Kaito’s Multifaceted KA1121

A portable shortwave radio that keeps up with the times

By Ken Reitz KS4ZR

There’s nothing new about a portable shortwave radio, but the Kaito KA1121 has a built-in MP3 player with 256 MB of Flash memory that you can use to download your favorite on-line podcasts and record your favorite shortwave, AM or FM programs for later listening.

❖ Kaito Pulls Out the Stops

The list of features for the KA1121 is impressive: It has long wave and medium wave coverage from 140 kHz to 1710 kHz; shortwave coverage from 3-29.999 MHz; FM from 70-108 MHz and all seven channels of the NOAA Weather band.

But wait, there’s more! It comes with rechargeable batteries for both the main radio and the MP3 player and separate charge circuits for both. It also tunes Single Side Band (SSB) ham transmissions, has six equalizer audio modes, three clock alarms, a sleep timer, an external antenna connector and can store up to 400 frequency presets and 100 customized station names. All this in a package just 6.5” wide, 3.75” high, and 1.25” deep.

Of course, the big attraction of this radio is the removable MP3 player which, when outside the radio, measures just 1.5” wide, 2.25” high and .5” thick. The player has a built-in USB port, earbud jack and four micro switches on the left and right sides of the unit which disappear when it’s installed in the radio. These switches control the MP3 player functions when out of the radio.

❖ The KA1121 Highlights

The KA1121 is an amazingly ambitious radio. It wants to be your AM/FM radio, your MP3 player, your shortwave radio, your weather radio, and your personal recording device. Can it really do all this? As with any product this ambitious, the reviews are going to be mixed. The built-in MP3 player is clearly the big calling card here, so I’ll look at it first.

Anyone born after the year 2000 already knows how to use an MP3 player, but to some of us older folks it’s new technology. With a little help from the instruction manual and the included MP3 driver mini-CD, I was ripping CDs to my audio library and putting them on the MP3 player in no time. Setting up to record from the radio to the MP3 player is not easy the first time, but like anything else, the more you do it the easier it is. Of course, the audio quality will only be as good as your reception quality. On FM the quality was very good. Playback of CDs from the CD library is excellent, especially when heard on the stereo earbuds which come with the radio.

On its own, the MP3 player has its pluses and minuses. On the plus side, it’s versatile. You can pop it out and slip it into your shirt pocket or hook it into your car stereo through the use of an optional FM modulator or cassette adaptor. The built-in battery charger is a real plus. The downside is that the recording space is relatively small compared to the iconic iPod®. At 256 MB, depending on the audio quality you select, you can only get a fraction of the songs you’d expect to get on a 2 GB iPod. (It also doesn’t have video display, which is one of the reasons iPods need to have so much memory.) Still, you should be able to get at least 100 songs on this little MP3 player. The MP3 player has other features including display of song lyrics for music playing on the player, record from other audio sources (via the line input), and even record live with the built-in microphone.

The KA1121 comes with three AA rechargeable NiMH batteries which, according to the Kaito tech folks, should be able to go through several hundred recharging cycles. This is a huge savings in battery costs. If all portables had this feature, it would also have a great impact on landfill pollution. The charger circuit automatically shuts down after 12 hours.

I was disappointed in long wave reception with this radio, but most portables are not capable of doing justice to that band. I was able to tune in a few low band beacons within two hundred miles of my location, but little else.

AM reception on the KA1121 was a pleasant surprise. It tunes this band in 1 kHz increments, a plus for AM DXers. Sitting on the desk with the computer shut off, running on its built-in batteries and my trusty Radio Shack tunable AM loop antenna by its side, I logged quite a few stations from all directions with strong signals. From my location in central Virginia I heard CHML 900, Ontario; Radio Progresso 890, Cuba; WWL 870, New Orleans; WWJ 950, Detroit, and all the regular metro powerhouse stations. Nothing was heard west of the Mississippi – not unexpected for those of us at the edge of the east coast.

The WX band on this radio was very good. It had no difficulty tuning our local NOAA WX station over 30 miles away. It doesn’t have a WX Alert mode and no provision for SAME encoding. But, it does what it’s supposed to
BRAC Closures / New Airports

By Iden Rogers

The Base Realignment and Closure Commission (BRAC) was enacted some years ago to periodically select U.S. military bases that could be closed or realigned for different uses. The intended purpose has been to cut billions of dollars from the defense budget. For BRAC info: www.govexec.com/specialreports/brac.htm and www.defenselink.mil/brac/.


Twenty-five major installations are to be closed down and 24 others radically realigned over the six years following the report. Your local newspaper should alert you to any affected bases in your area.

A few bases have and will become civilian airports. This changes the communications that we hear. Ones that don’t become airports can have all kinds of different businesses and government entities, many of which may provide new and interesting, non-aircraft listening. BRAC closures do not happen overnight. Over the next few years, keep an eye and an ear out for the changes as they progress.

Here are three of the previously closed bases that now have civilian air activities:

GEORGE AFB in the California desert near Victorville, closed in 1992, has become a cargo airport named Southern California Logistics Airport.

VICTORVILLE TOWER 118.35, VICTORVILLE GROUND 124.45, JOSHUA APPROACH and DEPARTURE 124.55, WX AWOS 109.40. For more airport info, see: www.airnav.com/airport/KVCV.

MATHER AFB in Sacramento California, closed in 1993, has become Sacramento Mather Airport and also serves as an air cargo airport with plans to become a major hub.

MATHER TOWER 120.65, MATHER GROUND and CLEARANCE DELIVERY: 121.85, NORCAL APPROACH 119.1, NORCAL DEPARTURE 127.4, CLEARANCE DELIVERY 121.85, UNICOM 123.075, ATIS 118.325. For more, see: www.airnav.com/airport/KMHR.

BERGSTROM AFB next to Austin, Texas, has become the Austin-Bergstrom International Airport with reports that it “is the biggest new airport project in the United States since Denver International.”

AUSTIN TOWER 118.225, 121.0, AUSTIN GROUND 121.9 121.7, CLEARANCE DELIVERY 125.5, AUSTIN APPROACH and DEPARTURE 118.8 119.0, UNICOM 122.95, ATIS 124.4, WX ASOS 127.875. See: www.airnav.com/airport/KAUS.

It will be interesting to see what additional new airports BRAC 2005 will bring.