

Editorial

Copping Licks

When I first started to play music, I was desperately trying to recreate the sounds that I heard on my favorite records. (For our younger readers, a “record” was a mechanical recording pressed onto a vinyl disk, which was played back using a device called a “record player.”) In order to understand what my favorite musicians were doing, I would often slow down the record player in an attempt to analyze and decipher what was happening. Pitch changes notwithstanding, it was one fairly effective way to unlock some of the mystery of my musical instrument.

There is a term among musicians called “copping licks.” Basically, it refers to trying to play something heard on a recording, while staying as true as possible to the original. While the idea of copping licks is more associated with traditional and non-classical forms of music, most learning begins with some type of imitation. In contesting as in music, imitation can be a powerful tool for learning technique.

When I first started contesting, I was a typical slow operator. I was oblivious to the value of each precious minute, and I wasted a lot of time with inefficient operating techniques. After seeing other operators in my area making much higher scores, I began to investigate their techniques. It wasn't long before I was trying to imitate them. I heard them sending faster, cutting out unnecessary information, and leaving very little time in between the elements of a QSO. It occurred to me that I should try to adopt some of these same techniques. What worked for them might work for me

as well. I started to cop some of their licks, and I saw my scores improve.

Copping licks has its limitations, and some musicians will roll their eyes when that “same old lick” is played. Music being a form of artistic expression, this is understandable. Likewise for contesters, no one can simply “clone” the operating technique of another operator, and expect identical results. Contests are fluid and dynamic, and the best operators have developed different techniques which are suited to different situations. The key is to learn and develop your own techniques, but copping a few licks from the masters can very instructive.

Beyond Copping Technique

Now that I have several years of operating under my belt, I find that I am still “copping licks” from some of the masters. What is different now is that I am looking beyond the operating technique, and looking towards the general attitude of some of the better operators. I'm discovering things about their mental approach, and how they handle challenging situations. I'm watching how they interact with the contesting community. I'm learning that they spend little time whining and complaining, and more time trying to overcome the next obstacle to their success. I'm finding out that the masters have a winning attitude, and most of them truly enjoy the experience of operating contests, win or lose. Finally, I am learning that they have a strong desire to give back to our community and help the game of contesting move forward. Among our community are many strong examples,

providing opportunities for learning that extend beyond the realm of contesting in my personal life. Imitation may be the sincerest form of flattery, but it's also a powerful tool for learning, given the proper examples.

In This Issue

We are pleased to bring you results of the July RTTY NAQP, as well as the August NAQP SSB (two months early) for 2013. The August CW NAQP scores will appear in the January/February issue as usual, along with the 2014 rules for the NAQPs and Sprints. WF7T describes the multioperating experience as K4TCG in the Tennessee QSO Party. K5ZD provides an update on WRTC-2014 preparations, describing the “dress rehearsal” 2013 station test. K6KYJ presents his personal view of the ARRL International DX Contest.

On the technical side, K1LI describes his “Tri-Mox” antenna, especially well-suited for DXpedition and portable use. W8WWV shows us how to build a rotator cage. ZL2HAM presents his **ViewProp** propagation analysis tool, which uses RBN spots to generate maps based on actual stations heard. Finally, VA7OJ provides an update on his receiver evaluation procedure.

Our regular columnists have cooked up their usual brew of great content, including the return of N4ZR with his popular “Software for Contesters” column. This month's *NCJ* Profile features W6SX, whose unique combination of old and new technology puts him into most every active contesters' log on a regular basis. We hope you'll enjoy this issue!