

Three New Receivers

by Bruce Portzer

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Some extremely compact receivers are coming out right now, each with a wealth of features like memory channels, digital readout, scanning, timers, and pushbutton tuning. In recent weeks I've had the opportunity to try out four such receivers. One is the Sony SRF-M40W, reviewed quite thoroughly by Rich Toebe in the September 3 DX Monitor. The others are the General Electric 7-1900C, the Kenwood RZ-1, and the Sony SW1S. These receivers are very different from one another in their performance and features, yet they are all good examples of where the receiver industry is headed.

The General Electric 7-1900C: This radio is GE's equivalent to the Sony SRF-M40W ("Digital Walkman"). It measures about 5" long, 1" deep, and 2-1/2" wide. Like the Sony, it has digital readout and pushbutton tuning for AM & FM, a belt clip, and no speaker. It was obviously intended for joggers. It has 4 AM and 4 FM memory channels, compared to 7 each for the Sony. Unlike the Sony, it has a clock. A switch on the front selects either the time or the frequency for display on the digital readout. Believe it or not, I found this radio for \$5 at a thrift store. At that price it was too good to pass up. It worked, too! It had been dropped a couple times, judging from the condition of the bottom corners, but otherwise it was in good shape. It's beyond me why the former owner decided to get rid of it.

How well does it work? Very well, but not as good as the Sony. Which is fortunate because I paid 10 times as much for the Sony. The two seem to be about equal on the upper end of the AM dial, but the Sony is noticeably more sensitive at the lower end. The Sony is also much more selective. For example, on sunrise skip KYTE-970 Portland is listenable on the Sony, but lost in KJR-950/KDMO-1000 splat on the GE. Likewise, on 830 the GE picks up distorted but understandable audio from 50 kw local KGNW-820, but the Sony only has audio spikes. The GE has a couple advantages over the Sony. AM coverage goes up to 1700, the full range of the new AM band extension. The Sony only goes up to 1670. When you

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try to tune the Sony below 530 or above 1670, it beeps at you. You then either have to punch in a memory channel at the other end of the band or go back through the frequencies you just listened to. The GE starts over at the opposite end of the band (i.e. 540-530-1700-1690 etc). FM reception has not been compared extensively due to the large amount of overload I get on any radio around here. My limited listening says they are about equal on FM.

Overall, this is not a bad radio, but for the money the Sony is better. I'm not sure of its current retail price or availability.

The Kenwood RZ-1: This radio is amazing because of the following combination of features:

- 1) It's intended to be used in a motor vehicle.
- 2) It tunes from 500 kHz to 960 MHz!
- 3) It has 100 programmable memory channels.
- 4) The digital display can either be the frequency or a series of alphanumeric characters (i.e. "BBC", "Fire Dept", "WBBM", etc).

The whole radio measures about 1-1/2" high, 7" wide, and 6" deep. Front panel controls include a tuning knob, on/off volume, squelch, headphone jack, digital display, and a bunch of programming & mode switches. The speaker is on the top of the cabinet. The rear includes a 12 vdc power connection and two antenna jacks (apparently one for HF and one for VHF and above.)

I haven't been able to find a spec sheet for it yet, but I've come across it at three ham radio stores in the past month (Missouri Radio Center in Kansas City, Jun's Electronics in Los Angeles, and C-Comm in Seattle). I first ran across it at Mo. Radio, where I spent a lot of time trying to figure out how it worked. It's not difficult to use once you get the hang of it, but it did involve a lot of trial and error. I heard lots of VHF/UHF activity (aircraft, ham repeaters, police, fire, etc) using a two meter mag mount antenna sitting next to the radio. But the lower bands were dead due to lack of an HF antenna. Only one 50 kw local (KCMD-B10) had a decent signal, and only a couple other locals were audible on the MW band.

A couple weeks later, I tried one out at Jun's in Los Angeles. This time, both antennas were connected, although the "HF" antenna was 6 feet of wire running up the wall. VHF sounded pretty good, and the AM band actually had some signals on it. All the AM locals I tried were in well, as were some of the Tijuana borderblasters (XEGM-950, XEPRS-1090, etc). But the frequencies in between were a mess, with all sorts of squeals, mixing spurs, scratchy noises (sounding like FM broadcasters getting through), and other garbage. Was it because of my location, the Mickey Mouse antenna, or a lousy front end in the radio? And how well does it work on shortwave broadcasts? I don't know. I had a choice of playing with the radio some more or catching my flight home. I chose the latter. A few days later, I saw one again at C-Comm in Seattle. This time I had my 1-1/2 year old daughter with me and all the salesmen were busy, so I wasn't able to try it.

In many respects, this is a helluva radio. Imagine, while parked in rush hour traffic, being able to chose between AM/FM broadcasters, SW broadcasters, TV audio, ham repeaters, your Police or Fire Dept, and just about anything else except longwave and microwave stations! The price of \$500-600 isn't too far out of line either, especially considering all it does. On the other hand, my limited listening raised some genuine concern about how well it works on the lower frequencies.

One drawback to the radio is it can't receive SSB or CW signals, only AM(MW/SW broadcasters & aircraft), FM narrow (two-way radio stuff), and FM wide (TV audio, FM broadcasters). I think they missed the boat here. One of the leading makers of ham gear makes a radio that tunes all the HF ham bands and sells it through ham dealers, but you can't listen to 99% of the signals in those ham bands! Dumb!

This radio has lots of potential and deserves a more extensive review than the one I just gave. It looks like a good performer above 30 MHz.

Below 30 MHz, who knows? And would they be willing to repackage it as a portable? Now there would be a really neat setup (especially if they added SSB/CW capability).

The Sony SW18: This is Sony's latest entry in the world of miniature general coverage receivers. The set measures a mere 4-1/4"x2-3/4"x3/4", yet it has a speaker, digital display, 10 memory channels, 24 hour clock with sleep timer and alarm, 9/10 kHz spacing for MW, dial light, keypad for memory and frequency selection, up/down tuning switches, tape output, and telescopic antenna. And it comes with an external active antenna, a "smart" AC adapter (plug it into any AC voltage and it will always give you the correct output voltage), AC adapter plug (for European outlets), carrying case, stereo headphones, shoulder strap, and a miniature suitcase to carry the radio and the accessories. It's available through several mail order outlets from \$250-300. It tunes from 150 kHz to 30 MHz and 76 MHz to 108 MHz, and can receive FM stereo.

Is it any good? Yes, it is really hot on shortwave. I tried one out at a local DX gathering recently and found it to be very sensitive, with absolutely wonderful audio. The set's owner told me the active antenna makes reception even better on weak signals, and is free from overload problems that plague some active antenna/receiver combinations. I was also told the set is pretty selective. It can easily separate SW stations 5 kHz apart on shortwave. I found the radio to be very easy to operate, in spite of having a large number of tiny switches in a small space.

We tested it side by side on MW with my Sony BRF-M40W and found little difference between the two. Conditions weren't all that great at the time, and there was some electrical noise present, but there wasn't a station one could get that the other couldn't. Nulling characteristics on the two sets were about equal. Curiously, there were definite differences between the way the audio sounded on the two sets, even with the same set of headphones, but the audio sounded pleasant on both.

The radio has a couple of drawbacks. It doesn't tune in SSB/CW signals, making it of limited use for hearing hams and SW ute stations. And it doesn't have a fine tuning control, which is unfortunate because many MW & SW stations don't follow the standard 5 kHz (SW) on 9/10 kHz (MW) spacing programmed into the radio.

Overall, this looks like a wonderful radio to take along on business trips and vacations. You'll be able to hear lots of DX on MW & SW with it, although it obviously is not an NRD-525.

