

AZDEN PCS4000 - user view

Two metres is a completely devalued band. Frankly, I can't tell the difference between FM on 144MHz and FM on 27MHz. The vast majority of QSOs are so banal and tedious that they are enough to make anyone with a real interest in radio cringe in disgust.

Regretfully, although 2m represents the thick end of the wedge, the thin end is quite apparent both on 70cm and the HF bands. Having recognised that there is a problem (and you had better believe that there is one) you must look for the cause. I perceive two reasons: 1) The multiple choice RAE is now so easy to pass that the sum of knowledge is little more than parrot fashion licence conditions, and the how and why of wiring a mains plug; 2) All you need to have to get on the air is an Access card with a credit limit of around £400.

Once there was a time when the only way to get operational was to build your own equipment, and the fact that people don't do this threatens the very fabric of the hobby itself. To support my view, I just ask you to answer a single question: When was the last QSO where you discovered something useful to do with radio? I can't remember either. Amateur radio seems more and more to be one giant CB channel stretching from 1.8 to 440MHz and I don't like it.

What has all this got to do with an Azden PCS4000 micro-computer controlled 2m FM transceiver? I have been reviewing this machine and I want everyone to be quite sure of the starting point of my own personal prejudice. This way, it saves people the bother of accusing me of bias when I openly admit it.

What it is

The PCS4000 is a synthesised FM mobile box offering either 12.5 or 25kHz channel spacing over the range 144 to 146MHz. It produces 25W (measured 30W) of RF and is at

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least as sensitive as any other comparable box.

It also offers all the features which mobile black box users have come to expect; the scanning facilities are possibly the most advanced that I have yet come across. The equipment allows storage of up to 16 different frequencies (with or without 600kHz shift for repeater use) and also has the facility for operating with non standard frequency shifts.

The memory facilities are split into two banks of eight which can be scanned either as eight channels within a single bank or sequentially for the full 16. In addition the transceiver allows scanning between two frequencies (12.5 or 25kHz steps) defined by memory frequencies stored in positions 7 & 8. This feature is useful when looking for traffic in the 144MHz sector.

The set also includes the now ubiquitous scanning and stepping controls on the microphone which, in theory, makes mobile operation

rather easier. An additional button on top of the microphone PTT bar recalls the contents of 'memory one' on depression. You would normally store 145.5MHz in the M1 position so that you can summon up the calling frequency without taking your eyes off the road. However this little extra isn't nearly as useful as it sounds.

The front panel

I wasn't the only person to remark that the front panel is the most distracting that has ever been seen on a mobile R/T. It is not simply that the thing lights up like Christmas in Oxford Street, but that it has more buttons than a scientific calculator cum digital alarm clock radio with teasmaid thrown in.

Specifically, there are three knobs: vol/on/off, squelch and memory mode. So far so good. The trouble is that there are a further 19 buttons and 23 indicator lamps. This doesn't include the four digit LED display. The main programming control is a 16 button keypad. Although the buttons themselves are marked numerically, these legends are of no significance. In essence, the desired frequency, either for immediate use or for memory storage, is arrived at by sequential stepping. In theory it should be possible to QSY quicker via the keypad. In practice, it is so fiddly to use — impossible when mobile — that the microphone up/down buttons are the main control.

The indicator lamps include a string of eight corresponding to the memory channel selected, plus an extra light to indicate which memory bank is in use. Redundant decimal points in the LED main frequency display indicate functions such as 'M1 select' 600kHz shift, reverse repeater, loop unlock, etc. Another string of lamps (five) give a visual representation of received signal strength and transmit output power while a few more immediately below them show such things as an