



It Seems to Us

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Techs on Ten

“Many Technician and Novice amateur licensees overlook the fact that they possess highly desirable operating privileges in the 10 meter band”

Owing to how it has evolved, the Amateur Radio licensing structure in the United States has some peculiarities. The FCC created the Technician and Novice classes of license in 1951, the former to encourage experimentation in the then-largely-unexplored frequency range above 220 MHz and the latter to serve as a temporary, one-time “learner’s permit” with very limited operating privileges. The privileges afforded by the two licenses did not even overlap. For a time it was possible to hold Novice and Technician licenses simultaneously, with different call signs! Eventually Techs gained access to 6 and 2 meters and in 1976 were granted Novice privileges. The Novice became a renewable license in 1978.

In 1987 the ARRL persuaded the FCC to adopt what we called Novice Enhancement — a modest expansion of privileges to allow Novices to join the mainstream of Amateur Radio. It might well have been called Technician Enhancement because the most lasting effect was the granting of 10 meter voice privileges to Techs, something the ARRL had sought since 1969. When it became possible in 1991 to obtain a Technician license without passing a Morse code test, the international Radio Regulations still required Morse ability for operation below 30 MHz so two “flavors” of the license class resulted: Technician with privileges above 30 MHz and Technician Plus with the additional HF privileges of the Novice. The distinction disappeared in 2007 when Morse testing was dropped from the requirements for any class of amateur license and all Technicians immediately gained the Novice HF privileges.

Today about half of the radio amateurs in the United States hold Technician and Novice Class licenses — mostly Technician, since the Novice license is no longer available to new applicants and Novices now constitute less than 2% of the total amateur population. The Technician license is now the entry level into Amateur Radio yet it offers full privileges above 50 MHz — in many ways the most challenging part of the radio spectrum — along with the use of up to 200 watts of PEP output power for SSB voice at 28.3-28.5 MHz, RTTY and data at 28.0-28.3 MHz and CW at 28.0-28.5, 21.025-21.200, 7.025-7.125, and 3.525-3.600 MHz. Those are nice privileges, but not many Techs are using them.

Why not? There could be many reasons. Because of its origins there is a tendency still to think of the Technician as a VHF/UHF license. A new amateur’s first exposure to on-the-air operating is likely to be a 2 meter repeater, many of which these days can connect to distant repeaters via the Internet; if you can talk to Australia with your VHF handheld, putting together an HF station to do the same thing may seem less appealing. Sunspots were not all that healthy in 2007 when thousands of Techs first experienced 10 meter operation, so they may have been disappointed. Techs who

are interested in HF operation tend to upgrade quickly to General and Amateur Extra so they can explore all of the HF bands.

But we suspect the main reason is inertia. We all tend to fall into grooves, doing what we already know how to do rather than trying something new.

So here’s a challenge for our Technician (and Novice) readers: Get on 10 meters. If you don’t have a rig, see if you can borrow one from a friend. Lots of hams have spare gear lying around that they would be glad to see put to good use. It doesn’t have to be the latest and greatest to get you on the air; practically any HF transceiver made in the last 40 years will do fine.

Antennas are easy. A quarter wave vertical is only about 8 feet tall; a half wave dipole is only about 16 feet from end to end; a quad loop can be made with 33 feet of wire. If you’ve never made an antenna and don’t know where to start, ask a friend to show you how. (Note to club officers: this would be a good topic for a meeting program.)

Not that interested in SSB? No problem. The best kept secret about Technician operating privileges on 10 meters is that you can use RTTY and data on all of the same frequencies as Generals and Extras. There’s a variety of digital data modes to explore, and lots of RTTY activity during contests and DXpeditions.

And while Morse code is no longer a licensing requirement, don’t count out CW as worth a try. With CW you’re not limited to 10 meters — you can explore 15, 40 and 80 meters as well! Purists may cringe, but Morse code readers and keyboards will get you on CW and let you make contacts.

Human nature being what it is, lots of hams are more interested in learning the code now than when it was forced on them. If your motivation is to be able to operate CW and not just to pass an unwanted test, skip practicing at slow speeds and go directly to listening to characters being sent fast enough that you can hear the rhythm and won’t be tempted to count the individual dits and dahs. Bad habits are hard to break so it’s better to not develop them in the first place.

See you on 10!

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