



CW Today

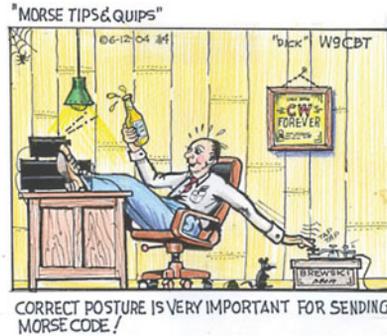
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In the first edition of *CW Today* published in October issue of *Amateur Radio*, we looked at the benefits of CW and some of the reasons it is making a comeback as an amateur radio communication mode of choice with many operators even being exclusively active on CW. For others, CW is a regular option for portable, low power, rare DX only available on CW or contests. This month we will take a look at how old timers and newcomers alike can get on the air and find activities appropriate to your various levels of ability.

Beginners

If you are new to CW or don't know the "Morse Code" at all, you'll be pleased to know that these days it is easier than ever to learn. If you have a computer, download free software by G4FON; a web search will easily locate it. The key is to use it for just 5 or 10 minutes every day, so that short term memory enters to your long term memory. Learning Morse once or twice a week with a one hour session is not the way to go. It has to be a little, without too much stress, and at least once a day.

In the past, many wrong methods of learning Morse were used, especially in parts of the western world. Some big mistakes were to start learning too many characters at once, and to learn them at such a slow speed that the mind thinks of dots and dashes and not the sound of dah-dah or dah-di-dah etc. G4FON software uses the right method of teaching you character by character at a proper character speed, but with



long spaces between the letters for you to think and remember. The program is also good for those who have already mastered CW but need more practice before going on air, simulating contacts with noise or fading etc.

Learning CW is like learning to speak when you were a baby. At first, distinguishing the sounds around you, and learning to mimic them, and experimenting yourself. Dada, Mama. Bay-bee. The more you learn, the faster the process accelerates and the easier it all becomes. Suddenly everything falls into place. The key to learning CW is to enjoy it, a little each day. Later, vary your experience by including some tuning around the bands or even better, with the online website Twente University SDR. This is because that receiver, free and easy to listen to in your web browser, is located in Europe which is awash with CW "rubber stamp" contacts and all speeds and styles of CW, hand sent, including electronic and semi-automatic bug keyers.

Old Timers

For Old Timers, those who are already fluent in the language and operation of CW, who may have

tuned around the bands in years gone by and found them quiet and concluded that CW was no longer popular Down Under, here is some news. The Sunday morning CW Net on 7025 kHz between 10 am and midday Eastern Time had record check in numbers recently. It is a good place to brush up your skills, meet other old timers and speeds are generally 18 WPM or above. Also take a listen to the CW broadcast (QST) an hour earlier on 7022.5 or 14022.5 usually sent from VK4QC with 21022.5 for those outside Australia in the Pacific region.

If you would like to also welcome newcomers to the mode and assist them in having some practice QSOs, please be prepared to slow down for newcomers and tune around higher up the band. A good place to find both old timers, former professional radio officers and also those just starting out, is the national VK CW Calling Frequency 7050 kHz with a simple "3 rule" Code of Conduct: Keep calls short, no more than 3 calls per 5 minute period, and QSY after establishing contact.

Band Plans

The 40 m amateur radio allocation in Region 3 is from 7000 to 7300, with VK being one of the fortunate places to have the entire allocation, although we're very limited in our maximum power and antenna restrictions compared to all our neighbours.

The most recent Band Plan for 40 m recommended by the International Amateur Radio Union and adopted by the Wireless

Institute of Australia for VK radio amateurs has acknowledged the growth of CW and with an expanded SSB section as broadcasters vacate band. Consequently 7000-7060 is now CW with 7040-7060 shared with narrow band data modes. SSB is now 7060-7300. Many of our neighbours have only 7000-7100 total allocation although they are allowed much higher power for Advanced license classes. 40 m is the most popular VK-VK band at all hours, as shown in surveys such as that conducted online and published in the *Amateur Radio* August edition.

On 80 m we are not so fortunate with our government having allowed only 3500-3700 with an additional small DX window 3776-3800. IARU Region 3 recommendation, but not currently allowed for us in VK, is 3500-3900. The CW exclusive section is rather narrow at 3500-3535, though CW is allowed shared with data and SSB at higher frequencies, and the CW practice beacon can be heard on 3699 kHz as a marker of the upper edge of our 80 m band. For DX and day time of course 30 m, 20 m, 17 m and 15 m are popular, though there is still much less activity than in Europe.

The bottom 10 kHz of each band are traditionally reserved for DX contacts. In the day time a contact between VK2 and VK6 would be considered DX on 80 m, but generally DX means long distance contacts beyond Australia. 25 kHz from band edge is traditionally high speed CW centre of activity. Slower speed CW takes place normally higher up the band between 40 and 60 kHz from band edge on most bands. Some of the popular QRP (low power) CW frequencies are traditionally 3560 (3530 in VK), 7030, 14060, 21060.

Crossing the Bridge

One of the obstacles to radio amateurs in Australia, aside

from the small population density and thus much lower amateur radio activity on our bands is the fact that we all speak the same language, English. This means that “rubber stamp” QSOs don’t really exist, and the jump from practising CW off-air to going on-air for those first QSOs is a daunting one. Someone is likely going to use long words in a “rag chew” telling you the details of the weather, his garden, or his rig set up.

In fact, in the past, many were those who only attempted one QSO and the experience was so negative or stressful that it was also their last. This is why a number of radio amateurs who love CW have all recently come together to look at solutions to make it easier for people to learn CW from scratch, to avoid wasting years with inefficient methods of learning, and to make the move to on-air QSO easy. The website VKCW.net provides much information to assist you in crossing the “great divide”.

Once you are ready to go on air and venture into your first QSO (radio contact) on CW, having a copy of essential Q codes in front of you, and a short list of commonly used abbreviations in CW, the best way to go would be to venture into “rubber stamp” style contacts. This is more than a simple signal report or contest exchange but is a simple formula that will put you at ease and set the pace for your QSO partner.

First, set the pace. Send a CQ at a speed a little slower than you are prepared for someone to answer you at. If you can receive 12 WPM, send your CQ at 10 WPM. A good place to try out is around 7028 kHz, as this is the FISTS centre of activity frequency, one of the popular CW clubs that are very welcoming to newcomers. It is also in the part of the more popular 40 m band area used by slower speed, SOTA and QRP activities. Or you could call on 7050 then “QSY up 1” after you get an answer.

Rubber Stamp QSO

Here is the popular format of a “rubber stamp” QSO, which provides excellent practice, is easy to master and gives a lot of information in a fairly standard format. It also sets the pattern for the more experienced station which may answer your call and will make for a more relaxing and stress free QSO as you are less worried about missing things. It is a good idea to copy this format down and use it as your own template, naturally using your call sign and that of your QSO partner.

First, as mentioned earlier, you set the pace.

Find a clear frequency, and send “?”.

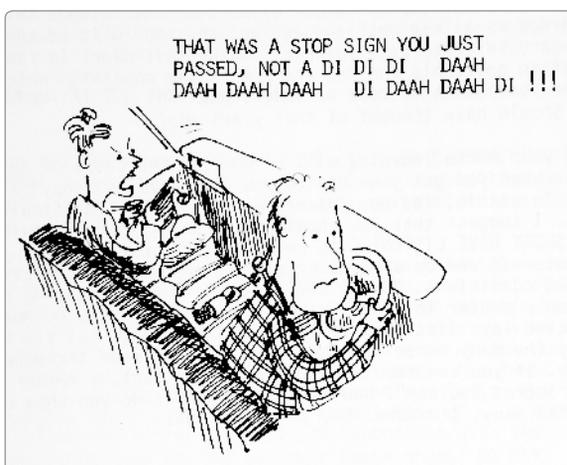
If no response, send “QRL?” this means “Are you busy (is this frequency in use)?”.

If it is still quiet, is it safe to call CQ.

If you use the 7050 Calling Frequency, you don’t need to ask if the frequency is in use, it is a calling frequency, you can just go ahead and call. Within VK since its launch at the end of July, no QSO have taken place there, so worry not, go ahead and call:

CQ CQ CQ DE VK5EEE
VK5EEE VK5EEE K

If no one answers you, tune around a little in case anyone is off frequency, and if still



nothing, try calling again. If on the calling frequency do this no more than 3 times within 5 minutes to honour the gentleman's code of conduct established by some 40 m users thus far, but on other frequencies you can make calls as long and as often as you like. Once you have a response, if it is on 7050, answer thus:

VK4QC DE VK5EEE QSY UP 1 K

Then tune to 7051 and continue as below, or if you were already on another frequency such as 7028, here would be your first over in a "rubber stamp" QSO:

VK4QC DE VK5EEE GM (or GA, GE) TNX FER CALL = (dah-di-di-di-dah) UR RST 579 57N 57N (repeat 3 times, N is short for 9) = QTH ADELAIDE ADELAIDE = OP (or NAME) IS LOU LOU LOU HW? (How do you copy me?) VK4QC DE VK5EEE KN (over and please no one else break in). Thanks can be TNX or TKS. FER is short for FOR in CW.

Your 2nd and final "over" in a "rubber stamp" QSO will look like this:

VK4QC DE VK5EEE R (only send R if you received all the information, otherwise say "PSE RPT QTH? K" or "PSE RST AGN? K") TNX PETER = HR RIG 100W ES (& in CW) ANT IS DIPOLE UP 5M = WX SUNNY TEMP 22C (optional weather info) = PSE QSL VIA BURO (if you will be sending a QSL card) = TNX FER FB QSO ES HPE CUAGN 73 VK4QC DE VK5EEE SK

Naturally if you received a poor report from the other station, you won't try to tell them all about the weather and can make your final over shorter than above.

After the other station sends their final, you can just end with a

dit-dit :-). All done, and by sending what was written out in front of you, and following the standard "rubber stamp" QSO format, you have appeared professional without any sweat. More tips are available under QRS and Tips menus on the VKCW.net website.

Essential Q-Codes

Every CW operator needs to know the three most important Q codes: QRT, QSY, QRL. If you hear QRT this means "stop sending" -- don't ask why, just stop if you ever hear this. Probably you are on a frequency already in use or disturbing an existing radio contact. Some of our bands are shared with other services on a secondary basis and we must not cause interference to them. QSY means "change your frequency". Again if you hear this, move off frequency or to the frequency given, e.g. QSY UP 1 means go 1 kHz up. QRL means "I am busy" or, more commonly, "this frequency is in use". To check if a frequency is in use you can use "?" at first (nice and short), then check again with "QRL?" or "QSY?". For a full list of Q Codes search "Q Codes" in Wikipedia.

In CW some of the most commonly used abbreviations are: ES (and), TKS, TNX or TU (thank you), FER (for), HR or ERE (here), HW? (how do you copy?), GM (good morning), GA (good 'arvo), GE (good evening), GN (good night), HI or HEE (laughter, never use HI to say "Hi!" always use on of the GM/GA/GE codes in CW!), 73 best wishes, 77 (adopted by some to mean "Best wishes and happy CW contacts, Long Live CW"), HPE (hope), QRS (please send more slowly), QTH (my location is), QSO (radio contact), SN (soon), GL (good

luck), RPT (repeat), RPRT (report), FB (fine business, means nice), UFB (ultra-fine business, means super), VY (very). A web search will reveal more of the abbreviations commonly used in CW.

Helpful Clubs and On-Air CW Practice

There are now several clubs that provide help for people starting out in CW or who want to develop their skills. There are various nets in SSB with CW practice, and "Elmers" (mentors) willing to help out and mentor newcomers to CW. As times and frequencies change with seasons and volunteers come and go, by the time they are published here they may be out of date. For the latest up-to-date lists of nets and on-air CW activities please refer to the VKCW.net website.

Anyone interested in CW, assisting others, becoming more active or just keeping up-to-date on current activities would be welcome to join the site and make use of the forum to ask any questions, offer assistance, or share your experiences. If you have any CW news to report, or any opinions to express, do write in to me by email and I'll be happy to incorporate whatever I can within this column.

Next month, among other things, we will learn who really invented the "Morse code" that we are using today, International Morse Code, which is very different from the original Morse code. It may come as a big surprise, a clue: he was German. We will also publicize some of the CW activities, nets and clubs around Australia, look at the many different ways you can send CW and how to get hold of a Morse key at little or no cost.

73 ES 77 de Lou, VK5EEE



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Table Bookings and info: vk5kc@wia.org.au or vk5nrg@wia.org.au