

Investigate Before You Invest

**By
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It's that time of the season again when hamfests abound and equipment purchases become more frequent. No matter if you're buying new or used, you need to at least know what you're buying before you actually bring it home. Otherwise, it's a real crap shoot. Unlike buying a car, you can't take new or used ham equipment for test ride to check things out before you buy, but there are some ways to avoid some of the pitfalls in buying equipment. There is help out there. You just have to know where to find it. There is a lot of good equipment out there and there's some that has or has had problems.

If you're looking at new equipment, do a little research before putting down your hard earned money. I might first suggest going to the manufacturer's web site and reading up on the equipment you are interested in buying. Also, if possible, download the user's manual and read it over. Next ask some friends in the local area if they have had any experience with the equipment you are thinking of buying or could suggest some who might. Find out how they feel about the equipment and see if they've had any problems that you might want to know about. You might also check some product reviews. Two good sources of product reviews are QST and E-Ham. If you're an ARRL member, QST and the ARRL web site have a large number of product reviews on many products. They can be found at <http://www.arrl.org> and do a search on product reviews. Another good source of reviews is E-Ham (<http://www.eham.net>). E-Ham has reviews by hams themselves. Every piece of equipment has a few "lemons" in the bunch, so if there's an occasional bad review, it may be one of these "lemons" or perhaps might be a user that has a tendency to handle their equipment more roughly than most other folks. If the majority of reviews are negative, you might think about avoiding the product. On new equipment, maybe you might take a trip over to HRO in Salem, New Hampshire and look at the equipment and perhaps even try it out.

If you're buying used, it's more of a crap shoot. Not only are you not sure how good the product is or was, but you have the added, extra attraction of not knowing the current condition of the product. Modern equipment also presents an additional problem of not being able to get parts if it needs repair. Many newer products have some components (mainly chips) which are proprietary and if they break down, they may no longer be available if the manufacturer no longer supports the equipment. In buying used equipment, use the same principles that you would use with new equipment, that is, ask friends, look at product reviews and try to find a manual to download. Finding the manual may be a bit more of a problem as many manufacturers no longer carry a manual on discontinued equipment. Icom is one exception in that on their Japan web site (<http://www.icom.co.jp/world/support/download/index.html>) (yes, it's in English) they list a manual for about every product they've ever produced. If it's not there, they may be able to post it to the web site for the asking. Other sources for manuals may be found on the PAWA web site (<http://www.pawa-maine.org>) and click on the Links page. One note in buying used equipment; buying a piece of gear without a manual may really compound the problem as newer equipment is fairly complex and really requires that you have the manual for proper operation. If the seller doesn't have the manual, tend to shy away if you're told "you can probably download it off the Internet". Another thing to do if buying used is to try it before

buying. If possible, have the seller demonstrate that it works before you purchase it. If the seller hesitates, you might think twice. If the seller is willing to demonstrate that it does work, have them run through the features of the equipment and make sure it is all working. Ask the seller about a return if you find it doesn't work. Ask the seller if they have had any problems with the equipment. They may surprise you by telling you the problems they have had. Finally (or perhaps first), do a physical inspection of the equipment. If it looks "old, tired and well worn" on the outside, it's probably "old and tired" on the inside. It's not a bargain if you're going to have to put a lot of work into a piece of equipment just to get it working.

Now that the hamfest season is in full swing, enjoy buying that equipment, but I highly recommend that you investigate before you invest! Enjoy haggling over used equipment and getting the "best bang for your buck" (remember to tell the seller how your 27 kids are going to starve if you pay the price they're asking).

73, Bryce, K1GAX