

Working DX

When you have made your first few contacts, most likely with fairly un-exotic European stations or the States, you will want to try something a bit more exciting and be looking for a DX contact. The term 'DX' is relative — on the microwave bands you may well be only a county or two away, and on 2 metres it depends where you are, even the North or South of this country may come in the category.

If you just want to get a few nice call-signs in the log, then the best way is to take a look around during one of the major contests. We are now in the contest season, and the one thing that contests do, other than annoy a lot of people, it to bring out a large number of DX stations which would be quite rare at other times of the year. They are therefore a good hunting ground for DX, although you will be limited to a very basic QSO only.

The first thing to do when trying to work anyone during a contest, assuming you aren't actually entering it, is to find out the required contest exchange. You won't be very popular if you don't know it, and it is very unlikely that anyone will stop to tell you what it is. The best place to get this information is from Radio Communication, which regularly publishes all the details for most contests. Other than the signal report, there will be some additional information, such as your zone, a contact serial number, county or what have you.

A Few Hints

Funnily enough, the best way of finding DX is to let it find you. Most DX stations seem to avoid pile-ups during contests especially if the event is one where country multipliers are involved. You stand a much better chance of working something if you find a quiet spot (if you can) and then calling CQ, working whatever comes along. By sheer virtue of statistics, the more stations you work the better your chance of something rare. Hopefully, someone may be looking for G as a multiplier, and you may be the lucky station.

If you are going to call a DX station, there are a number of vital points to bear in mind. During a phone contest, a really good operator will be working something like 300 stations an hour, and maybe 150+ on CW. That is one every 12 seconds on phone. It isn't

uncommon to hear people calling this station, and by the time they have finished their call, the DX station has worked 2 other people.

Quite honestly, if you come across a big pile-up, it is better to leave well alone — the competition at this stage is very high, and the pile-up is likely to be out of control. It goes out of control quite simply. Everyone wants to be the last person calling when the DX calls QRZ? It doesn't matter if the DX station came back to someone he could hear and is working him, because 95% of the rest of the calling stations let go of the PTT switch, hear other stations still calling, and so give another call. This then carries on for a while until everyone realises there is a QSO in progress. Also, by the time this sort of pile up has been generated, half the stations don't know who they are calling anyway ('here's a pile up — lets join in'), resulting in utter chaos.

When you do hear a rare station calling CQ, net accurately, and give one clear call to him, with your call-

sign once only using recognised phonetics. If he doesn't come back, by all means try but only when he asks for calls. Either you will be heard, or you won't.

If the miracle occurs, give the contest exchange once only, and confirm receipt of his details by saying 'QSL'. Don't tag on your name, the weather or half a dozen repeats of your call and his. If he isn't sure of your call he will ask for it. You may also find that he comes back to you with only your suffix, in which case you should repeat your call clearly once. QSL information can be asked for if needed, or if he is already working stations, he will give it periodically. Speed is the essence of the operation, combined with a good sense of timing.

One other point — headphones are a much better bet during contests, not the loudspeaker. Your concentration, and ability to ignore the inevitable QRM will increase dramatically with 'phones.

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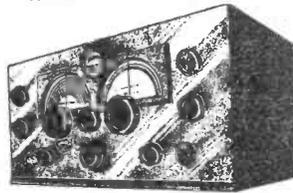
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