTCSS tones and 104 DCS codes in the scan, search and Close Call modes.

There are a lot of other BCT15 features that BCD396/996T owners will recognize, far too many to include in this review. You can get more information on all of this scanner's features by viewing a copy of the owner's manual on the Grove Enterprises website at: www.grove-ent.com/BCT15om.pdf

The multi-site trunking feature lets you share system channels across multiple trunk system sites to more efficiently use the scanner's memory. This, in the author's opinion, is the single best feature for hobbyists who do a lot of this sort of scanning, and puts the BCT15 and its cousin, the BCD996T, head and shoulders over any other trunk scanner in the marketplace.

Like the 996, this scanner has Close Call do-not-disturb that, when set, lets the unit make periodic Close Call checks whenever the scanner is not receiving audio in another mode. This eliminates annoying breaks in conversation while still allowing for Close Call functionality. It also has Close Call temporary store that temporarily saves the last 10 Close Call hits and includes them when scanning.

"Soft" search keys let you quickly search specified ranges and Quick Search lets you search from the currently-tuned frequency if you are searching a conventional system.

The temporary lockout function lets you lock out a current system, current site, or current search range in Scan or Scan Hold mode, a



MT Rating [four and 1/4 stars]



system channel, search frequency, or location data – just to name a few things you can use it for. The temporary lockout is cleared when you turn power off then on.

A record out jack, when used with the appropriate user-supplied cable and audio recording device with signal control, lets you record live audio of designated channels.

With the release of the 996, Uniden introduced a new vehicle power connector (the orange wire) that lets you connect the scanner to your vehicle's dimmer circuit to also dim the scanner's display with the vehicle's dimmer control. This BCT15 also includes this useful and creative feature.

Another innovative feature in the BCT15 is the upside down display. If you need to mount the unit upside down in your mobile for better audio quality, you can flip the display upside down so you can still read it. This is a menu selectable function.

Finally, there are the new GPS functions for use with an owner-supplied GPS receiver. Some of the GPS non-radio based features let the scanner alert you to dangerous intersections, speed alerts, and points of interest (POI) that you program into the scanner. The GPS display mode lets you display extended GPS information such as distance to a POI, direction to a POI, time to a POI, speed, position, and more.

The formats of the GPS data which the scanner can use are only the Global Positioning System Fix Data (GGA) and the Recommended Minimum Specific GNSS Data (RMC) system based on "NMEA-0183 standard, version 3.01."

❖ Frequency Coverage

The BCT15 can monitor signals in the following frequency ranges: 25.0-512.0, 764.0-775.9875, 794.0-805.9875, 806.0-823.9875, 849.0125-868.9875, 894.0125-956.0, and 1240.0-1300.0 MHz. A review of the modes and frequency steps used during searches reveals the BCT15 is set up to meet current bandplan standards in the United States except for the step used in the 150.8000-161.9950 MHz frequency range. It defaults to 5 kHz, while most of the band is segmented in 7.5 kHz steps. And while this will not stop you from listening to all the activity on this band, it will definitely throw off accurate frequency measurement and proper recording of new splintered frequencies.

❖ Trunk Tracking Capability

The BCT15 is a Trunk Tracker III™ model scanner. This lets you follow unencrypted conversations on analog Motorola, EDACS (wide and narrow), EDACS SCAT, and LTR trunk radio systems. Trunk systems in VHF, UHF, 800 and 900 MHz bands can be followed. The scanner can also scan both conventional and trunk systems at the same time. It cannot decode any of the new 700 MHz public safety trunk systems (even though the frequency coverage is present in the radio) or new UHF DoD Land Mobile Radio (LMR) digital trunk systems.

The BCT15 also does Motorola control channel scanning. If the scanner is set in this mode, the scanner tracks a Motorola trunk system using only control channel data. You do not have to program all of the system's voice channel frequencies into

memory in this mode as long as all possible control channels have been programmed in.

❖ What's New

There are two new features in the BCT15 that are unique to this radio.

- **The BearTracker™ system alerts you to transmissions on frequencies used by 'mobile extender' radios as well as by car-to-car, aircraft-to-car, and other special-purpose frequencies. You receive an audible (beep tone) and visual (flashing Alert light) alert whenever you are within an approximate three-mile radius of Highway Patrol/State Police units using a mobile extender unit.**
- **State-by-State Preprogrammed Channels that let you easily keep up with activity on local police, Department of Transportation, and Highway Patrol frequencies when you travel, without having to program any channels.**

❖ What's in the box?

In addition to the BCT15 scanner, accessories in the box include an AC adapter, cigarette lighter adapter power cord, three wire DC power cord, ISO mounting bracket and hardware, a push on type (BNC) telescopic antenna, remote PC to scanner cable (scanner plug to front of PC connector), owners manual, and other printed material. The manual is well written and should be studied to get the most out of the BCT15 and understand all of its operations.

❖ Overall Rating and Final Thoughts

When testing this radio, in some respects, I felt like I was working with a BCD996T. When I got into it a bit deeper at menu and control functions, I started to see some of the differences between the two. For instance, it took me some time to break myself of the habit of pressing the on/off/volume control, expecting to control the display lighting, but finding I was controlling a Bear Tracker function instead.

As in previous Bear Tracker models, I was not impressed with the Bear Tracker feature. In several weeks of testing I never saw it go off in the three states we traveled in. To be honest, I must admit that this feature has never excited me at all since its initial release several years ago by Uniden. As I told a friend several years back, if you are relying on the Bear Tracker to keep you from getting a speeding ticket, I have some nice rocky mountain land for you to plant crops on!

But those of you who have read this column in the past know that no scanner is perfect. Right off the top, there's no digital decoding. In this day and age of scanning, to me that is a show stopper. There is nothing more aggravating to a true radio hobbyist than to hear that digital stream being broadcast with no way to decode it. And, for whatever it is worth, Uniden included the new 700 MHz PS and UHF DoD LMR trunk frequencies in this radio even though you won't be able to monitor them due to the lack of digital decoding capability.

Like the 996, there is a steep learning curve with this BCT15. So let me offer three pieces of advice to those who purchase this radio – read the manual several times, use the free UASD software to program the radio, and read the manual again.

Like the 996, while the GPS capability is a neat feature, it is very labor and research intensive to get it up and operating. I am sure with time, like other aspects of the scanner hobby, information will be shared through the internet to aid hobbyists in programming location information for a variety of radio systems nationwide. But that will be at some point down the road and only a few will probably fully utilize the GPS features in this scanner in the near term.

Bottom line, however: this is a *very* nice scanner. If you live in an area that is using digital, forget it and save a little longer for the BCD996T. But if you only need an analog trunk scanner, or maybe want to have a second one for conventional frequencies or milair monitoring, this is the baby to pick up. There is a lot of scanning capability loaded into this small package. So if you are looking for one unit that does a lot, check out the baby brother of the Uniden BCD996T. You won't be disappointed.

The Uniden BCT15 (SCN 15) is available from Grove Enterprises (1-800-438-8155 or www.grove-enterprises.com) for \$229.95 plus shipping.

Miscellaneous Specifications

Dynamic allocation capacity –

Systems: 500 maximum

Groups: 20 per system

Sites: 1000 maximum (all)/256 per system

Channels: up to 2500

Channels per trunk system: up to 250

Operating temperature –

Normal –20°C to +60°C;

Close Call –10°C to +60°C

Scan rate –

100 channels per second (conventional mode)

Search rate –

300 steps per second (5 kHz step only) maximum

Attenuation – 20dB nominal

Audio output –

2.6W nominal into 8-ohm speaker

30mW nominal into 32-ohm stereo headphone

Power Requirements –

DC 11.0V to 16.6V via Cigarette Lighter Cord or DC Cord with Orange Wire, AC Adapter (AD-1009) all included

External Jacks:

Antenna Jack –

BNC Type 50-ohm nominal impedance

Phone Jack –

3.5-mm (1/8-inch) Stereo Type

External Speaker Jack –

3.5-mm (1/8-inch) Monaural Type

Record Out Jack –

3.5-mm (1/8-inch) Stereo Type

DC Power Jack –

5.5-mm center pin positive and Orange Wire Jack: Three pin (Center Orange Wire)

Remote Interface Jack –

Four pin mini type

GPS/Remote Interface Jack –

D-sub nine pin (male type)

Note: Features, specifications, and availability of optional accessories are all subject to change without notice by the manufacturer. Information presented above was based on the test unit provided by the manufacturer. Specifications certificated accordance with FCC Rules and Regulations Part 15 Subpart C as of date of