

QRP Philosophy

Often we take our Amateur Radio pastime a little too seriously. If someone else's idea of how to pursue QRP is not the same as our own, we get defensive and confrontational. I have seen this happen on the QRP reflectors, as well as in person. QRP means different things to different people.

Diversity

Each of us has a slightly different take on Amateur Radio and this is a good thing. It offers the possibility of expanding one's horizons when interacting with other QRPers. Left to our own narrow viewpoints Amateur Radio would stagnate.

QRP is often considered by mainstream ham radio as a group of arcane individuals who practice the esoteric art of CW. In fact, QRP is the fastest growing facet of ham radio. With the advent of low cost, high performance kit radios, thousands have flocked to the ranks of low power communications and become homebrew aficionados in the process. PSK31 has opened the HF bands to many newly licensed hams who have had little interest in our side of the hobby, fearing a lack of CW proficiency would prove fatal to their dreams of enjoying QRP.

New rigs like the Yaesu FT-817 have raised portable QRP operation to an art form for thousands (if sales records are accurate). The idea of using a tiny rig as a "pedestrian mobile" station has captured the imagination of the folks who hang out on the HFpack reflector. Many innovative ideas are discussed on this reflector, resulting in a very lively discussion group and an outstanding source of information on portable HF operation.

Our diversity is our strength. By encompassing many different methods of enjoying QRP we evolve and grow. This evolutionary process is vital to our survival if we are to attract new blood into ham radio.

What is QRP?

Strictly defined, QRP is the pursuit of ham radio at the 5-W level—nothing more, nothing less. While for some, QRP has become a lifestyle bordering on religion; it's still *just* an avocation. Many times non-QRP hams have been treated to a litany of reasons as to why QRP is "right" and high power (QRO) operation is "wrong." Nothing turns people off faster than having a fanatic get up in their face and collectively

tell them they are doing things wrong. Both are having fun. Neither is "wrong."

This concept extends even into the ranks of QRP itself. There are those who practice the "Minimalist Concept," which states that true QRP can only be accomplished by using the bare minimum of homebrew gear and wire antennas. Power for the radio is obtained via a solar charged battery or a small generator attached to the side of the hamster cage. Big beams, log periodics, rhombics and phased arrays are evil and not in keeping with the "True Spirit of QRP."

The counter argument is that QRP is a power level *only*, and efficient antennas level the playing field. Minimalist QRPers view all others as being heretics while non-minimalists view their counterparts as being totally out of step with reality.

There is no "right" or "wrong" here. How you choose to pursue QRP is your business. If it is fun and you enjoy your time on the air using the Minimalist Philosophy, that's great! If, on the other hand, you really can't get into the Minimalist Movement, then that's okay, too, as long as you're having fun doing QRP your way.

When QRP Isn't Enough

I know I'm going to take some heat for this topic, but it must be said. All grandiose, righteous, ostentatious motivation aside, there are those times when 5 W isn't going to work. In those instances there is nothing wrong or shameful about going to a higher power level. That's why we have linear amplifiers.

To be perfectly clear, the FCC mandates that we use the minimum power to effect and maintain communications. This doesn't mean that we need to run 1500 W to talk to a friend across town! Conversely, it also means that if we are in QSO with someone and they are having a problem copying our 5-W signals, then it would be perfectly justifiable to increase power a few decibels to reduce the difficult copy at the receiving end.

Skills

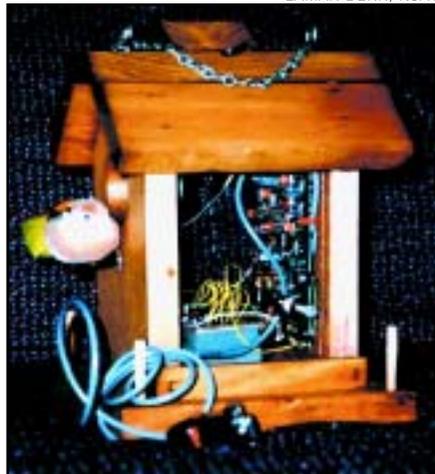
One of the first facts that a new QRPer has to face is, with a 13 dB power disparity between 5 and 100 W, special skills are vital for success. Developing and honing these skills is an ongoing process. Developing good listening skills is paramount. Listen to the DX pileup. Learn when the ebb and flow occurs, and get your call in where it will do the most good, instead of trying to go head-to-head with the wolf pack. Listen to how the DX operator is working stations and time your call so he can more easily pick your QRP signals out. Listening skills are developed after spending many, many hours in front of the radio.

Sending ultra-clean CW is a must. Don't try to send faster than you can copy. If you have a problem visualizing the characters as you send them, write down the basic QSO format first, so you don't make unnecessary mistakes, which saves time, embarrassment and confusion. To some this may mean using a CW keyboard. We are after flawless CW and if the CW keyboard is the answer, use it.

And in Conclusion. . .

Ours is a great pastime. We regularly show the world how to communicate, *and* we do it with only a few watts, much to the chagrin of the high power crowd. Theoretically we are all mature people who enjoy communicating via radio. Let's act that way. Honest—there is enough room in Amateur Radio for everyone. 

LAMAR DERK, N3AT



Kevin McCauley, KB3EJM, of East Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania, built the NJ QRP Club PSK Warbler kit into a bird house. The sides are plexiglass so its workings can be seen. Kevin added an AF amp so it "warbles" when in use. The bird on the front of the structure is perched on the AF volume control shaft. Kevin took the "Bird House Warbler" to Field Day, and the *Pocono Record*, the local newspaper, featured a photograph of this unique PSK transceiver as part of an article on Field Day.