DE N2QAY

Also, in the recent past I had great difficulty in hearing the transmissions of the Coast Guard from New York harbor. Was there a problem with that site ? It sounded like they were off freq. I used several radios at different locations, so I don't think it was a problem on my side of the radio waves.

GREAT LAKES FLEET CALL RADIO CALL SIGNS

http://www.oakland.edu/boatnerd/facts&figures/callsign.htm

TRUNK TRACKER CHARGING

Dear Bob, The recommended charging for the nicad battery is 16-20 hours for a complete charge. You can leave the charger on longer and it will not hurt the batteries, but we recommend that you use the batteries. As for the 12 volt car charger you can use that to run the unit or to charge the batteries. Remember though you must use nicad batteries. If you use alkaline then you can not use either the house adapter or the cigarette lighter adapter. They will ruin the battery.

Thank you
Heather Smith
Uniden Product Support Services

HUDSON RIVER AIR TRAFFIC

123.050 - Hudson River
123.075 - East River
123.100 - NYPD
126.050 - LaGuardia Control

WHO'S MY CONGRESSMAN?

The Urban DX'er

The Urban DX'er is published monthly through the cooperative efforts of Bob Kozlarek, WA2SQQ and Charlie Hargrove, N2NOV

Any information contained is considered public and can be copied, distributed or otherwise electronically distributed provided that proper credit is given..

Contributions of information for future issues is always welcomed and greatly appreciated. Please send your E mail to wa2sqq@hili.com..

Click on the "Hyper-Link" below to Contact your Representative in Congress concerning HR-2369.
http://congress.org/search.html
Charlie (KB2UVV)

MIR INFO

Want to know what the crew of the MIR space station is up to? Here is list of the planned Russian communication and tracking systems/frequencies on International Space Station (from NASA-JSC) The frequencies looks very 'traditional' and already used on MIR
http://mir.irisz.hu/

THEY DO RESPOND!
DE EDDIE MURO

 As we all know, the outcome of HR-2369 will have a profound impact on our hobby if it is passed. The following is the reply from Congresswoman Carolyn McCarty, in reference to my correspondence to her (Many of you were forwarded my letter a couple of weeks ago)........

August 21, 1997

Dear Mr. Muro:

Thank you for writing to me about H.R. 2369, the Wireless Privacy Enhancement Act of 1997. I appreciate hearing your views on this legislation.

I understand your concerns regarding the potential negative effects Congressman Tauzin's bill may have on the rights of amateur radio operators. I believe that maintaining fundamental public access to the airwaves is an important piece of our government's communications policy.

As you know, concerns for the privacy of cordless and cellular phone users led to the introduction of the Wireless Privacy Enhancement Act (H.R. 2369). While I agree that privacy is extremely important, we cannot truly protect the personal rights of one group by unfairly limiting the rights of another.

Thanks again for contacting my office. As Congress continues to debate the issue, I will keep your views in mind. If I can be of any further assistance on this or any other issue, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,
Carolyn McCarthy
Member of Congress

For those of you who may also wish to contact Congresswoman McCarthy, her
address is: 1725 Longworth Building
Washington, DC 20515
FAX: 202-225-5788
Phone: 202-225-5516
Local Office 516-489-7066

EX PASS = EZ SPY!
Here in New York, there is now a convenient way to pay TOLLS when on the road. The system is called E-Z Pass and is administered by the MTA, the New York State Thruway Authority and the NY/NJ Port of Authority.

The device is a mini transponder which you attach to your windshield with velcro. The device allows you to roll through toll booths at 5 MPH and then the TOLL gets deducted from your account which is charged to a credit card. You save time and they discount the TOLL by 50 cents.

I just read an article in the newspaper that states that a company called Transcom in an effort to provide accurate traffic reports to TV & Radio stations is going to install E-Z Pass monitors at fixed intervals along 100 miles of roadway in all 5 boroughs of New York City within the year. The system will calibrate the time that a
car, traveling the speed limit, should arrive at each monitor. If traffic is markedly
slower, the monitor will transmit both the actual speed and a warning to Transcom and
the pertinent agencies that something is amiss. (Transcom officials claim that the
monitors will scramble E-Z Pass IDs so that the monitors won't be used to issue speeding
tickets.... yeah, right).

Editors Note: Transcom is an agency created by and for the Port Authority of NY / NJ. Transom is located at Journal Square in Jersey City, NJ. The agency is run by Bernie Wagenblast, one of the original "Shadow Traffic" founders. Their primary mission is to collect, disseminate and coordinate traffic rerouting strategy in the New York Metro area. I visited this agency a few years ago to do some research for an article I wrote for Monitoring Times.

SCANNER LISTENER TO THE RESCUE!

PANAMA CITY -- (AP) -- Separate juries have recommended death for one defendant and life for another in the fatal shooting of a sheriff's deputy although both were convicted of first-degree murder.

A jury of eight woman and four men rejected the death penalty and recommended life in prison without parole for Roy Lee Hall in the murder of Holmes County Deputy Lonnie Lindsey following a liquor store robbery last year.

Those will be the only two options available to Circuit Judge Clinton Foster when he sentences Hall, 38, of Hartford, Ala., and Terry Paul Ray, 31, of Noma for the first-degree murder.

Ray's jury voted 7-5 in favor of death in the electric chair, the minimum necessary for that recommendation, in June.

Foster said he probably will sentence both defendants in October. He isn't bound by either recommendation but must give them great weight.

While home sick in the New Hope community on Sept. 17, Lindsey heard a call over his police scanner radio about the nearby robbery just south of the Florida-Alabama state line in the Panhandle.

The suspects had stopped their truck on the roadside to fix a dragging muffler when Lindsey pulled up behind them in his patrol car. He was killed and both suspects were wounded in the shootout that followed.

Lawyers for each defendant had argued the other man fired the fatal shots. But under Florida law anyone involved in a felony can be convicted of murder if someone dies as a result of the crime. Both defendants also were convicted of robbery and auto theft.

State Attorney Jim Appleman argued at Hall's trial last week that Hall shot first and when he was wounded Ray picked up his military-style rifle and finished off the deputy. Lindsey was shot five times in the head.

Both trials were moved to Bay County after an unsuccessful effort to select an impartial jury in Holmes.

A COSTLY HOAX!
Authorities seize equipment in boat hoax probe

MENTOR, Ohio (AP) -- Investigators searching for the source of eight fake distress calls made to the Coast Guard have confiscated communications equipment from a man's home.

Investigators from the FBI, the Federal Communications Commission and the Coast Guard took a radio scanner, radio transmitter and other marine equipment on May 23 from Gary Goodmanson's home, authorities said Wednesday.

The Coast Guard's Fairport Harbor station received the false calls of boats in distress on Lake Erie between May 1 and May 22. One call reported that a boat with 21 people abord was sinking. Another caller said a fire aboard a 26-foot pleasure boat carrying five adults and three children. That call led to a five-hour search.

Goodmanson, 43, has not been charged, and the Coast Guard said the investigation was continuing. Making false distress calls is punishable by up to six years in prison and a $250,000 fine.

Phone messages seeking comment were left at Goodmanson's home and an answering service. The Coast Guard spent a total of $122,375 and 117.5 staff hours checking out the hoaxes, Petty Officer Amy Gaskill said. No false reports have been received since May 22.

Documents related to the search of Goodmanson's townhouse about 20 miles east of Cleveland were filed Tuesday in U.S. District Court in Cleveland.

In an affidavit supporting a request for search warrant, FBI agent Joseph Fierro and FCC agent David Viglione said they used tracking equipment during the last hoax and traced radio signals to Goodmanson's street. Viglione said the signal was strongest outside Goodmanson's home.

EX-LAKE MAYOR PLEADS GUILTY TO EAVESDROPPING ON CORDLESS PHONE CALL

By JAMES A. SUYDAM
Avalanche-Journal

Former Buffalo Springs Lake Mayor Marilyn Royal pleaded guilty in federal court Thursday to illegally intercepting electronic communications.

Royal, who intercepted and recorded a cordless telephone conversation between lake board member Jack Driver and lake resident Donnie Bridges, was ordered to pay $500 - the maximum fine possible for the federal infraction, which is neither a misdemeanor nor a felony.

Royal also forfeited more than 27 eavesdropping items seized by the FBI from her home Jan. 24. Royal used radio scanners, radio manuals and related literature as well as various electronic surveillance equipment to monitor and record conversations, Assistant U.S. Attorney Bill Mateja said.

For more than a decade, lake residents have complained that someone has been taping their telephone conversations.

Royal has repeatedly denied covertly recording conversations, at one time stating, "I've even been taped myself." Royal declined comment following her plea Thursday. Mateja said he hopes that Royal's sentence will send a message.

"The bottom line is, don't listen to or record someone else's phone conversation. It's against the law," he said.

In her plea, Royal admitted to intercepting a telephone call made by Bridges to Driver by using a radio scanner locked to the frequency of Bridges' cordless telephone.

On the tapes, which Royal dropped off at the doorstep of lake board member Les Fithen, a political rival of Driver, Driver is heard expressing his wish to fire a lake ranger investigating an alleged break-in.

Mateja emphasized that the prosecution of Royal had nothing to do with the on-going political infighting at Lake Buffalo Springs, "though the investigation detailed the petty bickering going on between a number of individuals."

"Simply put, Royal had no business recording anyone's phone calls, even if she believed she was recording a conversation which demonstrated that Mr. Driver was attempting to obstruct an on-going police investigation," he said.

Driver said Thursday that he thought Royal got off easy.

"That don't seem hardly like that would be enough, now does it?" Driver said of her $500 fine. "Do you think that will stop her from doing it?"

Residents told FBI agent John Truehittcq that Royal knew intimate details of marital disputes "which she only could have obtained by listening to telephone conversations," the affidavit states.

Residents also had complained to the Federal Communication Commission about the Royals' 500-watt citizen's band radio transmissions that interfered with her neighbors' telephones, televisions and radios. FCC rules state that CB transmissions not exceed 5 watts.

Former Buffalo Springs Lake Manager Kenneth Martin told Truehitt he received up to 24 complaints from residents about Royal recording their telephone conversations. At one point, according to the affidavit, Royal and her husband, Douglas, mounted onto their lake house a loud speaker that blared tape recorded telephone conversations.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY: BNN BUST
http://www.breakingnews.com/

NEW RCA SCANNER
I was able to see the new RCA hand held scanner soon to hit the scene yesterday at a local radio shop, and I must say that I was quite impressed. The scanner is made by GRE, the same folks who make many of the Radio Shack scanners.

I am told that the design is a hybrid of the best of the good old Pro-43 and Pro-60 features, less cellular of course, with super fast scan speed, and other newer features, all at a VERY reasonable price of around 200 bucks!!!

I've seen this unit at Advanced Communications in Saddle Brook, NJ. They stock them and also have a very good assortment of scanners, accessories and radio hobby related books. In fact, I think they easily exceed the amount of equipment that Gilfer Associates ever offered. If anyone is interested in visiting Advanced Communications, please contact me for directions., WA2SQQ

NJSP ON YOUR TRUNK TRACKER
There still seems to be some confusion about the proper programming for listening to the NJ State Police. Here's the condensed version of all you will need to know.

The correct size code for the New Jersey State Police Type I fleets/sub-fleets is S-13 for block 0 and S-13 for block 4. Due to the size of S-13, there are no blocks 1,2,3,5,6,7. This is entered by using the "USR" option in programming the fleet map.

NJSP does not use 000-13 as a Type I talk group however you will hear ALL Type II talk groups between 681 and 6FF in this "slot". You have discovered why the NJSP is termed a Hybrid system! The majority of NJSP communications is Type I fleet/sub-fleet, but within the area for 000-13 and 400-12 there is space for a number of Type II talk groups. Hence there is a mix of both Type I and II (hybrid).

You cannot effectively track these type II talk groups (i.e., selectively monitor each talk group) using 000-13 or 400-12. You must separate the Type II from the Type I groups and put them into 2 separate trunking banks.

B.T.W., the talk groups between 681 and 6FF include the medical helicopters, some turnpike and Garden State Parkway communications, aircraft, and a few high ranking officer channels. The talk groups that fall into the second range include other agencies such as NJ Dept of Transportation, Agriculture, Insurance, Consumer, and Taxation.

NEW 800 MHZ RUBBER DUCKIE !

http://www.radio-ware.com/sek800.html

Radioware is proud to offer our newest 800 MHz antenna that beats them all! Finally there's a Rubber Duck

with real gain in the 800 MHz band! Even tuned 1/4 wave antennas can't come close to matching the Seeker 800's performance. The secret is Seeker 800's patented (US Patent No. 4,940,989), 1/2 wave, ground independent, commercial quality design. Our high-performance Seeker 800 was even selected by Monitoring Times for field testing the new OptoElectronic's Scout!

Seeker 800 significantly improves 800 - 900 MHz reception on handheld and base scanners, frequency counters, and cell-phone equipment. Removes the "scratchies" from signals and picks up weak signals missed by other antennas. Only 11.75 inches tall. Lower antenna section is stiff, upper section is flexible. Connects to BNC antenna mounts.

GREAT HF MARINE AND AIR URLs

Bob Sanford passes along these comments and suggestions this month! If you want a great site to check out all the frequencies and station information on the HF Marine Network then go to this URL:

http://www.globewireless.com/stations/grn.htm

And here is a great page for HF aircraft frequencies and information you may or may not know about.

http://home.sn.no/~stabell/hf.htm

MATCHMAKER: INTRODUCING YOUR SCANNER TO YOUR PC

Many of our readers are relatively new to scanning and the concept of PC aided scanning is unknown. There are many approaches to this facet of our hobby that can cost you hundreds of dollars. As Charlie and I receive many related questions I thought I'd devote an issue to this topic and present you with one moderately priced approach.

If you've even considered interfacing your PC with your scanner you've probably discovered that two names stand out; Optoelectronics and Probe. Optoelectronics Inc offers the Opto 456 and Opto 535 interface boards. The Opto 456 easily install into the Radio Shack PRO-2006 and the Opto 535 into the PRO-2035.

"Probe" is a DOS based program sold by Datafile Inc. Probe sells for $xxx.00 and can run on virtually MS DOS equipped machine with as little as 8mb of RAM. These meager requirements breath new life into that otherwise obsolete office PC or laptop lying there in your closet. Unlike some computer scanner packages, the Opto boards <u>do not</u> allow you to upload or download info to the scanner itself. This combination actually takes control of your scanner, so your PC and scanner operate as a "dynamic duo". Disconnecting the computer returns the radio to the original features.

Seeing as many of us already had the Optoelectronic boards I contacted Datafile and spoke to Probe's author, Perry Joseph to see about getting an evaluation copy. Within a few days I had a copy loaded on a laptop and set out to recruit some volunteers equipped with Opto boards who weren't already using Probe. Without much persuasion I got responses from three net participants; Roger K2JAS, Steve K3WKM, and Charlie, N2NOV. Initially they received the necessary equipment *without* the operating manual. I intentionally did this to see how user friendly the system really was. With Roger's given affinity for expressing himself, he was "volunteered" as the group spokesperson and secretary! Roger was also the only member of the group that was also faced with the task of installing the Opto board in his new PRO-2045. Keep in mind that Roger is a seasoned "ham" and has had his fingers in countless goodies over his 40+ years in the hobby. While far from a neophyte, he wouldn't find any defective "6SN7's" or "807's" within this project! Their comments follow.....

Rogers's Opening Comments

I've done my very best to diligently review this software and the manual. As a consequence of all my efforts here I've learned a hell of a lot about this kind of software and the whole business of scanning via computer interface. This will be an interesting test of the Probe3 software since I didn't have a manual to guide my

introduction. If I can operate the scanner with this program without the software manual... there is hope for people who are much less computer capable. I have about twelve years of computing experience... mostly on the Amiga platform so we shall see how I do with a DOS program on a PC. Working without a manual, what I'm doing is some very rapid thrashing and banging to get things to work and, if I do manage to get something to work.... I don't always remember what I did. This is not a very efficient way of learning anything although my son is particularly good at this learning style while I have my problems with it.

Installing the Opto 535 Board
The OPTO535 manual is a far cry from any Heathkit or Eico manual. It was thrown together in great haste with little consideration as to it's usefulness. Being a "photocopy special" it was barely adequate. All of the photographs... although very well taken... are not numbered or even page numbered. They are however referred to by number. Very frustrating!

From the very beginning I started under a cloud of confusion since the manual states this board is only to be used with the PRO-2035 scanner and makes no mention of the model scanner I was using. Several times I went to the advertising literature and saw the board was recommended for both scanners. I guess the manual just never caught up with the new production radios. Scary!

Then you are told you only need a few basic tools to do the installation and no mention is made of the fact that you would need at least three different sizes of Phillips screw drivers. You are also strongly encouraged to purchase a Radio Shack nibbling tool to cut out the metal frame of the pc board support. The pretext of using the nibbling tool is to avoid very tiny metal particles you'd generate otherwise. While this is a legitimate concern... the main scanner board and OPTO535 boards are completely removed from any area where cutting or nibbling is going on. Reasonable care is all that is necessary to avoid small metal filings and metal dust flakes.

Well, I tried the nibbling tool route and found it extremely tiresome and inconvenient. Since I had already removed the main scanner board and front panel... the only thing left was the metal frame...to which was attached a power transformer which naturally was in the way of the nibbling tool. I decided that removing the transformer at this point was the thing to do.... so two mounting screws removed and two wires unsoldered later....I dove into cutting out the rear panel opening using my saber saw contrary to the factory's instructions. Now that made fast work of the project. I was then able to thoroughly clean up the metal frame of steel filings and file and grind all the razor sharp edges smooth.

With the transformer reinstalled and the scanner main board reinstalled too, I struggled to remove the old ribbon cables. The manual instructs you to use a cutters for prying leverage. Wow! What a mistake you'd make if you slipped and cut wires. Bad move. I avoided this and instead resorted to delicate prying using curved needle nose pliers and gas pliers which had a wider grip. More tools not specifically recommended!

The three new panel interconnecting cables that came with the kit weren't exactly keyed properly but they did fit after a fashion... but not with a click-lock positiveness. The black and white photographs of the pc board and cable placements weren't very useful since they have no arrows to show what the text is talking about.

Finally, with two new wires soldered to the main board... only accomplished with a very narrow pointed temperature controlled iron... I realized most people would have great difficulty with this operation lacking the proper iron. Then again, this soldering operation was to prove to be a mistake.

With all the cables in place and the Opto535 board screwed down... the scanner would not operate! Three times I removed and installed the Opto board and three times the scanner would only work with the board disconnected. Finally, out of sheer desperation, I called OptoElectronics and spoke to Ken in the service department, who advised that I return the board to the factory, which I promptly did.

By the way, the installation of this board voids the one-year warrantee on the scanner and the

OptoElectronics people don't want to have anything to do with servicing your scanner... so I waited a full three months to check out the scanner before I did this installation.

I received the Opto535 board back from repair in only nine days... which was really a very good turn around time, especially since the UPS strike was in full swing. The sheet accompanying the returned board noted that they repaired a bad solder connection. So much for prior product testing.

By the way, in order to remove the Opto535 board from the scanner, not only do you have to do this very delicate prying of cable plugs...but you also need to unsolder the two wires that were very delicately soldered to the main scanner board in the initial installation. Boy was this dumb! If everything else is connected by plug-in pin cables, why not include an in-line set of plug and socket to accomplish this? Beats me why they never thought of it. So... I cut these wires to facilitate the removal and on replacement...all I needed to do was re-solder them and seal them in heat shrink on installation. Plug and socket would have been better and not a hell of a lot more expensive. One other item. When you're all finished installing the board and the entire radio is sealed up... you look down and find you have six gold colored Phillips head screws left over. No mention in the manual that this is normal!

There are lots of other assumptions the manual makes but it would be just too picky to go into here. Generally, I'd say that if you were not VERY PROFICIENT with hand tools and didn't have good soldering skills... STAY AWAY FROM INSTALLING THIS KIT! Pay an experienced technician to do it for you, especially considering that you are voiding your scanner's warrantee doing the installation! For a competent technician to do the installation... it's no big deal. It took me a leisurely two hours and that's not counting the three times the board went in and out.

One final note - The Opto535 manual tells you NOTHING about how to use the board with anyone else's software. Zero, ZIP, Nada! How wonderfully user friendly! In fact, other than telling you how to cut the scanner sheet metal and connect the cabling... you are told absolutely nothing about the operation of their board and it's capabilities. They cut you loose from this point forward. The advertising literature is perhaps more helpful.

On to the Software Installation
What follows are my impressions as I am encountering the Probe 3 software and it's manual in laborious sequence. As will soon be apparent, I may frequently correct my impressions as I progress and learn more about what I am doing. One has to understand that I am new to scanning and I've never done software evaluation before... although I have an extensive background in ham radio for almost forty-five years and a decent background as a computer user for about twelve or thirteen years.

"Editors Note: Again, keep in mind that Roger is proceeding without the benefit of a users manual. This is not the suggested method of installing any software, but it is probably more common than not."

To determine if the scanner can operate properly under computer control... one needs to start the Probe3 software. While running Windows95 I engaged the Explorer and found the Probe.exe executable file which I clicked on and got the program to run. I immediately realized that if the computer was to control the scanner it had better be assigned a COM port. How clever of me. I had cabled the scanner to the serial port's COM-1 even though this port was formerly used by my mouse. Since I switched to a Microsoft PS2 mouse, my COM-1 port was now free! This is a big deal on my computer since the computer contains a 4-COM serial card enabling me to control my US Robotics modem, AEA PK-12 packet TNC, and Kenwood TS-440s Radio Interface along with the Opto535 interface for the Radio Shack PRO-2045.

Getting the COM port configured was again, a matter of thrashing about in the Configuration menu to find the "com Port" display screen and by trial and error I had a devil of a time configuring the ports even though I had the correct IRQ settings right in front of me. The problem was that no matter what I did, the settings were not accomplishing anything as far as controlling the radio. The PRO-2045 was still displaying normally and was

not under computer control. Finally, I gave up in disgust and decided to re-boot the computer in the DOS mode and open the Probe3 program from DOS. That worked fine! And the configuration went better. What I NOW realize (appropriate DOPE SLAP TO THE FOREHEAD) was that the reboot gave the computer a chance to find the COM port and what it was controlling. Then, when I turned on the scanner and told the program to scan... it asked for the limits of the frequency range to begin scanning. Of course it can't scan if no range had been entered. This is cleaver!

With the port properly configured and rebooted... the computer took control of the scanner and the scanner's display went blank... only showing it's normal yellow/orange color without any display information on it. (Somewhere...perhaps at the Dayton Hamvention where I bought the Opto535 board, I was told this was normal. Good thing since I would have been terribly worried that my scanner was now malfunctioning).

Now all the display information was on the computer screen... but hardly legible since the colors of the text were as close to invisible as one gets. Time to configure the display colors. Previous experience doing this in another DOS program that interfaces my computer with my ham transceiver (Log-EQF) gave me some familiarity with this type of operation...although the Probe3 program was truly unique in the vast number of options and colors one has to choose from. Back I went to the CONFIGURE menu item and selected the DISPLAY item which brought up a host of choices from which I selected....COLOR. BAM! What a jumble of information! This screen is a marvel of information density... almost none of it making much sense. I soon realized that where I couldn't see text... it was because the colors were totally wrong and it was fairly easy to accomplish the changes intuitively. *I felt that it would have been far easier for the program to at least start with some decent preselected colors instead of things being obscured because dark brown text was preselected for display against a black background.*

Another quirk I encountered was related to the mouse's interaction with Probe. Although my mouse pointer moved freely about the screen... it does nothing in the program and I have to get used to using the letter keys and the up/down arrows to navigate. It's throw-back time to an earlier computing age.. but not all that cumbersome.

Entering Frequencies
Being somewhat of a neophyte to this aspect of the hobby certain terms were not overly familiar to me. One of the supreme tests of any scanning software and its manual is the degree to which both assume the user is both experienced with the scanning hardware and computer literate to boot. Frequently users don't fully understand the terms that describe the functions of the hardware nor do they understand the computerese jargon that goes with the software. Here, perhaps a glossary of terms used would help the first time scanner enthusiast. With almost no experience with scanners I am feeling my way defining a "BANK", which I assume to be a cluster of related frequencies... ie. 2-meter ham band.

I've discovered that in the UTILITIES menu you can define a range of frequencies and select the step spacing and then all those frequencies get stored for you to search. However, if you later decide that a large block of those frequencies are unusable.... I haven't yet discovered how to delete a tagged batch of adjacent ones. I am stuck deleting them individually which is a tedious bore. Opinions such as the one above undergo many changes as you will shortly see. At this point Roger got smarter and decided to pool his findings with Charlie, N2NOV !

Editors Note: Deciding these guys suffered enough I provided copies of the manual that arrived on August 28. With the manual in hand they now got down to doing some serious evaluation!

There is no help here for users who are using Windows95 and not DOS. Users who are not DOS literate are left hanging high and dry, which is surprising since this is a DOS program. I realize its a lot of work writing instructions in a manual but these users should at least be given some clue as to how to edit the Config.sys file if their's is not adequately configured. Fortunately I didn't have these problems but other users might. Then again, I hear that Perry, the software's developer offers great tech support for users

who need help but I'm certain his time could be much better spent developing this product than teaching users how to edit their config.sys files. The manual's installation instructions are excellent and should greatly help anyone who is a novice to DOS. Unfortunately, it is of little help to Windows95 users who expect a different level of installation ease.

Quick Start!
This is unbelievable. The manual basically tells you that if you can get the program to run... which should be easy... the program will check your config.sys for you and tell you if anything needs to be changed and when you restart the computer it will all be done for you. Can't beat that! Bravo Perry! I take back the previous stuff! Understand! The hardest part of learning any software if you're not going to gnash and thrash about and trying to figure things out...on your own... is that you must be prepared to READ THE MANUAL. Oh! How those words strike fear in the hearts of people. It's like asking people to order from the Chinese Only version of a Chinese Food Take-Out menu!

This happens mostly because at one point in time we've all read manuals that made us feel like idiots because some dumb author hadn't a clue how to communicate with non programmer types of human beings. Wonderful to say... the Probe manual , right from page 1 doesn't give you that feeling. It's warm and friendly and inviting and you start getting the impression that this isn't going to be so bad. That's great! What happens later is another story.

OK! I've read the entire "Quick Start" section and I must confess that is was written as simply and as clearly as it is possible to write these things. I didn't get lost once or feel the least bit confused. It all went step by step... and painlessly to boot. Of course the trick is to get the radio to scan and mine was doing just that! Whoopie!

Documentation - A Bit Wordy!
Someone once said that "A Picture Is Worth A Thousand Words." Needless to say... a few good illustrations here would have saved a lot of well chosen words. This is a major shortcoming of the entire manual... more words, not enough illustrations. I can read the entire manual and although the words are in English ...I don't come away with the comprehension I wish I had. For example... I understand the words Group, Bank and Channel. But, throw them all together without a diagram mapping out what the author is referring to and I go off into La-La Land. Since I'm visually oriented I depend on pictures and graphics heavily for information while others can deal with wordy ideas. I rather suspect that there are more people like me and the ones who are the word dependant types are the ones who write the manuals. The Understanding Banks stuff is fairly straight forward as is the Configuring Banks.

To us "Newbie's" terms such as "module", "field" and phrases like "Terminate saving all current data" should have been explained and perhaps simplified. Good graphics are worth their weight in gold.. and that is something many DOS based programs have traditionally lacked. After reading portions of the manual it's very obvious that the author is very knowledgeable, and sometimes progresses a bit too fast. The manual is abundant with references to *"see explanations elsewhere"*, although the "path" to the place where the explanations are found is carefully spelled out... a little thing like the page number is all that is needed. Therefore, I strongly recommend that you remove, or better yet... copy the contents pages in the beginning of the manual and keep them handy for page look-ups.

The further on I get into the documentation for Probe 3 the more I realize that the manual had to be written to document every item in the pull-down menus. This assumes that every single item on each menu is of equal importance and so it is only necessary to cover them all in sequence. While thorough, it depicts the task of learning the English language by telling you to read an English dictionary starting at "A" and work your way to "Z." When you are finished, you will know English.

Basically, there are three ways to have a scanner scan.... 1) to have the flexibility of manually entering each and every frequency of particular interest because you saw it published in a book or on a chart or map,

2) to download the database that someone else uses....ie. a scanning enthusiast who you are friendly with... or a CD-ROM database which you can purchase.... 3) to define your own ranges of frequencies to search and have the ability to mold and modify that data ie. customize it to suit your specialized interests and needs. Probe3 accomplishes all these exceptionally well. Using a database like the one offered by Percon, it's relatively simple to retrieve data based on several different search criteria.

This is one of the very few times that I have actually read a software manual from cover to cover and the experience has been most educational. My labor has taught me that..

1. Probe3 is a simple and extremely powerful program I will enjoy owning because it is so flexible and configurable as my scanning needs mature.

2. The interface that the user has to deal with is a very functional while being graphically as boring as it is possible to be. Telephone books are likewise chock full of information but nothing you'd want to stare at for very long.

3. The software manual dutifully grinds out the documentation of each and every feature in the order that one finds it on the screen. The explanations of those functions are often found in other parts of the manual but getting to those explanations is a laborious chore because the manual's authors didn't see fit to use references with page numbers.... a horrendous oversight.

4. The manual is in no way organized as a teaching instrument. It makes far too many assumptions. It should be divided into beginner and advanced user sections and the items of basic and critical importance should be presented first. An effort should have been made to supply the user with practice material ie. entering data into the program that could be supplied on index cards. That would have been most helpful. Then the user could likewise be taught to delete the fictitious data and enter his own. I believe we'd all be grateful for the practice. I would wish the manual started with the assumption that most users were rank novices and proceeded to teach everything one needed to know about scanning and how the features of the software are implemented to accomplish each new level of sophistication. I fully realize that is asking a lot. I believe that's what users are paying for but not receiving.

5. The really important features that will get you up and scanning in a useful fashion and in a short period of time are left for you to discover by virtue of your own ingenuity in combing through the manual to cull out pertinent data... or, hopelessly turned off by this approach.

6. The lack of mouse support in this day and age is an anachronism to say the least. Norton Commander is a DOS environment program and it is "mouse friendly" and I appreciate that feature.

7. The color display setting ability of the Probe3 is dizzying. This is mostly due to the fact that it is nearly impossible for the new user to confront all the terms that describe the screens the display windows are showing. Therefore, I methodically tried to set each and every different item to a different set of useful colors and then found that I could change the ones I wanted by virtue of the colors that were set and not the titles of the functions. The software should come similarly configured for all user.

8. I still don't know if the Sound Squelch feature of my Radio Shack Pro-2045 is utilized or not by the software.

Comments as a Result of Actual Use
After reading and digesting this thorough account of Roger's experiences, I for one was teeter-tottering as to what a first time scanner enthusiast might be thinking at this point. In actual use, Probe is a traesure chest of scanner goodies. Used in conjunction with a CD database it's possible to select and load hundreds of frequencies from your PC in just a few minutes. Recently, I visited Cape May and had the opportunity to visit the US Coast Guard Group to conduct an interview for an article I'm writing. Two weeks before, Steve

K3WKM volunteered to program dozens of frequencies I had an interest in. Steve used his lap top and Probe to construct a one week long snap shot of Cape May's radio activity. With this information in hand I knew what frequencies were hot and which were not. I also recently saw an interesting approach to documenting what frequencies were used at a particular cell site. Allowing Probe to scan the entire cellular band, it recorded all frequencies that could be received from a given location. Since Probe records signal strength, sorting the frequencies did a very nice job of grouping the frequencies by cell site - neat trick!

Tracking the government frequencies has become somewhat of a guessing game in recent months since many have suggested that much of this activity has moved to 800 MHz SMR services. Entering in all the possible known frequencies while any high ranking government official is in town might yield some clues. Now, compare this data with the same frequencies a week or two later and we get a good idea of what frequencies were active. The possibilities are endless!

Part of the great enjoyment of scanning happens in the user's imagination. The user's interface screen should do something to appeal to and enhance that imagination; Probe seems to have missed the mark in that respect, though it does open up a wide variety of features not available with the basic scanner.

Functionality is a whole different criterion and will always be the ultimate deciding issue when feature is put up against feature. Although I haven't tried other scanning programs at this point I'd bet there are few others with as much functionality. It is my fondest wish that Probe3 software continues to evolve... and in Dr.Spock's immortal words... "lives long and prospers."

Editors Note: Perry Joseph was invited to give some feedback on this review. I had planned to have those comments in this issue, but seeing that we are already on page 12, his comments will be held to next month! Perry has also offered a special deal to any readers who are interested in purchasing Probe 3. If you have any desire to explore computer aided scanning, I highly recommend Probe.

NYC Mayor Recognizes Amateur Radio and RACES
Recently our own Charlie, N2NOV was called upon to share in the official recognition of amateur radio and RACES by the City of New York. That's N2NOV just to the right the mayor! Forgive me for not having the names of the others, but Charlie didn't pass them along with the photo.

N2NOV with Mayor Giuliani