

How Do You Rate Your Best Catch?

by Larry Godwin

At one time or other - or perhaps continually - all of us are interested in determining which station is our best catch. Many criteria can be applied for ranking BCB stations; two of the most common are distance and power.

Distance from the DXer's location to the station's transmitter site is relatively easy to calculate if a globe is available. Miles are concrete units, and normally there is no problem deciding which is a better catch, for instance, a Hawaiian or an Aussie. But in all fairness, we must inject the power factor; what if the Hawaiian is KZOO (1000 watts) and the Aussie is 6WF (50,000 watts)?

Some DXers have attempted to devise mathematical formulas for resolving such questions. For example, by using the mile-per-watt criterion, from Los Angeles often heard KZOO rates $2550/1000 = 2.55$, and 6WF rates $9400/50,000 = .19$. Obviously the results can be a bit misleading. The milage divided by the square root of the power is a somewhat better indicator; for KZOO it is 80.7 and for 6WF, 42.0. The extreme case would be the VOA station at Okinawa, with 1,000,000 watts! Clearly these formulas are inadequate for measuring the relative merits of catches.

Besides, factors other than distance and power may have a bearing on rating a best catch. Was reception during the night or during the day? A Hawaiian heard at noon PST from the west coast would probably outrank most Aussie catches heard during the early morning. Did the signal come across land or sea, and if across land, did it follow level or mountainous terrain? KINY in Juneau, Alaska, heard from Denver should outrank a New England station, if power is the same, because of the mountain barrier to the west. Was reception during the winter or the summer? An "easy" European heard from anywhere in North America in June would easily outrank a more distant TA with the same power heard in November. Is the current season a high sunspot count one, or was there considerable atmospheric interference at the time of reception? If so, you may want to attach an extra premium or handicap to your rating of a good catch heard under such conditions.

Factors concerning the station itself may influence your rating. Is a directional antenna used, and if so, are you benefitted or hindered by its effect? Did you hear a definite ID, and if you sent a report, was it verified? Probably you will value a QSL from a "non-verifier" more than one from a station that readily verifies. And was your good catch heard through considerable interference on the same or an adjacent frequency, or was the channel clear?

Finally, you may want to consider personal factors, such as your receiver and antenna or your level of experience or sophistication, before rating an all-time best catch.

I don't propose that there is any simple or objective way to rate your best catch, but rather suggest that the process may be more complicated than it seems at first glance. Some DXers will want to give more emphasis to some of these factors than to others, so an all-encompassing scale would be difficult to derive. At least it should be recognized that the traditional distance and power factors are not the only ones that should be considered.