

Cool Clubs and Hot Goodies

One need not look very far to realize that interest in QRP is growing by leaps and bounds. Indeed, the numerous QRP clubs, projects, on-the-air activities, and ever-expanding array of hot new goodies you can enjoy on a limited budget is incredible! Looking from that “maximum enjoyment at minimum cost” standpoint, this month’s column highlights the top clubs of the day, plus some exciting new accessories for QRP fun. If you have been thinking about spicing up your usual ham activities—being a big fish in a little pond rather than vice-versa—QRP is the answer and this column is your guide. Let’s begin with details about the major QRP clubs.

Clubs for QRPers

Traditionally, QRPers thrive on building kits, sharing ideas, and experimenting with circuits, and our leading QRP clubs support that interest with some terrific quarterly magazines (photo 1). Indeed, every issue of these QRP-dedicated publications is filled with “build ‘em” details on neat mini-rigs, accessories, and antennas. Between building gear and operating in some of the contests also outlined in the magazines, club members stay enthusiastic, bond together, and have a ball. If you want to really enjoy life in the QRP lane, join one or two clubs and share the fun. Which one(s)? They all are winners!

The **G QRP Club** of Great Britain is well known and endorsed by low-power enthusiasts worldwide. In fact, many of the homebrew projects described in the club’s quarterly magazine, *Sprat*, have become commercially produced kits of good performance. A membership/subscription is well worth the investment, and it is available in the U.S. through Bill Kelsey, N8ET, of Kanga U.S. for \$15 a year. Kanga UK and Kanga U.S., incidentally, produce some cool little kits (such as the FOXX III mini-transceiver discussed in the June 2002 “QRP” column, plus other items we hope to review here in the future). You can reach Bill at Kanga U.S., 3521 Spring Lake Dr., Findlay, OH 45840; telephone 419-423-4604; on the web: <www.bright.net/~kanga/kanga/kanga@bright.net>.

Another big-time QRP club that has been around for many years and continues to grow like crazy is the **QRP ARCI** (QRP Amateur Radio Club International). This club sponsors several on-the-air contests plus an outstanding awards program, such the famed 1000 mile-per-watt award you can get after making only one good cross-country QSO at the 1 or 2 watt level. The club’s magazine, *QRP Quarterly*, is balanced sort of like *QST*, with projects, circuits, contests, member activities, milli-watting news, etc. Membership is \$15 per year (U.S.), and goes to QRP ARCI, Mark Millburn, KQ01, 117 E. Philip St., Des Moines, IA 50315-4114, or <www.qrparci.org/us2signup>.

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Photo 1— Nothing brings home the camaraderie of QRP like membership in three or four QRP clubs. Their quarterly magazines are filled with thought-whetting circuits and homebrew projects attractive to amateurs of all backgrounds and ages.



Photo 2— The very popular and widely acclaimed LDG Electronics Z11 Automatic Antenna Tuner. Unit measures 1.5”H × 5”W × 7”D, matches impedances of 6 to 800 ohms, and operates from 13 volts DC or a pair of 9 volt batteries for stand-alone activities. Note SWR-indicating LEDs on front panel. Nice!

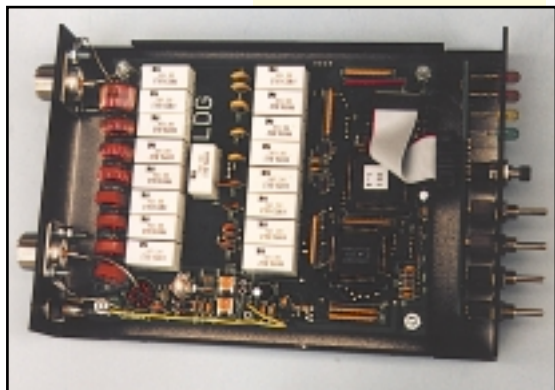


Photo 3— Inside view of the LDG Z11 reveals multiple capacitors and inductors that are switched into its “L”-type tuning circuit by latching relays which retain their settings even after power is removed. Updated (MARK II?) specs reveal all Z11s can operate from two 9 volt batteries and handle up to 60 watts of power.

If you enjoy homebrewing to any reasonable (or unreasonable!) degree, you simply must join **NorCaL**, the North California QRP Club, and check out its quarterly magazine, *QRPP*. Every issue is loaded with details on hot kits and homebrew projects, plus member-initiated expansions and modifications galore. This magazine is dink heaven, and NorCaL kits are top notch. Subscriptions are \$15 a year for U.S., \$20 DX, and go to Jim Cates, 3241 Eastwood Road, Sacramento, CA 95821.

Next in line is the **New Jersey QRP Club**, a newer club that is coming up strong. The club launched its own magazine, *QRP Homebrewer*, a couple of years ago. Like NorCaL, the NJQRP Club is heavy into building goodies and kits. Membership/subscriptions are \$15 per year U.S., \$20 DX, and go to George Heron, N2APB, 2419 Feather Mae Court, Forest Hill, MD 21050, or e-mail: <n2apb@amsat.org>.

Do you like contests and mainly enjoy the operating side of QRP? Take a close look at the **Colorado QRP Club** and its magazine, *The Low Down*. It is quite interesting and includes short articles from some sharp QRP DXers to boot. Subscriptions are \$12 a year and go to CQC, P.O. Box 371883, Denver, CO 80237-1883. The club's website is <www.cqc.org>.

Several smaller yet equally active clubs that focus more on local-area activities (and may expand or "go nationwide") also warrant mention now so that you will recognize their names at a later date. These include the Arizona ScQRPions, The St. Louis (MO) Club, and The North Georgia (NoGA) Club. Finally, our vote for the most up-and-coming and promising QRP-affiliated group of the day goes to Bonnie Crystal's HF Pack Troops. Details on these energetic, creative, and very active low-power portable operators was included in our October and November 2002 "World of Ideas" columns. (You do save back issues, don't you?) You can also check out this group at <www.hfpack.com>.

Now let's shift gears and peek preview some blowout new goodies for QRP—and more!

LDG-Z11—MARK II?

You probably have heard of the LDG-Z11 (the most popular accessory going for Yaesu's FT-817), but no, an official MARK II version has not been added to the line. The LDG-Z11 does, however, represent LDG's second generation of low-power automatic antenna tuners, and it also sports some recent performance upgrades worthy of special recognition. Before delving into the upgrades, however, let's take a brief memory-refreshing tour of this little marvel (photos 2 and 3).

Basically, the Z11 is a microprocessor-controlled "auto tuner" similar to the type used in many modern transceivers, except it has a wider impedance matching range and uses latching relays to select various L-C values. Specifically, it will match loads of 6 to 800 ohms or SWRs up to 10:1! The Z11 can be used as a fully automatic, semi-automatic, or manual antenna tuner; it has unbalanced/SO-239-type inputs and outputs; and works with coax-fed dipoles, beams, verticals, etc. An optional 4:1 LDG balun can be added for tuning a balanced or ladderline-fed antenna like a multiband doublet.

When used in its fully automatic mode, the unit senses SWR and selects one of its 130,000 L-C combinations any time an antenna's SWR is 3.0:1 or higher. In semi-automatic mode, the Z11 tunes for a low SWR (1.5:1 or less) when you press its front panel's "tune" button. In manual mode, you watch the Z11's SWR-indicating LEDs and tap its momentary "Cap" and "Ind" toggle switches to yield an optimum (near 1.0:1) SWR.



Photo 4—The W4RT Electronics One Touch Tune mod interconnecting a Z11 and FT-817. Mod is ideal for walk-and-talk HF'n where SWR changes as you move. Additional One Touch Tune modules for interfacing LDG's AT-11MP and RT-11 tuners with an FT-897 or TS-50 are also being developed by W4RT Electronics.

The big attraction of this little auto tuner has to be its use of latching relays to "switch in" different capacitors and coils to achieve a low SWR. That's because once tuned, the Z11 does not require "keep alive" or "maintenance voltage" like regular automatic tuners (latching relays hold their position until reset). This means you can even switch off or unplug the Z11's DC power cable and it will still hold its tune setting (until you reset or retune it). Combine that fact with the Z11's recently upgraded ability to operate from an 11 to 20 volt source (two regular 9 volt batteries wired in series), and this tuner's go-anywhere portability really shines. This is big news for campers and pedestrian mobileers, as the tuner can oper-

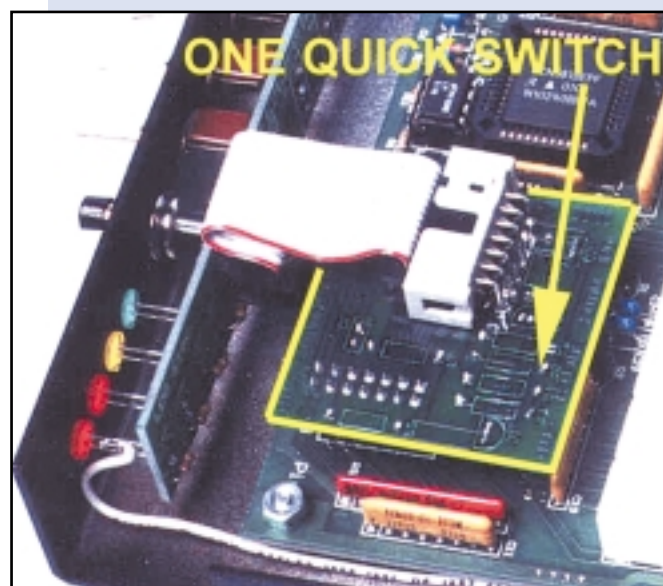


Photo 5—The W4RT One Quick Switch mod installed in a Z11. Unit allows the Z11 to stay in the "off" mode, yet briefly awaken anytime a remote Tune command is sensed. Mod is handy when backpacking and reaching gear is inconvenient.



Photo 6— Want a super-sounding SSB signal for portable QRP work? Need an extra hand for HF pack'n? Heil Sound's new Traveler headset with boom mic fills the bill in high style, and optional plug-in cables let it work with the FT-817, FT-897, or IC-706. Rock 'n Roll Radio Supreme!

ate stand-alone style for “walk and talk HF'n,” plus two 9 volt batteries will power it for more than 500 tune cycles.

After extensive field tests and study, LDG also upgraded the Z11's maximum intermittent (SSB or CW) power rating from 30 to 60 watts. It thus qualifies as a handy auto tuner for low- and medium-power applications alike. No production changes were involved here, so both upgrades apply to all Z11s regardless of age. Everyone wins! In addition, the Z11 now has two higher power cousins: a 150 watt desktop version AT-11MP with a cross-needle SWR meter, and a 125 watt remote-mount version RT-11. A mini-review of the RT-11, incidentally, will be included in my next column on mobile operation. Watch for it!

How does the Z11 stack up in “typical portable operations? I've used it with my FT-817 and a haphazardly adjusted “Buddipole” (described in my October 2002 “World of Ideas” column) to operate not two, but three bands without tweaking, and it worked great. I even wrangled some DX QSOs with the lash-up. I am also continuously impressed by the amazing flexibility this pocket-size auto tuner adds to any rig—not just an FT-817. I've used it with a NorCal 38 Special and a Kenwood TS-50 (at 10 or 50 watts only), and with a multiband G5RV, and it makes operating from anywhere a cinch. Try one. You'll like it!

Z11 tuners and information are available from LDG Electronics, Inc., 1445 Parran Road, P.O. Box 48, St. Leonard, MD 20685; telephone 410-586-2177 (or 877-890-3003) for orders, or via <www.ldgelectronics.com>.

Before leaving our discussion of the Z11, I should also highlight two popular support items (one brand new) for this tuner from W4RT Electronics. First is the One Touch Tune module which interfaces an FT-817 and Z11 to give instant autotuning (regardless of mode) by pressing a remote button (photo 4). Second is the new One Quick Switch mod which can be installed in a Z11

(photo 5). The latter mod lets you leave the Z11's power switch off for zero battery drain, yet briefly “wakes up” the Z11 for autotuning when you tap its Tune button. Both mods are ideal for battery-powered pedestrian mobile pursuits, and more details on them are available at <www.w4rt.com>.

New Heil Microphone

Bob Heil, K9EID, has also been quite busy pumping out some fantastic audio-enhancing goodies for the FT-817 and other QRP/battery-friendly transceivers. Leading that list is his new Traveler headset shown in photos 6 and 7. This



Photo 7— As Rhonda, KG4FVL, demonstrates here, Heil Sound's new Traveler makes a dandy chest mic for walking or mobiling when worn around the neck with its mic swiveled up to lip level. Its full-bodied audio response sounds great on FM, too!



Photo 8— This unique new Squeekey key is handmade by Englmar Wenk, DK1WE, in Germany and is only 1 inch wide by 3 inches long. It sports angled levers, round fingerpieces, and works great with horizontal, vertical, or lateral finger movements. Paddle is rugged with a self-protecting design and is well suited to handheld or off-desk use.

little treat is a single earphone with a swivel boom mic and an in-line push-to-talk switch with up/ down tuning buttons. The Traveler's cable terminates in an 8-pin ICOM plug which mates with sockets on optional cables to fit an FT-817, IC-706, or other Kenwood, Alinco, or ICOM rigs. After studying the headset, I asked Bob if he named it the Traveler because it could move around for portable work or because it could travel between rigs. Bob cheerfully replied "Yes!" Enough said.

In checking out the Traveler we found it has a new wide-range electret mic element that delivers exceptionally full-bodied audio with enough output to drive even the most finicky mic input. Use this headset with an "HF plus VHF" rig such as the FT-817 or IC-706, and you can have awesome transmit audio on both 20 meter SSB and 2 meter FM. It rocks! With a slight adaptation, the Traveler also makes a dandy mobile mic. Just wear it like a chest mic with its

headband around your neck and the mic swiveled up to your lips. You can clip the Traveler's PTT box to your shirt, or Bob even has an optional ergonomically designed footswitch with dual circuits and cables (one for rig, one for amplifier) you can place on the floor.

To order the Traveler and/or learn more about it and Heil Sound's other goodies, contact Heil Sound Ltd., 5800 North Illinois, Fairview Heights, IL 62208; telephone 618-257-3000 or <www.heilsound.com>.

DK1WE's "Squeekey" Key

Remember the little Squeekey key made by Englmar Wenk, DK1WE, and introduced in my December 2002 holiday gifts column? I recently put it to the test in a couple of QRP contests and while mobile, and found it to be terrific (photos 8 and 9). I even connected this "QRP Key" to my higher power big rig and it worked great there, too!

If this paddle looks confusing to you, the brass strips on each side are the levers and those round, black pieces at their ends are fingerpieces. Dot/dash contacts are set into Teflon® insulators below the levers, and adjacent screws (with heads near lever centers) set gap or travel. This unique, self-protecting design makes Squeekey ideal for carrying in a shirt pocket, using "handheld style," and going mobile. Squeekys are handmade and available direct from Englmar Wenk, DK1WE, Hubenring 4, D-88048 Friedrichshafen, Germany; or <www.morsekey.com>. Try one and spice up your CW life!

On that note, the curtain falls on another month's column (ouch!). Keep on hamming with low power, have fun, and may the force of good signals be with you! 73, Dave, K4TWJ



Photo 9— We often take Squeekey mobiling, as it fits perfectly into the gearshift position-display window on my Camaro, and probably many other vehicles. A thin piece of clear double-sided tape on the key's base also holds it solid to a rig case or other surface. Paddle is fitted with cable and 1/8 inch stereo plug for instant use.