

First Look at the Eton E5 Portable

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Just when I thought there were plenty of portables on the market to choose from, Eton Corporation has added the E5 to the line-up. I must admit, when I took it out of the box, I wasn't all that impressed. I mean, if you've seen one low-cost portable, you've seen just about all of them. But then the little things that Eton has done caused me to look at the little radio differently, as you will see.

❖ First Glance

Measuring in at 4"H x 6.5"W x 1"D, the E5 is about the size of paperback book, and has a reasonable number of controls on the front-panel to match its size. One of the first things that impressed me was that all buttons on the front-panel have the label for their primary function on their face, not the radio; not only are they on the button, but they are illuminated by the backlight – perhaps a minor thing to most, but very helpful when using it in low light or in the dark.

The LCD multi-function display is about 1.25"H x 2.5"W and displays operating information such frequency, mode, signal strength, etc. The E5 is another one of the newer portables in which user-input acts as a trigger to turn on the backlight. The backlight stays on for 15 seconds while using batteries, but remains on when powered by an external adapter. A dedicated Light button is also provided.

The E5 covers 500 kHz to 29,999 kHz continuously as its AM band, and then 87.5 MHz to 108.1 as its FM band. In the AM band, you can receive AM and SSB signals, but only FM mode (stereo or mono) in the FM band. While in FM, stereo output is available for the included set of earphones.

❖ Ergonomics

Due to its size, right-handed folks will have no trouble accessing all of the front-panel buttons using their right thumb.

The Lock button on the E5 works a little different from what I'm used to: with the E5 Off, the Lock prevents accidental power-on, but when the E5 is On, an initial press of the Lock button puts the radio into "Hold" mode, and pressing again locks all front-panel buttons. While in "Hold" mode, the frequency is locked, but all of

the other controls are available. Once again, this is a relatively small thing, but it does add a nice option to the typical "all or nothing" locks of the past.

Unfortunately, I was unable to try the "audio-mute" function referenced in the "Lock" section of the Operation Manual. Eton mentions the mute feature, but never really elaborates on how to use it. Also, the manual mentions the On/Off power-switch is disabled when the radio is in "Hold" mode, but I found that not to be the case.

The speaker in the E5 is a little over 2" in diameter and has surprising audio for something so small. Obviously, it is lacking in bass response, but what it does project is clear and crisp, as observed while listening to some classical music stations.

Only one clock is provided with the E5; however, it does allow you to set the time zone; what you end up with is what I'll dub a "dynamic-clock." Once you've set the time and day-of-the-week for your location, you can easily change the time zone to view the time/day virtually anywhere in the world.

❖ Warning Sign?

I usually downgrade my expectations whenever I see a "reset" button on a communications product. In my experience, this typically indicates marginal operating software that occasionally "locks up" the radio. Unfortunately – or fortunately, depending on your perspective – the reset button is on the front panel of the E5. And it was fortunate for me it was on the

TABLE 1. RECEIVE SENSITIVITY

AM 10dB (S+N)/N	
Frequency (MHz)	Level (uV)
0.5	1.73
2	1.18
6	0.83
9	0.85
12	0.71
17	0.87
21	1.33
29	2.45

front-panel, as I needed it four times over the course of this review: once after changing the batteries, and three times during what I would consider to be normal operation.

❖ Changing Frequency

The operating frequency of the E5 can be changed using one of the following five methods: numeric-keypad entry, Up/Down step buttons, the tuning knob, memory-recall, or Auto-Scan.

Numeric-keypad entry is very simple: just type the frequency in kHz for AM band frequencies and press AM, or enter the frequency in MHz (not including the decimal point) for FM band frequencies and press FM.

The Up/Down step buttons change the frequency by 3 kHz from 150 to 520 kHz, by either 9 or 10 kHz from 520 to 1710 kHz, by 5 kHz from 1710 to 29995 kHz, and by 100 kHz from 87.5 to 108.1 MHz.

Dimpling on the Tuning-knob helps to keep the index finger from slipping off while dialing across the band in either 1 kHz steps from 150 to 29999 MHz, or 25 kHz steps from 87.5 to 108.1 MHz. And, I am happy to add, there is no "chuffing" while tuning with either the tuning-knob or using the Up/Down step buttons.

Memory channel reception is as easy as selecting a memory page using the Page/Time button, then pressing the F-key that corresponds to the channel number on that page. The current Page can be selected using either the Up/Down step buttons to scroll to the desired Page, or by entering the Page number then pressing the Page button. The E5 is equipped with 700 memory channels divided into 100



pages of 7 locations.

Auto-Scan provides three different modes of operation: Stop, D-5, or ATS. In Stop mode, the radio stops and stays on the first station encountered; D-5 mode pauses the E5 at each detected station for 5 seconds and then resumes scanning. ATS stands for Auto-Tuning Storage mode and stores the strongest local FM stations received during the scan.

❖ Sleep and Auto-On

For those of us who like to fall asleep to our favorite radio station, the E5 has a sleep function. It can be set from 1 to 99 minutes by either using the keypad to enter a value and pressing the Sleep button, or by pressing the Sleep button and then using the tuning knob to select the minutes. The Power button is used for radio On/Off and also for enabling the Sleep timer when held down.

If you like to be awakened by your radio, or you want it to turn on automatically, Eton provides four alarms. Available settings for each alarm are alarm-time, weekday, volume, daytime, and memory-location.

❖ Antennas

The E5 comes equipped with three antennas: a built-in ferrite-core bi-directional antenna, a 36" swiveling telescopic whip antenna, and an External Antenna jack.

❖ Other Jacks and Controls

For those who like the ability to reduce the sensitivity of the radio, there is a Local/DX

switch. Typically, the only time I find this feature necessary is when connecting the radio to a large external antenna.

There is a Wide/Narrow bandwidth switch, but as is all too common on receivers in this class, the Narrow position is just too narrow. This seems to be a historical trend, only contradicted recently in my personal experience by Radio Lab's Super-909 – which I would consider the best filter combination I've heard in recent years.

Single Sideband (SSB) reception is enabled via a button on the front-panel. In my humble opinion, it seems to me manufacturers should just drop the SSB reception on radios with tuning step sizes greater than 100 Hz. Tuning around in the "Ham Bands" can be frustrating with a 1 kHz step. Even though the fine tuning can compensate for the spread, it just seems too large, adding to "listening fatigue."

A knob on the lower right side controls audio volume, and there is a jack for connecting an external 9 Vdc power source.

❖ How Does It Play?

Shortwave reception with the E5 was quite nice for a radio of this size. Sensitivity was very good and selectivity was acceptable. Reception indoors was acceptable with the whip, and when connected to my Loop Sky Wire seemed to handle the higher signal levels well.

AM broadcast band listening was also good, with the selectivity providing good

rejection of strong, local, adjacent channel signals. The built-in ferrite antenna provides a degree of directivity, giving the listener the possibility of interference reduction, depending on the locations of the desired and interfering signals.

One of the ways I check an FM radio is to try to pick up CFMX in Toronto, Canada, with only the indoor whip antenna. I am happy to report the E5 grabbed the classical music station with a full-quieting signal and had good audio, despite its size. Most receivers I test either don't pick CFMX up at all, get bleed-over from an adjacent signal, or include a fair amount of "bacon-fry" noise on the signal.

There was one surprisingly absent feature in FM, though; there is no signal strength indicator. I don't know about your preferences, but I missed it.

❖ Final Thoughts

I found the E5 to be a refreshing improvement over the G4000A, and in fact I would take one E5 over two G4000As. Its small size and very good performance, combined with the little considerations here and there, such as the lighted button labels, really warmed me up to this new offering from Eton. If I didn't have the money to pick up a Super-909, I would probably go for the E5.

The Eton website, at www.etoncorp.com, lists the E5's price at \$150 US dollars. Grove Enterprises also offers the Eton E5 as Rev10 for \$149.95. For more information, visit their website at www.grove-ent.com.

Eton E5

A POWERFUL NEW PORTABLE FROM ETON!

With all the traditional quality expected from Grundig, the new E5 is packed with features: Full-spectrum medium/shortwave coverage, FM headphone stereo, single-sideband detection, 700 memory presets, alpha-numeric station labeling, frequency scan, programmable clock timer, wide/narrow selectivity, tone selection, internal battery charging. Measuring a scant 6-5/8" x 4-1/8" x 1-1/8" and weighing only 12 ounces, the new E5 is a serious contender!

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