

QUESTIONING THE

RAE

So you're thinking of taking the RAE? Well I'd be the last person to put you off, but I want to tell you of my experience. As a former mathematics teacher well-used to O-and A-level examinations, the May 1982 RAE came as an unbelievable shock!

I remembered very little electronics from my University course and was in the same position as most candidates in that I relied heavily of the text of the Radio Amateurs' examination manual for my preparation. This was my first mistake but I really had tried to find other suitable textbooks without success. (Even my husband, G8DCZ, who is an electronics teacher couldn't help here). In the end, my only other reference source was the series "Passport to Amateur Radio" by J. Thornton Lawrence, GW3JGA published in Practical Wireless some time ago.

The RAE manual is at fault in two ways. Firstly, there are some words bandied about without proper definition. In the May 1982 examination, I was almost caught out by "characteristic impedance" where the four multiple choice answers included one I had heard at University (some 10 years ago!). I was lucky here — other candidates might not have been. (For your information, characteristic impedance, Z , may be defined as the value of resistance which terminates a line of infinite length to produce complete absorption of an incident wave).

The manual's second fault is that the sample examination papers, at the back of the book, while being useful factually are far more straightforward than the questions you will meet in the examinations room. The actual questions are worded with very subtle differences between the given answers so that a

The controversy which has surrounded the RAE appears to have fallen on deaf ears. In my opinion the ambiguities are still there.

sometimes' in one version may change to 'always' in another. Indeed some of the answers needed a good pass in O-level English Language just to be able to decipher the information given. (Who said that multiple-choice papers were an easy option?)

My second mistake was believing the RSGB's announcement that questions on power limitations for the different bands would be discounted for the May 1982 examinations (due to the new schedule). Under the circumstances City and Guilds did well to discount two of these questions but unfortunately had failed to eliminate one about the maximum power on side-band. I would still like to assume that this question was eventually discounted but was glad that I had not been so stupid as to entirely ignore the new schedule in my revision. Indeed this was the first of several queries to which I alerted the invigilator in case he had any further instructions on the matter.

I am sure that if you have heard other candidates discussing the May 1982 examination you will have

been drawn into discussion of the callsign to be used by a "touring caravan in Wales". Okay, so what's so difficult about that you say — Welsh callsigns start with GW. Fine so far, but what exactly is a "touring caravan"? Let's consider the options:—

1) callsign/M if the car towing the caravan has been parked for less than 15 minutes (you cannot actually travel in a towed caravan while it is in motion).

2) callsign/P if parked at a location eg at the roadside for more than 15 minutes.

3) callsign/A if parked at a postal address eg a campsite. In fact the words "Touring caravan" brought the picture of a dormobile into my mind so you could transmit while in motion as well. Confusing, isn't it? Surely the point of having this type of question in the RAE is to check that the operator knows how to fill in the log book correctly. As it stands, this question certainly doesn't do this and having spoken to local, experienced radio amateurs it seems that even they would have found this question ambiguous.

Shortly after the start of the second examination paper my hand was again raised to attract the attention of the invigilator. This time the problem was that to calculate a frequency using $f = \frac{1}{2\pi LC}$ I needed some rough paper the answer grid supplied being too narrow to work out a question with powers of 10 everywhere. At first the invigilator said that he was not allowed to give me any and sat down again. Then seeing the look of despair on my face, he came back with a spare answer grid and told me to write my candidate and centre number on it as he would have to send it to City and Guilds with the actual answer