

TIPS FOR BUYING USED RADIO EQUIPMENT

EVERY ONCE AND A WHILE The need arises to buy a new piece of ham equipment... It might be because you have just acquired your license or perhaps because of a license up-grade or any of the many other reasons hams buy and sell radio equipment. While there are many new quality HF radios on the commercial market ranging from just below \$800.00 up to \$13,000.00 dollars many times for any number of reasons we are not always in a position to run out and purchase a new radio.

Enter the used radio market where we can often get more features in a radio for far less money. In addition many older radios are standouts for both their performance and longevity throughout the years. However the used market while seemingly very attractive does have its pitfalls. However you as the purchaser by being well informed can limit or in many of cases eliminate the hazards of purchasing used equipment.

So before you run out and buy a radio only to find out a week later that its not what you wanted or isn't working properly, take a breath, slow down and do some home work.

When buying any radio it helps to know exactly what you want. So some thought beforehand helps to narrow the field of possibilities and reduce some confusion before you begin your search. What do you actually want to use the radio for, band coverage, modes of operation, power output and fixed or mobile based to name a few? In many cases you can find a one radio fits all such as the IC 7000 and its siblings the Icom706 family of radios. Small enough to use for portable or mobile operations and feature rich enough to be used as a base station. If you enjoy CW it's hard to beat the receiver and CW performance of the older Kenwood TS-930S. Or how about the ICOM 756 Pro III currently selling for less than half of its original price? If you feel you don't need the WARC bands a Kenwood TS-130 might fit the bill. Do you want to employ some of the digital modes in your ham activities? Well then a radio that has a data output jack will allow you to run all of the modes USB, CW, FM, AM and the digital modes with out having to unplug the microphone to use the radio in the various modes. Most importantly, what is your budget? Experience has shown me that a careful buyer can get a very clean, fully functional HF rig for as little as \$250.00 to \$300.00. It just takes some careful planning and perhaps a couple of compromises here and there. Once having identified the equipment that will fulfill your needs, it is possible find reviews on the internet and to see if those reviews were favorable or not. The idea here is to collect as much information about a particular radio before actually starting your search for that new rig.

Options abound when looking for a new rig, Private sale, dealer, hamfest, ebay and of course the internet. Each one has its pros and cons. Some of the pit falls to be considered when purchasing use equipment are: The radio in question may have been repaired or modified and the work many have been poorly done. Obviously the used equipment will be older than a new rig and may not be as reliable. However while it's nice to buy a new rig many times the cost of a new radio can not be justified.

Therefore purchasing used gear within a given budget will allow you to buy a better radio than if you were purchasing a new radio. Buying used will most likely mean that there will be no guarantees, and if the radio has changed hands many times there will be no accurate information regarding the radio's history. So lets look at some of the disadvantages and advantages of buying used gear.

PRIVATE SALE: The price may be lower. The current owner may be the first or second owner of the radio and knows its history.

Perhaps it is or was owned a non-smoker or the radio was used as a backup rig or perhaps not used heavily. Or he may just be looking to sell the radio and not selling it because it has become problematic.

He may be a friend or a club associate and may let you use the rig for a week before actually paying for it. On the other hand he may be unknown to you and his level of honesty may not be known and the reliability of the gear may not be honestly presented.

DEALER: Since the dealer has a reputation to uphold the equipment may be exactly as described. Most dealers will supply some form of warranty, usually 30 days. A nice dealer feature is If he doesn't have what you want he can put you on a waiting list or may have something other to offer. The only disadvantage is due to shipping and dealer profits and taxes the price will most likely be higher than other sources.

HAMFESTS: Here you can examine the equipment, question its history and even may be able to try the radio out. Prices are generally lower than via a dealer or the internet and you will most likely pay no taxes while you get to take the radio home with you. Just keep in mind that just as there are unscrupulous sellers on the internet they can also be found at hamfests however to a lesser degree.

EBAY: While there is a large selection of equipment available here, the disadvantages far outweigh the advantages. You will be buying the radio sight unseen. Often with a disclaimer and no possibility for a return of the equipment. Ebay sellers have come up with several ways to try to gain your confidence with out actually saying they will stand behind the sale. On many occasions equipment can sell for a premium price often within 15% of the original selling price. And most importantly Ebay abounds with schemers and scammers trying to fleece you out of your money. So if going the Ebay route thoroughly research the equipment and the seller.

OTHER INTERNET SOURCES: There are many places offering used radios for sale on the internet. Doing a search for used ham radio equipment will turn up a dozen or more web sites that you can browse for your favorite gear. Prices here will generally be lower than from a dealer or on Ebay but somewhat higher than you would pay at a hamfest. The vast majority of offerings are from licensed amateur radio operators. Once again you will be buying sight unseen and most likely without any warranties.

TIPS FOR GETTING A GOOD WORKING RIG: When buying a radio at a hamfest or from a local party and the radio is physically available for an inspection the following tips should insure that you are getting what you may be about to pay for. Before you looking at a new radio do some research and know its features prior to examining it. What should I look for in a used radio? As strange as it may sound when looking at a radio take a few items with you. A set of screwdrivers will enable you to remove the outer cases and inspect the interior of the radio. Once inside

look for signs of staining and the odor of cigarette smoke. Any burned areas of the chassis or components? If the radio has been modified or repaired there will most likely be signs of that activity. Do they have a professional, quality appearance? Does there appear to be any hidden damage. What is the general appearance of the radio externally as well as internally? Check all of the controls to see if they feel mechanically sound, turn smoothly and don't wobble, a sure sign of a bent control shaft. Once satisfied with your physical inspection reassemble the radio. Three additional items you should have brought with you are a length of coax, a dummy load and a power meter. Connect the dummy load and power meter to the radio, provide a source of power and turn the radio on. Run the radio through as many checks as you can with this set-up. Check the band switching and power output on all bands using all the primary modes. (SSB, CW, FM, AM,). Do all of the dial lights work, how about the power, swr, and s meter/s ? You get the idea. Now remove the dummy load and take your last piece of test equipment, a 25 to 30 foot piece of wire and use it as a receiving antenna. Once again tune the bands in the various modes to be sure that the receiving circuits and all other receiving functions work properly. Check all the controls and features of the radio to be sure that they work to your satisfaction. Be assured that an honest seller will not object to you performing these tests. Just tell him that you are from the show me state , Hi Hi.

SERVICING: When buying a used radio servicing is another important factor. However reliable equipment is today there is always the possibility that something will go wrong. Many manufacturers no longer service older radios and parts may also be a problem. However there are any number of qualified technicians that earn a living servicing these radios for a reasonable fee. (Their fees are usually less then what you would pay for a factory technician to have made the same repairs.)

Buying used amateur radio equipment can offer a very good alternate to purchasing a new radio. Most often providing a means of getting much better value for the money spent. While there are pitfalls, these can often be circumvented by using caution and being a smart, informed buyer. Just remember that while we are always looking for that great deal most often if it's too good to be true it probably is. WA2NTK