



Woe is Us

These letters of woe are a fairly representative cross-section of the things that can go wrong in mail order buying. That said, when you consider the amount of stuff that changes hands through the mail, complaints are few and far between. I say this with feeling, having both lost important material in the post recently and had stuff damaged on the way back to its owners. It happens — not so often, but too often, you might say.

G6PJE is lucky in one way. He dealt with a company which did not bank his cheque, saving him two potential sets of bank charges. It is easy to make mistakes about stock levels, and it makes sense to wait and see if stocks come in, if this happens. But it is very offputting to be told "it's in", and then be told "it's out".

As well as checking stocks, get an estimate of delivery time. Some companies give themselves a week, others a month. It saves teeth-gnashing.

Working Units

Mark Matthews was dealing with a business which seems to have genuine staff absences and lack of parts. Even so, being left without a unit

for months, when it should be in warranty, is unacceptable. If this happens, write to the MD of the company demanding a working unit. They have the option to replace, rather than repair it. If this fails, go to your local Citizens' Advice Bureau and find out what options are open to you to get a working unit, and how best to go about them. Take any paperwork, letters, advertisement, etc. with you for reference. Their number will be in the phone book.

Know Your Options

If you have real problems with substandard equipment, orders not supplied correctly, inaccurate advertising, etc, then speak to your local Office of Fair Trading, who will normally investigate.

If orders are supplied wrongly and you are faced with the expense of returning stuff, again, talk to your CAB, who will know if you are entitled to, for example, demand that the supplier collects the item.

G1ORD doesn't say whether his package was sent parcel post, or by another route, and he also doesn't mention insurance. Also, sending parcels, especially for a VAT-registered

business (virtually any scanner dealer) can be labour-intensive as parcels have to be logged individually with the post office. I think the kit supplier who charged 4p for packing is losing money on it — generous, but not good for the business.

Survival Tips

At HRT we don't have the personpower or specialist expertise to investigate individual claims, but we would like to hear if anyone has real problems. Tips: check stock/delivery times before ordering, keep copies (stats or written) of all orders, letters, etc. with dates, cheque numbers and amounts; write to the top person if you keep getting ignored; go to a local consumer body for advice if this falls. Do that BEFORE you send solicitors' letters and the rest; they are expensive, and don't achieve much unless they are very clear about the next course of action.

Genuine Error

Always assume a genuine mistake has been made the first time: suppliers can have insurmountable problems at times. And who knows what they think of us in their darker hours, faced with underpayment, orders with no name, no VAT, goods returned damaged, and sometimes thousands of quids' worth of unpaid invoices (not from amateurs, of course) to give them a headache? Still you are entitled to goods of merchantable quality, within a reasonable time, so press for your rights. Everyone benefits if businesses and customers can rely on each other.

This has been a HAB (humanitarian advice bureau) announcement.

£10 FOR THE LETTER OF THE MONTH

You've got a gripe about the bandplans, or your're sick of being wiped out by next door's microwave. Or maybe you've been bowled over by the excellent service from your local radio shop.

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Sent your epistles to: Letters Column, Ham Radio Today, ASP Ltd, Argus House, Boundary Way, Hemel Hempstead, Herts HP2 7ST.