

President's Corner

April 2010

I had quite the scare a few weeks ago. I was engaged in a QSO on 20 meters with a station in Mississippi (which I needed for the Worked All States award, which I'm over half-way to receiving) when smoke started coming out of my Yaesu transceiver! I immediately powered down, then used the internet to look up the phone number of the OM I was conversing with and called him on the telephone to let him know why my station had suddenly gone dead.

I was using PSK-31 at the time, a popular digital mode. I mentioned in my last column that I'd been getting into digital modes recently. Well, I've been able to log a lot more states (and a couple dozen countries) that would be difficult or impossible for me using SSB, because the digital modes are far more efficient (kind of the way CW carries much better than voice). What I hadn't realized is that digital modes operate at "100% duty cycle", which means the full power of the transmitter is engaged the whole time one is transmitting. (This is not the case with CW, which is only powered on for the dits and dahs, nor SSB, which varies the power in relation to the volume of one's voice.) This apparently can stress your transmitter.

I put my Yaesu on the workbench, started pulling it apart, and when I separated the automatic tuning unit (attached to the side) from the transceiver, I discovered that the tuner smelled bad, but not the transceiver. I disassembled the tuner, but didn't see anything obvious, so I put it all back together and got back on the air. Apparently I'd cooked a little insulation off something in the automatic tuner, but it still functioned perfectly, and my transceiver was unscathed. Lucky me! I now know that I must dial my power back when using digital modes, as my tuner can't handle the 100% duty cycle for more than a few seconds at a time.

I hadn't been on the air much up until a couple of months ago, but this digital modes thing has got me hooked! Not only can I easily work DX, but since I'm not speaking, I can operate silently after my XYL has gone to bed :) I plan to give a presentation at a future BARA meeting on how easy it is to work digital modes (I've been using RTTY, PSK-31, and a bit of Olivia). I'm hoping that we have a pleasant evening one month where we can trek up to the shack & do a hands-on demonstration (as I mentioned in my last column, I plan to outfit our shack with the necessary hardware and software to do this).

I'd love to hear about *your* radio horror stories! Please send them to Bill Jakaitis (KB2SIN@stny.rr.com) so that he can print them in the newsletter.

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