STONER ON SIDEBAND

by DON STONER

Don Stoner is an "ole timer" when it comes to single sideband. He built his first ham SSB rig in 1955 and has been suppressing his carrier ever since. His original CB call was 11W1507. An active "sidewinder" in the Seattle area, Don is one of the owners of SGC, Inc., prominent manufacturer of single sideband equipment for the domestic marine and overseas market. "Mister Sideband" will be conducting a monthly column on his favorite subject. If you have any questions or problems, drop Don a line care of CB Magazine, 250 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10017.

SIDEBAND ETIQUETTE

Making the transition from AM to SSB is not simply a matter of planking down a pile of "green stamps" for a shiny new knob-infested AM/SSB transceiver. Often the new sidebander gets a rude awakening the first time he radiates his carrier-less voice for the world to hear and admire.

The mode of operation and etiquette is quite different on SSB compared to AM. Most people prefer the operating techniques used on SSB. The AM switch position is rarely used once they get the "hang" of sideband operation. There are only a few cases in recent recorded medical history of Jekyll and Hyde personalities developing from using both modes and remembering when to say "that's a big fat 10-4, good ole buddy" and when to talk like a normal person.

Take, for example, the infamous term "break-break". If you try to enter a conversation this way on SSB, you'll hear more cat calls coming your way than heterodynes. Can you imagine walking up to a group of friends at work or school and entering the conversation saying "break-break"? Or answering a question with "Thatsa 10-4"? They are going to think you have lost your ball bearings!

Generally speaking, you enter the SSB roundtable or existing conversation about the same way you would any other conversation in your presence. Instead of saying "hi, I'm Don", the equivalent would be "Sidewinder 1717 on frequency". Keep it short so you don't disrupt too much of the conversation in progress. You can also "tail end" when one of the stations stands by. Regardless of how it's done, you are interrupting and good manners should apply as in any similar circumstance. At a convenient point, the stations will stand by and let you into the conversation.

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If there is any question about the right way or the wrong way, simply follow the rules of everyday speech and manners. You can't go wrong.

One of the nice aspects of SSB operation is that your voice "comes across" just as it would if you were talking in person. Your voice will be heard by the people listening on frequency loud or in the background, depending on your signal strength, proximity to the others and so forth. It will not come across as an unintelligible whistle, as it does on AM.

The lack of a carrier does create a minor problem for the sideband newcomer. To the listener, there is no difference between pauses in speech and releasing the push-to-talk button on the mike. Thus, until you get adept at SSB operation, it is convenient to say "go ahead" when you want to turn the transmission over to someone else. With experience, you'll learn to add inflections to your voice so the other station will know you are listening for his reply. Ultimately, talking on SSB becomes just the same as if the other person were in the room with you.

Another "bone of contention" is the use of the 10-code. Most sidebanders look upon the 10-code as a disease known as the "Adam 12 syndrome". There seems to be something glamorous about saying "when you get to your work 10-20" instead of "when you get to work". Or how about I'll pass you all the good numbers, ole buddy"? Does this mean 88's (love and kisses), as well? If you were at a CB coffee break and decided to head home, would you say "I'll pass you the numbers"? The 10-code is simply an abbreviation to save air time by professional communicators. The way it is used on CB, the 10-code usually wastes air time and the user comes across as anything but a professional communicator.

Before I give the impression that sidebanders are without sin and can, therefore, cast the first stone, this is unfortunately not the case. Misuse of the amateur radio "Q" signals can often be heard on the sideband channels. Many of the CB sidebanders are hams or at least ham oriented and the "Q" signals are quite popular. One of the most common mistakes is to hear someone say they are going "QRT", when they clear with another station. To "QRT" means to shut down and close operation. Another mistake is to tell someone they are coming through 'Q5" but missed a part of the conversation. To copy "Q5" means absolutely perfect copy with no loss of the other fellow's transmission.

Here are a few of the more common and popular "Q" signals. It's debatable whether they save any air time on voice operation (they were originally developed for telegraphy). However, if you are going to use them, use them correctly.

QRM— Man-made interference (QRN is natural static)
QRX— Stand by, such as "QRX, while I answer the phone"
QSL— Acknowledgement of transmission copy. A QSL card is a document

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which confirms a two-way transmission.

QSO — A conversation
QSY — To change frequency
QTH — Location, the equivalent of 10-20

A complete listing of the "Q" signals can be found in the Amateur Radio Handbook, published by the American Radio Relay League.

Another mistake, occasionally heard, is for one sidebander to "correct" another one, informing him not to use a particular sideband. One of the advantages of having two sidebands available is that it truly doubles the number of available channels. Two conversations can take place simultaneously on the one channel without interference. This assumes that all the stations are properly adjusted and have good sideband suppression. Naturally, if you are talking to a weak station on one sideband and someone comes on the other sideband with a rock crushing signal, some of his unwanted opposite sideband energy is going to crud up your QSO. But if the signal strength ratios are similar, several stations can operate upper and lower at the same time without undue discomfort. There is certainly nothing "incorrect" about operating upper or lower. That's what they are there for and why you have a USB/LSB switch on your transceiver. Even if lower sideband is standard (as it is in the Seattle area), it's a simple task to flip the switch to upper to see if anyone is operating there. There is certainly no justification for complaining about a lack of "sideband channels" until full usage is made of both upper and lower sideband.