

What Is QRP and Why Is It So Popular These Days?

From an article By Bob Myers, W1XT Phoenix, Arizona

QRP Is... ...Low power operation on the Amateur Bands. QRP has long been a popular way for Radio Amateurs to test their operating skills, have fun, build their own gear, operate contests, etc. QRPers often chase DX and operate in contests competing against the "Big Boys" who run high power with very large antenna systems. Unless you have a serious need to be first in a pileup or want to have a world high score in a contest, QRP may be just the activity to put more zing into your Amateur Radio operating! QRP is on-the-air Amateur Radio operating with a power output of no more than 5 watts. In many cases, QRPers run much less than that -- some going as low as 10 or 20 milliwatts! You must have keen operating abilities to be successful at QRP. Most QRPers are very highly skilled.

Why Would You Even Consider Running QRP? Here's one reason: Do it for the fun of it. Many have done just that and have stayed with it. But... More recently the move to QRP operating has been enhanced by a need for Amateurs to live peacefully with their neighbors in a community of building restrictions, antenna/tower regulations and of course RFI (radio interference caused to local home entertainment components, telephones, etc. by Amateur Radio high power transmitters). To many Radio Amateurs, QRP has become a way of living with today's reality of tight restrictions and RFI problems yet still allowing the operator to fully enjoy the fun of Amateur Radio. QRP is not a compromise. It is a way of life!

\$ for Fun!

Arguments raised against QRP operating just a few years ago suggested one didn't make many contacts with QRP. Considering QRM and QRN, you just wouldn't be loud enough to be heard on the bands. In contrast to that thinking (mostly by the high-power folks!), many ardent QRPers have more QSOs in their logs than their counterparts using high power. It just takes a little longer (sometimes) to work DX with QRP. The true QRPer can work almost every DXpedition that comes along if the right skills are developed and used. On a dollars-invested-for-fun basis, it is really hard to beat QRP.

CW, SSB or What?

Not too many years ago most QRP operating was done on CW. The CW mode's ability to get through under difficult band conditions is well known and understood in Amateur Radio circles. But in recent years, many QRPers have turned to operating SSB as well as CW, and with great success. Even more recently, QRP is showing up on PSK31, a digital mode for computer keyboard-to-keyboard operating between stations at HF frequencies.

Industry Has Caught On Modern radio transceivers designed specifically for the QRPer are now available. Most of the relatively high power transceivers (100-200 watts) manufactured now can be turned down to 5 watts (and below). That wasn't true some time ago, so now, there's no shortage of equipment for QRP!

Just do it... Never tried QRP? You'll be absolutely amazed at what QRP can do for you. Crank down the power on your present transceiver to 5 watts or less and go make some contacts. Work some DX too! You won't believe how many stations can hear your 5 watts. And you too will feel the thrill.

"Less is better" really applies to QRP!