

Extreme QRP(p)

By Mike Boatright, KO4WX

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In a friendly club competition to see who can Work All States QRP the quickest, one ham cranks out the QRP QSO's, while another expresses his gratitude for the thrill that QRP has put back into his amateur radio hobby.

Ask a QRP'er why he or she does it and nine times out of ten, you'll get the response, "Because it's Fun!" Over and over, you hear stories about hams that have rediscovered their enthusiasm for the hobby in QRP. While many ham radio clubs are struggling to keep membership and meeting attendance up, QRP clubs are bursting at the seams. Heard any complaints lately about nobody showing up for hamfests? QRP'ers show up a day early for Dayton! (Check out Four Days in May, sponsored by QRP ARCI at <http://www.qrparci.org/fdim64.html>.)

QRP'ers love to build things. QRP'ers love to operate. QRP'ers embrace the history of technology, while pushing the envelope of new methods of communicating. By just about any measure, QRP is THE happening thing in amateur radio today. QRP is addictive. It's contagious. It's extreme!

I once showed Riley Hollingsworth, K4ZDH, my KnightLites SMiTe 80M transceiver that fits inside a miniature Altoids tin (see <http://www.arrl.org/members-only/extra/features/2001/02/12/1/P2070011-lrg.jpg>). The first thing that he said wasn't "what kind of filter does that thing have?" but rather, "Wow! That's cool!" (We did discuss harmonic suppression a little later, though!)

In my home QRP club, the North Georgia QRP Club (<http://www.nogaqrp.org>), we're currently having a friendly "competition" to achieve "Worked All States" at 5 Watts power or less. The original intent was to encourage QRP operation and create friendly competition within the club. In typical NOGA QRP style, several members have taken the competition to the extreme. Sam Billingsley, AE4GX, is making all of his contacts at one Watt or less using his Georgia Sierra (a NOGA QRP homebrew project) and a hand-cranked, "Gibson Girl" generator (and a battery—all that cranking does interfere a bit with sending Morse Code!).



Jim Worthington, AD4J, has already worked 45 states (since the competition began on February 1) using only a DSW-20 and a DSW-40 (from Small Wonders Labs) at 1.5 Watts!

Keith Studdard, KR4IP, is operating PSK31 at 3 Watts, using a New Jersey QRP *Warbler* (<http://www.njqrp.org/warbler/index.html>) into an 80-meter dipole. So far, he's worked 27 states!

First licensed as KD4QOW as a "no-code" Technician in 1992, Keith has discovered the joy of QRP and it has rekindled his enthusiasm for amateur radio. "I feel the best thing I did in a long time was getting into QRP and becoming involved with the great bunch of people at the NOGA QRP Group," he says. Like many "no-code Techs" he quickly upgraded to General, then Advanced and then Extra Class. "I upgraded because I went to Field Day the first year I was licensed and got a taste of operating HF and knew I had to get HF privileges."



Also like many hams, he lost interest in operating "because the equipment got so advanced and instead of operating skill it was who had the most power and the biggest antenna." His original interest in the hobby came from building an 80-meter transmitter as a teenager while taking a communications correspondence course. But "it didn't seem like anyone was building equipment anymore."

"Once I upgraded, I chased DX for a while on HF, but that started getting old to me because it got to be too automatic, looking at the DX clusters and getting caught up in pileups... The thing I don't like about contests is that everyone always gives a 599 report regardless of the signal. I have heard stations give a 599 report and ask for a repeat of the call sign several times--if this signal was 599 why ask for all the repeats?"

Then one day, about a year ago, Keith met Mike Branca, W3IRZ at the local Conyers (Georgia) Amateur Radio Group. Mike gave a program on "homebrew" construction and QRP as an affordable mode of enjoying ham radio. Mike is an active NOGA QRP member as well. He put Keith in touch with Tom Dooley, K4TJD, who sold him an unbuilt NorCal 20 transceiver kit. It was his first construction project in 20 years, and just like that, he was hooked. "I enjoyed building and operating that rig that I had put together with my own hands sitting at the kitchen table. I realized that I had found something that put the thrill and enjoyment back into ham radio for me."

Keith then started coming to NOGA QRP meetings, "I went to a meeting and that group of hams showed so much excitement in what they were doing and treated me like I belonged even though the only ones I had ever met were Mike and Tom." Since then, he has built a SMK-1 surface mount kit (also from NorCal), a NN1G-40, a NOGA PIG-Tic keyer-AFA combination project, and of course, the 80 meter PSK31 Warbler that he is using to Work All States.

“When I first built the warbler the receiver was hot it was working fine, but I couldn't get the transmitter to work. Not having a lot of test equipment, I called on my friends at NOGA and several of them— Tom (K4TJD), Sam (AE4GX), Pickett (AD4S), and Both of the Mikes (W3IRZ and KO4WX) offered their help. Between all of us we discovered the IC U1--a surface mount SA612--was defective. After contacting Mouser, and Digi-Key unsuccessfully trying to find a replacement, I contacted George Heron of the NJQRP group and obtained a replacement part from him, which was installed by Mike, W3IRZ, and the transmitter came to life. Since then I operate it every night and try to work as many stations/states as possible.”



“I feel I have a bunch of elmers, in that everyone in the NOGA group helps me when ever I ask for their help--that is just the way this bunch is--but if I had to name the one that has been the most help to me it would have to be Mike Branca, W3IRZ . Mike lives in the area and is the one I attribute my being involved in QRP to and I would like to say thanks to him for the help he has given me.”

The reinvigoration of Keith's amateur radio hobby goes beyond QRP. He regularly checks into the local ARES net, and has recently been appointed EC of Newton County, Georgia.

His daughter, Mallory, KF4CTR, licensed at age 11, “is trying to learn code now so that she can upgrade and enjoy some of the things I do.” Malloy also attends NOGA QRP meetings with her dad.

I interviewed Keith for this article, after receiving an e-mail that he sent to the NOGA QRP reflector, under the subject line “Gratitude.”

“The thrill is back in amateur radio for me thanks to you guys at NOGA and it looks like QRP has made it an enjoyable hobby again for many others with all the easy kit building and home-brew projects that are fun to build and are affordable for everyone--unlike some of the Japanese QRO rigs I own.”

When I asked him further about this gratitude, he said

Don't get me wrong I have had some problems getting some of these operating correctly, but when I called on members of the NOGA group they were all willing to help me find and correct the problem and that is what I always thought ham radio was all about people helping other people in need of help and not expecting monetary reward.

The gratitude I have is for all the wonderful people that have helped me along the way since I became involved in QRP.

That gratitude has this ham attempting to Work All States on 3 Watts, PSK31 on a piece of homebrew equipment.

*That's **Extreme QRP!***

***Editor's note:** Mike Boatright, KO4WX is Assistant Section Manager for Information Technology for the Georgia Section. He works for the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) as a senior architect, helping media companies develop and implement their digital media strategies. He is a graduate of Georgia Institute of Technology and has been a licensed ham for 10 years.*