

Introducing: The AM Radio Network

Fans of vintage gear recruit members for on-the-air nostalgia, complete with AM carriers.

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You're invited to join a new club whose members use some of the oldest gear on the bands: The AM Radio Network. No dues, no newsletter, no pressure. At the "meetings," you only speak when you feel like it. The only membership "requirement" is a fondness for vacuum tubes and for the warm, relaxed sound of a QSO on AM. As charter member Don, K4KYV, of Tennessee puts it: "The AM Radio Network is a state of mind."

Contrary to the philosophies of high-technologists, the carrier in an amplitude-modulated signal plays a crucial role "carrying" the conversation to a listener on the other end of the circuit. How many times have you heard hams interrupt each other on HF because their voice-actuated rigs failed to give a clue as to when someone was done speaking?

The AM Radio Network invites members to set aside their downsized, impersonal modern transceivers and join their AM brethren as they settle in with chrome-trimmed, wrinkle-finished, highly styled transmitters and receivers reminiscent of those vintage automobiles you see at antique car shows.

Indeed, the AM Radio Network is a happy mix of the old car attraction, the lure of the "Golden Age" of radio, and the yearning for gear you actually can understand and work on. The group formed a few years ago—partly in jest—after some East Coast hams decided the AM "regulars" they encountered deserved some kind of recognition. So, this special club was born.

Conversation among the AM crowd often has to do with repairing, restoring or locating a specific vintage receiver or transmitter. But it also can involve more personal visits on the airwaves, where people get to know one another. You might find the depth of conversation far more satisfying than the rapid-fire contesting or random QSOs common elsewhere on HF.

Certain aspects of setting up a vintage station could take some getting used to, especially for hams accustomed to today's radio offerings. For example, seeing a vacuum-tube radio light up—as it's supposed to when you turn it on—might unnerve owners of solid-state rigs, which typically only glow if there's a problem.

But you might not need vintage vacuum-tube gear to jump into AM. Most modern transceivers at least let you listen to AM, and this is how many people discover this venerable mode on the bands. In fact, many contemporary rigs can be carefully adjusted to sound pretty good on AM, enabling even folks with modern rigs to join the festivities and possibly start hunting down their own vintage gear.

The rising popularity of older equipment from the 1950s has created a recognized category of "classic radios," often discussed in great detail as members of the AM Radio Network gather on the airwaves. You might even hear a rare Collins KW-1 transmitter, one of which recently sold at the Dayton Hamvention for \$12,000! Suitable gear also exists on the more modest end of the scale, though. AM ops often recycle such classics as Johnson Ranger and Heath DX-100 transmitters or National NC-300 and NC-303 or Hammarlund HQ-170 and HQ-180 receivers. The Collins 32V-series transmitters also are popular for AM but may be a bit more pricey.

Vacuum-tube equipment has enjoyed a revival not only among amateurs, but among musicians, broadcasters and audiophiles. Western Electric recently announced it will resume production of a classic triode tube, catering to those hi-fi buffs who disdain what they perceive as the "cold" sound of solid-state audio amplifiers.

Many musicians swear by vacuum-tube guitar amplifiers and loudspeaker units like the "Leslie" revolving speaker used on the Hammond organ in many rock bands. Some broadcasters pay thousands of dollars for tube-type microphone pre-amps and audio processors, because of the premium sound they offer. In a way, it's not surprising then, that the

pre-amps and audio processors, because of the premium sound they offer. In a way, it's not surprising then, that the technical appreciation of such gear has spilled over into the ranks of ham radio operators, many of whom admit they're bored with radios they cannot experiment with but can only plug in and use.

Membership in the AM Radio Network is open to all. Pay us a nostalgic visit sometime. You could find yourself hooked by the high-quality audio, created much as it was by ham stations many years ago.



Heavy metal abounds on this sturdy desktop AM station of Paul Maikranz, KB2MUQ, a member of the AM Radio Network who lives in Holland Patent, New York. The transmitter to his right is a Heath DX-100.

Where to Find AM Activity

To encourage compatibility with other modes, most AM enthusiasts voluntarily concentrate their activity around these calling frequencies:

160 Meters: 1880-1900 kHz

75 Meters: 3885 kHz

40 Meters: 7290 kHz

20 Meters: 14286 kHz