

## The 48 Set

My interest in electronics started at a very early age in New Zealand as I watched my father and a broadcast engineer friend working on a Williamson audio amplifier they were building from scratch. It was an impressive project, with a separate pre-amplifier and power supply, and seemed to take forever to complete. I'd play with a handful of colour-coded resistors as the air filled with smoke from resin cored solder and curses when things went wrong, which did a lot to expand my vocabulary.

When I was a bit older I built a crystal set and was fascinated by the fact that you could get music out of thin air from a few components tacked together on a piece of wood. Further education came when I helped repair the family Grundig reel to reel tape recorder, which contained a number of relays that seemed to go wrong regularly. So regularly in fact that there really wasn't any point in screwing it back together completely. I learned how to track down springs, screws and other small components that had rolled along the floor and disappeared under the furniture.

By the time I started high school I'd become interested in short wave radio, as the family radio had a band that would pick up these overseas signals. My German teacher found out about this and offered me an ancient radio set in a large wooden case that had several short wave bands. It was too heavy to carry home, but my friend had a bicycle, so we tied it on the back and together wheeled it carefully up the steep hill to where I lived. The radio worked reasonably

well, apart from the ever - present hum from all the failing condensers, and the fact that the reading on the frequency dial was well off the actual frequency being received. Not that that it mattered much, as I didn't have a frequency guide, and so I'd make a pencil mark on the dial whenever I heard an interesting station so I'd have a good chance of finding it again, at least in daylight.

Art Cushing was a well known New Zealand short wave listener in those days and accounts of his successes inspired me to spend many hours at night searching for exotic foreign stations. After a year or so my father purchased an old RME 69 receiver, which was a quantum leap, as it had a band spread control along with a BFO and other refinements. Once we'd replaced all the leaking condensers the signal quality was impressive, particularly after we attached a 20 foot high vertical antenna to our chimney as an upgrade to the piece of wire tied from the corner of the house to the fence. With this set I heard Radio Prague telling the world that Soviet tanks had suddenly appeared in the city, but nobody believed me at first when I told them. I also listened to the captain of the US spy ship Pueblo reading a confession of guilt from a North Korean prison. The log I kept at the time is long gone unfortunately, along with the one QSL card that I had (can't remember where it was from, but it certainly wasn't from North Korea).

My high school had a radio club, which operated during lunch hour and after school – ZL3ABU was the call sign, but when I checked recently I noticed it's no longer listed. I became interested in

having my own transmitter and began looking around for something that would fit my budget. Eventually I found a pile of army man pack 48 set radios in a local army surplus store and dug through them in order to find a set that contained all of its valves. I had to open the radios up and do a bit of cannibalizing before I came up with a complete unit, which cost me 2 pounds 10 shillings.



Once I got it home I discovered that the B and C batteries necessary to run it were either unobtainable or astronomically expensive, so I ended up building a power supply to run the set.

A couple of school mates also bought 48 sets and managed to get them operational, but none of us had bothered to obtain our amateur licenses, or pay much attention to frequency allocations. The result of this oversight was that once we were all on the air, the other two were promptly pounced on by the Post Office radio inspectors. For some reason I didn't get caught, and as a precaution I mothballed the set for a

while as I started studying for the amateur exam. I even got fairly good at receiving Morse code, but was never able to figure out the punctuation characters, or the need for having things like semi colons in a code transmission in the first place.

I left the country before I got around to writing the exam, and didn't finally get an amateur licence until twenty years later. By that time I'd been using two way radios for years in the woods and somehow the novelty of portable radios had worn off a bit. Modern compact handhelds are technically impressive and make the old 48 set seem like something that might have been carried on Noah's Ark by comparison, but they're just not as interesting. You can't operate them when they're opened up and you can't see what's happening inside the valves. You also aren't likely to get electric shocks, but that was just part of the learning experience. It's a great pity that computers have displaced electronic tinkering with the upcoming generation. Probably these days many teenagers think a crystal set has something to do with crystal meth.

In a way I wish I still had that old 48 set with its loctal valves, so that I could put it next to my Yaesu VX-170 and marvel at the changes that have taken place in transceivers.

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