

The content which follows is a transcript of the Practical Amateur Radio Podcast hosted by Jerry Taylor, KD0BIK. This monthly version of PARP is typically released the last week of each month.

The Practical Amateur Radio Podcast – Episode number 44.

From the ham shack of KD0BIK, located in Colorful Colorado, this is the Practical Amateur Radio Podcast.

This is show number 44, volume number 4 with a release date of July 16, 2011.

Hello everyone. My name is Jerry Taylor; my amateur radio call sign is KD0BIK and welcome to the Practical Amateur Radio Podcast...Creating Elmers One Podcast at a time. Amateur radio or ham radio is what this podcast is all about. If you are currently studying for your exam or have been in ham radio for years....I'm hopeful this podcast will help you. If it has helped you, I hope you will continue to listen and I also hope you'll tell others. Also, in keeping with our Creating Elmers one podcast at a time philosophy, if you learn something from our podcasts....please share that knowledge with others.

Once again I had to take a little more time in between episodes than I intended. Sometimes the priorities of life just step in and take over. Also, sometimes one hobby has to yield to others. This is all about life balance. While work has consumed most of my time in the past few months, I've also managed to do a little geocaching (more about that later), made it to the driving range and have dug out some of my flight simulator hardware and spent a few hours flying around the Microsoft Flight Simulator world.

In addition to all that, my wife and I just returned from a little over 2 weeks in Europe. This was our bi-annual trek to Belgium to visit her family. The trip was fun, but tiring. I won't bore you with all the details...but let's just say that I spent more time at London City Airport than I truly ever care to do so again. Long story very short...our flight from Denver to Heathrow was late landing. We only had about 3 hours to trek across London from Heathrow to London City to catch a flight to Antwerp, Belgium. We walked into London City about 5 minutes too late to get our luggage out to the plane so they bumped us and put us on stand by. They couldn't get us on the 2nd and 3rd flight, finally about 5 hours after walking into London City we were on the last flight out.

Again the vacation was great. We visited many new places and even some which were new to my wife who actually grew up there. But I'm sure you know how that is. Sometimes it is the places and things right in your own backyard that you get to experience.

On the way back from Belgium we did detour through the English Countryside and spent 3 relaxing days and celebrated our 4th wedding anniversary. I know many of my listeners live within an easy train ride from Tunbridge Wells, Kent where we stayed. Many of you are very dear friends and I truly hope one day to sit across a table from you and share a pint. I didn't reach out to you on this trip due to it being our wedding anniversary holiday. I hope you understand and next time we must arrange for a meet up as I would dearly love to meet you all in person.

Before we get started with episode 44, I did want to update you on Spencer from episode 43. In episode 43 I read a letter from a gentleman named Spencer who asked me several questions and indicated he was preparing for his tech exam. Spencer and I have shared emails back and forth over the past few months and last update I received from him was sometime before my trip to Europe. Spencer was making great progress and was planning on taking his exam sometime in August. Some of the questions he has asked is what ties into this episode.

Spencer had a slight set back to his preparation and somewhat struggled with whether he should pursue the hobby. Spencer picked up a QST Magazine from his local book store and that led him to Google and search out several retailers like Ham Radio Outlet, MFJ etc. Spencer began looking at prices for new equipment and immediately experienced a setback.

Like many, Spencer is on a budget. In these uncertain economic times, everyone must carefully consider what they spend their hard earned money towards. I can tell from Spencer's emails that he wants to pursue the hobby of amateur radio. But what has happened is he's become slightly disillusioned from all the glossy, full page ads from manufactures like Yaesu, ICOM and Kenwood and when he puts pencil to paper and adds it all up, it's all looking like fuzzy math to him.

Now this episode is not about those glossy print ads in QST magazine or the many vendor websites providing new fancy ham radio equipment. The topic is about something else and something we all probably are thinking about .

Ham radio on a budget is the topic for this episode. I believe perhaps the most common question asked by new hams or hams to be is what type of radio should I get? Or asked in another way....should I buy a hand-held or mobile rig as my first radio? I know I receive emails asking this question all the time. Unfortunately, the answer given will vary depending on who is asked. I know some who insist on a hand-held as being the best choice for a new ham and I know just as many who believe that is the worst possible advice you could give someone just starting out.

Now when I'm asked the question of what type of radio should be my first radio, I like to answer with "It depends". Now I know that is not a good answer. But don't worry...I don't leave the person asking the question with just the answer of "it depends". I use that as a way to dig a little deeper and expand the conversation. Usually within a few minutes I'm able to gain enough knowledge to provide a suggestion or two.

In this day and time, our overall budget for being able to do something is important. Especially when we are talking hobbies. After all, if you are a young person without an income....the budget is probably coming from the bank of mom and dad. Even if you have a part-time job, the cost of getting started in ham radio could easily deplete those funds if you let it.

It doesn't get any easier as an adult. Us hams often find ourselves speaking with our financial advisors...huh, I mean our wife on why we need whatever it is we're wanting in our shack. The hobby budget is often having to play second fiddle to the day to day operational budget, vacation budget and let's not forget the send the child to college fund. If there is anything left over at the end of the month there is no guarantee you'll have access to it.

This is why we really need to understand what our overall budget is likely to be for our ham radio hobby and plan accordingly.

I really think there is a misconception with new hams and soon to become new hams that the entry level cost of getting into the hobby is expensive....is way outside of my budget....is out of reach for me and my family. These really are just misconceptions. However, I won't sugar coat the situation either and say the hobby doesn't come with a price. But what hobby doesn't right? This price is what I like to call the introductory cost or introductory price. Again...most hobbies have them.

An example, A new hobby I've taken up in the past 18 months or so is geocaching. By the way, I've discovered a lot of hams also geocache. My geocaching.com userID is KD0BIK. But the hobby of geocaching has an introductory cost associated with it. So does the hobby or leisure activity of golf, scuba diving, photography etc. etc.. So my point in all this is ham radio is not the only hobby to have a "pay in order to play" cost associated with it.

If you've been listening since the beginning....and I mean waaaaay back in 2008 when I started the podcast, I did a multipart series on what ham radio was about and how to get started. I asked a very basic question and I asked this question several times throughout that series. The question is simple and the question is still important today. That question is Why? Why do you want to become an amateur radio operator?

As I stated back then....it's OK if you don't immediately know the answer. After all if you are just learning about the hobby....you may want to take some time to first explore and then answer the question. But answering the question of Why? Why do you want to become an amateur radio operator is paramount in assisting in planning the budget.

Amateur Radio on a budget is possible. I know dozens of hams who are having a ton of fun on a small budget. But I believe the secret is understanding what you want from the hobby and doing a little research first. This research will help you make the right decision the first time and help you avoid spending unnecessary money.

Now back to the why question. If you are interested in ham radio from just the sole purpose of helping in your community with disaster response and community service events like parades or even storm tracking activities, your introductory cost to get started will be a lot less expensive than if the desire is to talk to fellow hams on the other side of the country or planet.

In these "local" community activities, and I can't express enough about the importance of serving in this capacity, often a dual-band hand-held radio with an extra battery back or two will serve you extremely well. Where a little more power is required, a dual-band mobile rig with a mag mount antenna can be purchased new for just a few hundred dollars. Both a hand-held and mobile rig can be easily moved between mobile/portable use and the shack.

Now with regards to hand-held and mobile rigs.....I'd like to issue one word of caution when planning the purchase. If you're on a budget....I realize the thought of having that brand new tech license without a radio to talk on can be a dilemma. Too many times new amateurs will rush into that first purchase and buy the very first thing they can afford. I fully understand that sometimes this is unavoidable. However, a mistake that is often made is to purchase a single band hand-held or single band mobile rig. In some cases these are available for under \$100 new and when talking about hand-held radios with their radio, power supply and antenna all in the same box.....the desire can quickly over play the risks.

In a lot of the metro areas of the country both 2m VHF and 70cm UHF are extremely popular. The advice I want to pass along is to just do your homework before hand. Meet up with a local club, talk to some fellow hams and find out what is most active in your area. If your area only has 2m repeaters...then the choice for single band is made easier. However, if you later find out after purchasing that 2m HT that most of the activity is on the 70cm machines.....see my point? I guess the point I'm trying to make is it might be worth waiting a few extra weeks until you can save a little more money for something that will provide you more bang for your buck.

Now speaking of dual-band hand held transceivers. While I do not have any first hand experience with the Wouxun (spelled Wouxun), these radios debuted at Dayton in 2010 and are available for around \$120. That's right...a dual-band, 2m VHF 70cm UHF hand-held transceiver for around \$120.00. Again, please do your homework before you make your purchase.

<http://www.powerwerx.com/wouxun-radios/?gclid=CPLq2MmlkKcCFR5hgwodglfHdw>

Let's again revisit the "Why" question....why do you want to become an amateur radio operator. If you want to talk to hams across the country or on the other side of the world...then you're talking an HF setup and the introductory cost will be higher.

Now I'm not going to get into all the details of what you need and how much it will all cost as we've talked about that stuff before. But I will say the issue probably facing more new hams is antenna restrictions. Yes we've covered that topic as well. I just want to say that too many hams throw their hands up in the air and give up when trying to get on HF due to antenna restrictions. You don't need to give up.....please don't give up. You have so many options available to you....listen to some of my old episodes where I talk about antennas and antenna restrictions for some tips.

I will say I had a great QSO with a ham in Hollywood a couple of months ago. He travels for his job and lives very near Mann's Chinese Theater on Hollywood Blvd. As you can imagine if HF antenna restrictions aren't in place....where would you put one? Well this ham has done what I've done and uses and loves and works the world with a 20m hamstick dipole mounted on a short push-up pole.

Now....in just about every choice you could have with regards to equipment purchases to get started in ham radio you have the new versus used option. Like with any hobby....do your homework if you are planning on going the used equipment route and allow me to give you some advice.

The advice is simple. Join a local club in your area and attend club meetings and talk to your local fellow hams. Most club meetings I've attended (and I've attended several different club meetings both here in Colorado and Texas), but most at the beginning of the meeting do a round the room introduction. Stand up and say something like Hello....my name is Jerry and I'm interested in ham radio and interested in purchasing used equipment to get started. If there are 20 hams in the room, I bet 50% of them have something....could be a transceiver, could be an antenna, could be a power supply or could just simply be a spool of coax. But most every ham has something they are willing to sell.

Second, check out the hamfest calendar in your area and again, your local club can help you with this. If you live in a large area, you might find a ham fest taking place every few months. At your typical local ham fest you'll find just about everything you need to get your first station setup. In the local club I just advised you to join, seek out help. If the club is the right kind of club and I mean friendly and welcome new members, you'll have other members willing to help you with making purchases of used equipment.

Another point about buying used equipment from an individual ham or at a ham fest. Ham radio operators are some of the most honest people you'll meet on the face of this planet. Most will go out of his or her way to help someone regardless of what that help is. Yes, I've heard stories about fellow hams selling junk equipment and telling the unknowing new ham it works perfectly. However, these are very, very rare. This is really why I encourage you to seek out assistance....a buddy if you will and go from there.

Oh...one more option I want to throw out there to you. Some ham radio vendors offer pre-owned equipment or even open-box equipment on their websites. In some cases, these items may be sold As-Is, and in some cases the customer is given about a week to fully test and verify the equipment works with return options if it doesn't. Finally, also look at options for manufacture re-conditioned or repacked models. Check out DXStore.com for their selection of ICOM repacked equipment. With these repacked items you get a warranty and peace of mind the items were tested and certified directly by ICOM.

To wrap things up, ham radio on a budget is very much doable. It's doable when you know exactly what it is you want from the hobby and then can directly apply that when you begin seeking out the equipment necessary to build your first ham shack. Unfortunately, only YOU can really determine what it is you want from this hobby. However, once you know that key information....please then reach out to your local club, to a ham radio forum (hamradioforum.net is one of the best) and if all else fails, drop me a line. If I can't personally answer your question, I'll help you get the answers you need.

Featured Website Segment

- This month's featured website segment is not about any one specific website. This episode's website segment is your own amateur radio club website. What??? You don't belong to a club? Why not? Yea I know...some clubs seem to be stuck in a low gear and are resistant to changing gears. But why not join that club and try to make a difference? But I digress....

Visit your amateur radio club's website and take a look around. What do you see? Is it inviting? Is it informational? Is it current? If a new ham or someone interested in the hobby were to find your club's website, would they easily be able to learn when and where meetings are held? Would they easily be able to determine how to join? Would they gain an understanding of specifically what your club offers its members?

Finally, does your club's website reflect the attitude of Come one, come all. New hams, old hams, hams that know code, hams that don't know code, HF hams, Contesting Hams....we want you and we welcome you? I really encourage you to sit back and think about that for a moment.

Now...here's the action item for you. After you have taken time to look over your club's website....think about the questions I just asked you and especially think about the last point. Then make a plan and contact your club's webmaster and ask him or her to consider making the necessary changes.

I'm asking this simply because our hobby is missing out on some very important opportunities. Whether we like it or not, ham radio is now in the information age and I'm glad to say I think it is surviving very well. This is not a doom and gloom message I'm trying to relay here. This is simply just an opportunity to have all of you, my loyal listeners take a look at your club's website and encourage them to spruce it up a bit.

Encourage your club to look into social media. With the club leadership's permission, volunteer to setup and run a Facebook page or a Twitter account on behalf of your club. Whether you believe it or not, there is lost potential for not only your club....but also the entire hobby if we don't capitalize on social media. I'm not talking about the internet

replacing ham radio and trust me, I'm also tired of reading the Twitter comments (mostly from non-hams) that compare Twitter to the ham radio of yesterday. Twitter will never be the ham radio of yesterday, today or tomorrow. But it, like Facebook, the new Google+ and many other social media platforms WILL help get our message out to new and prospective hams.

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Featured Gadget Segment

Amateur Radio is all about gadgets. Some gadgets may directly relate to amateur radio and some may not. However, in most cases the featured gadget will at the very least be something that may help you in some capacity around the shack.

Our featured gadget for this episode is something I mentioned in a post over on Google+. By the way, Google+ is a new social network very similar to Facebook but without the farms, the mafia and other distractions. Anyway, if you would like an invite to Google+ just drop me an email. I'll give you my email address at the end of the show.

Anyway, I had uploaded a large portion of my QSL collection to Google+. I had commented that when I receive a QSL card I scan it and I upload it to Facebook and Google+, but I also add it to my digital picture frame.

I received one of those digital picture frames for Christmas a few years ago. It set behind my desk for a few months and I got the bright idea to use it to display my QSL cards. So each QSL card I receive I scan it and add it to the memory card that plugs into the digital frame. When I'm in my shack, I switch it on and it will scroll through all my QSL cards. Every now and then I'll glance over at it and see an image of a QSL card that brings back memories of that QSO. I know I have many QSL cards from listeners of the podcast. I hope to add many, many more to my collection when we get the chance to work each other on the air.

These digital picture frames have come down in price and if you have one laying around and you don't know what to do with it. Then I hope this segment gave you some ideas.

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Ham Adventures Segment

Since returning from vacation I've mostly been off the air. For almost two weeks now, we've had strong afternoon summer thunderstorms move in to the area. I've kept my antennas disconnected for obvious reasons. The weather forecasters are predicting another week of this. So I'm hopeful to take advantage of some time on Saturday before the storms move in to get on the air.

Also, a few months ago it was time to get a new car. I don't mind saying that I'm somewhat of a victim of habit. The Ford Escape worked well for us and we opted to get another. With my work schedule and the long vacation, I have yet to reinstall my APRS rig in this new Escape. I'm hopeful to also get this done in the next few weeks.

So while I haven't done much in the form of amateur radio and operating, I do have a lot on my list of things to do. I'm confident the list will get completed in due time and of course will be a fun time while doing so.

One thing I did manage to accomplish was to move my podcast recording setup over closer to my ham station setup. Before it was about 12 feet away, now it is about 3. I will eventually run an audio line from my transceiver into my mixer. This will be useful for many things. I'll easily be able to record various audio sounds so I can incorporate those into the podcast to demonstrate how the various digital modes sound. Also while spinning the dial late at night if I come across any signals that sound "out of this world" I can quickly record. Of course I'm kidding...or am I?

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Mailbag

Mail goes here

None

Before I close out this episode, I would like to introduce you to a new amateur radio podcast I've recently discovered. Have you heard of Ham Nation? The Ham Nation podcast is the latest venture into the world of podcasting/netcasting from TWiT, that's Leo Laporte This week in tech netcast network. Anyway, Ham Nation is hosted by none other than Bob Heil, K9EID and Gordon West, WB6NOA. They are into their 8th episode.

Now it's a much higher level of produced podcast than the practical amateur radio podcast. I think the pockets are a little deeper over there. The episodes are provided in both audio only and video for those of you who want to see what you are hearing.

While I've only watched a couple of episodes, I'm sure Ham Nation will reach a large audience of both current hams as well as those interested in the hobby. According to what I heard in episode 8, even Leo Laporte is studying for his ticket and if you follow any of the TWiT Network programs you've probably heard about the Brick TWiT house Leo is building. In that Brick TWiT house will be a ham radio station and amateurs are invited to stop by and operate from it. Perhaps if I ever get back out to the bay area for work, I'll stop in myself and operate from the TWiT ham shack. You can visit the Ham Nation website at twit.tv/hn

Well this wraps another episode of The Practical Amateur Radio Podcast. We will return again with episode 45 hopefully sometime in August.

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Until next time, 73 to all from KD0BIK.

This has been The Practical Amateur Radio Podcast. The Practical Amateur Radio Podcast is written and produced by Jerry Taylor. You may contact Jerry by email at kd0bik@arrl.net or by visiting his website at www.myamateurradio.com. The practical amateur radio podcast and myamateurradio.com are protected under the Creative Commons license. Please see myamateurradio.com for details.

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