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THE REALISTIC DX-390 - A "QUICKIE" EVALUATION - By Leonard Hyde

Recently, I had a chance to try out the new Realistic DX-390. This receiver hit the market about January 1, and is intended as the direct replacement for the DX-440.

I could write paragraphs of glowing testimony about the improvements over the DX-440 regarding ease of tuning and use of the keyboard. However, what I discovered during 5 minutes of use renders all these improvements moot.

The fact is, unless the unit I tested was a defective receiver, the DX-390 is fatally flawed for use in AM DXing!

I was allowed to take the receiver out in front of the store, to get away from all the QRM from computers florescent lights, etc. Therefore, I was obliged to use only the built in antenna.

On powerup, the receiver was set at 150 kHz. I was very pleasantly surprised by the total absence of display noise. This is a major limiting factor with the DX-440 on longwave and BCB, using the built in antenna. So far, so good.

Tuning up the band, I was not surprised by the lack of signals - on longwave, this is normal in daytime with an inefficient antenna. However, the relative lack of noise of ANY kind was more disquieting.

The lack of noise, though, took a quick back seat to what I found at 350 kHz: my local, WJJJ-1260, blasting in!

At 374 kHz, the beacon at the Roanoke Airport, audible on the DX-440 with the built in antenna, even with the display noise, was not heard. Only a slight increase in static was heard here.

The "birdie" at 455 kHz on the DX-440 was thankfully absent. Yet, at 520 kHz, I found another surprise: WKEX-1430!

Tuning across the BCB revealed no more apparent images. However, it it was obvious that the DX-390 is FAR less sensitive than the DX-440, at least with the built in antenna. Stations that are heard on the DX-440, even with the display noise, were faint or not heard at all.

One might reason that the receiver should perform much better with an exterior antenna, such as a tuned loop. This may be true: yet, the presence of images of this magnitude, especially with the less sensitive built in antenna, AND the lack of sensitivity, indicate the presence of major design flaws in the RF circuitry of this receiver.

Certainly, a more subjective evaluation is indicated before consigning this receiver to the "trash heap." Yet, however cursory the test, these findings are cause for genuine alarm. I would urge any serious BCB DXer to look this receiver over very carefully before buying it.

Hopefully, someone will take it upon themselves to do a true scientific evaluation of this receiver, since it will no doubt be around for some time to come.