



Dayton 2016 Report – Win Grant -WA4SSG

Wray, AB4SF, and I made our sixth annual trek to the Dayton Hamvention recently. The attendance totals are not yet available, but there seemed to be somewhat fewer attendees than last year's 25,000, and some vendors who usually participate were missing this year. But it was still a big turnout and well worth the trip.

West bound on I-64, we pretty much stayed in 2 meter D Star simplex contact with Dave, WD3O, and Austin, N4CVA, most of the way, stopping to have lunch with them near Charleston, West Virginia. We saw (and listened to) a contingent from the Hampton area for much of the trip. Those poor guys had to leave home two hours earlier than we did. Of course we observed a lot of other vehicles with obvious ham antennas of all descriptions along the way.

As in past years, our VHF D Star repeater in Richmond was linked to a common reflector to which the Dayton D Star repeaters were linked. We talked to Armand, WA1UQO, and Jon, NQ4A from Dayton while we were driving between the Hamvention and our hotel.

Dayton weather can be very unpredictable. We have learned to bring clothes for every season. Friday was beautiful so we hit the flea market for most of the day because rain was predicted for Saturday, and it started Friday night. Fortunately, the rain let up enough by mid-morning on Saturday that the flea market vendors uncovered the tarps and business got going again for the rest of the day, but with rain starting up again right at 5:00pm to signal that it was time to leave.

Once again, there were no big product announcements by the major radio manufacturers, although Kenwood did have a prototype of their first D Star product in a glass case with a company engineer guarding it. It's a handie talkie that covers 144, 220 and 440 MHz, does APRS and has a beautiful color display and a keypad, something that the current Icom D Star HT's lack. The new Kenwood is quite a bit thicker than the ID-51A, and the price is likely to be considerably more than an ID-51A. Kenwood said it would be available for sale by the end of the year. This is significant because Kenwood is now a second major manufacturer making D Star

products. As of this writing that HT is not yet on the Kenwood website but below is a picture of it that your intrepid reporter was able to take.

Probably the biggest trend this year was digital voice. The Fusion forum was packed, a testament to the interest in it, driven somewhat by Yaesu's very aggressive pricing of both the radios and repeaters and their equally aggressive advertising. There were a lot of used DMR commercial radios in the flea market area, but I could not tell how many were actually being sold, or just offered for sale. Another trend was probably the number of test equipment vendors such as Rigol, Siglent and Bird Technologies all offering digital oscilloscopes and spectrum analyzers. These products range from \$400 to \$3,000, but that is a fraction of the price of HP and Tektronix products of just a few years ago that sold for \$30,000 and up.

Icom had their previously released IC 7300 on display. It's a true SDR, but with plenty of knobs, that pretty much does it all, and vendors were selling them like hotcakes for \$1,399. A few months ago Icom discontinued manufacturing its first D Star radio, the ID-1. I asked the Icom rep if the company was abandoning the 1.2 GHz D Star market. He said, "No way. There's something in the pipeline that will fill that gap." This band, while a small niche in the U.S., is an integral part of the D Star market in Japan where there are no D Star repeaters on 2 meters.

The Hamvention D Star forum was well attended again this year, but a bit disappointing as there was only one new product announced, and that was a \$89 Universal Digital Radio Controller from Northwest Digital Radio that in combination with a Raspberry Pi, gives a Yaesu Fusion repeater D Star capability in addition to Fusion (C4FM) and analogue. Also missing from the Hamvention D Star forum was Robin Cutshaw who has developed many popular D Star products and the key backbone repeater linking software. He had a conflict with a Google developer event, but posted a polite response to a question on a D Star message board that he did not have a booth this year because the leaky roof at the HARA Arena last year damaged some of his products. More on the HARA Arena below.

On Friday night, Wray and I attended the Southwest Ohio DX Association dinner at the Marriott for the first time. The Marriott beats the pants off the Crowne Plaza in terms of food, service, parking, cleanliness and ambiance. Martin Jue, founder of MFJ Electronics was the speaker. He told how a Chinese American whose family ran a grocery store in Starkville, Mississippi got started building ham radio accessories and founded a company that produces more radio products than any company in the world, 93% of which are made in Mississippi.

The event was memorable for two more reasons. First, Wray won one of the grand prizes, a HyGain TH 11DX antenna. My first reaction was, "Wow. Good for Wray." My second was, "How are we going to get that thing home in my car?" It was packed in three boxes, each about seven feet long, total weight of almost 90 pounds, and it barely fit in my SUV, but it did, and it's now in Richmond! Oh, and Wray won a \$100 DX Engineering gift certificate the next night at the CQ Contest Dinner. I won a free turkey sandwich last week at Potbelly's.

The second memorable moment was when the moderator asked all the hams who had over 300 DXCC countries confirmed to stand. Quite a few, not including me, stood up. As the moderator raised the number, people began to sit down (Wray sat back down at the next increment) until there was one person standing in this room of 500 of the world's top DXer's. That one person, who had the most confirmed countries at 391, was Bob Eshleman, W4DR, from Richmond, a former president of RARC and speaker at our banquets. Bob was truly the "Last Man Standing" with the most impressive DXCC numbers in a room full of the top DXer's in the U.S. and many from other countries. The next closest ham in the room was from Japan and has 389 countries confirmed.

The famous Luso motorized tower is pictured below. This year's show model is the 90 foot version for \$16,800 PLUS installation, mast, rotator, antenna, etc. The Luso mast rotator goes for a mere \$9,780, which is only \$8,900 MORE than my Yaesu G-1000DXA. They have a new controller that allows you to control the tower, monitor windspeed, etc. from inside your shack. No price on that, but I would guess at least \$3,000.

Missing this year was Optibeam, the German manufacturer of superb yagi antennas. Prospective big gun antenna buyers were left with JK Antennas, a relatively new company out of New York whose products are similar to the fine Optibeam design and construction. I've worked a lot of stations in the Middle East that are using the JK Antennas.

Last year one of the big announcements was that RKR Designs, which has built the Alpha Amplifiers for years, had purchased the combined Ten Tec and Alpha companies. I was able to talk to Ken Long, one of the three partners in the new company about the five year delayed Alpha Dream Tuner, and he acknowledged how far behind the project was. Unfortunately, it appears very little has happened with tuner development since last year.

A few months ago, it was announced that Dishtronix had purchased the Ten Tec side of RKR, and now it appears that Dishtronix has also purchased the Alpha Amps business as well. While the display was bare compared to years past, the TenTec equipment that was on display, in particular the Eagle portable transceiver and a matching 100-watt power amplifier and the TenTec Omni-VII, are supposed to be re-released later this year under the new company. Color me skeptical. They also had an example of TenTec's large rack-mount receiver which we were told is again in production and currently being shipped on a Navy contract. Wray was told that a new SDR version of the venerable Orion series of high-end transceivers is in the design stage but with no target date for manufacture and sale.

That said, the future of these two formerly great companies is uncertain. Dishtronix makes two products: a solid state amp that starts at \$10,850 for the base model, and a \$220 cross needle wattmeter. It's going to take a lot of money and expertise to turn things around. It would be a real loss to the amateur community, and to American manufacturing, if Ten Tec and Alpha don't survive.

In terms of activity, Elecraft had people lined up to view products and place orders. It was the kind of interest that Alpha and Ten Tec used to enjoy. Elecraft is currently the leader in American made transceivers. Their new product is the KX2, an 80-10 meter SSB/CW/Data transceiver that fits in your pocket and weighs less than a pound. Prices start at \$750.

Forums and seminars are a big part of the Hamvention that many people attend. The topics can be anywhere from technical to operational in nature and moderated by experts who you hear about and read about. Wray and I attended several forums including one on DStar, one that discussed the legal aspects of municipal zoning and ham antennas, and one concentrating on RTTY Contesting. Unfortunately we did not have time for forum subjects such as signal propagation, antennas and the ARRL's National Parks on the Air activity. When you go to Dayton you should attend forums that interest you. You will learn something and may meet some folks that you have worked on the air - and, if nothing else, it does feel good to sit down for a while!

Amateur radio societies from around the world had booths and English-speaking hams who were anxious to talk about their countries. The Radio Society of Great Britain was present as well as the Japan Amateur Radio League, the Qatar Amateur Radio Society, and the German national ham club DARC. As we walked around the exhibit halls Wray and I noted hams from all over the world wearing their call signs on name badges, hats, jackets, shirts. It is truly an international gathering.

I hate to close on a sour note, but the reality is the HARA Arena is like that boat anchor piece of gear you just can't bear to part with even though you know you should. The facility continues to deteriorate. There was no evidence of a dime being spent on maintenance since last year despite a big announcement a year ago that the owners were partnering with a company to inject some capital which would be used to spruce up the place. The potholes in the parking lot flea market area continue to grow larger. When it rains, as it did this year, they fill up with water, so you have to watch your step or risk putting your foot in a puddle. I heard the term "pile up" used to describe waiting lines at the inadequate restroom facilities. I fear the place is going to be condemned one day with insufficient time to find an alternate location.

The pictures below give you an idea of the Dayton experience. I'm already looking forward to next year, despite the crumbling facility.

Allan, WA3J, working the Dayton Amateur Radio Club booth at the entrance.



The famous Luso tower.



And the new Luso tower controller.



FlexRadio was showing off the Maestro, a \$1,200 “Control Console” for people who spent between \$2,500 and \$7,300 for a radio without knobs and who now want some knobs. It’s wireless so you can operate your SDR from the pool. Pool not included in the price.



Icom IC 7300 SDR HF radio. Knobs included.



Martin Jue being interviewed by Tommy and George of Ham Nation.



Dishtronix booth featuring Ten Tec and Alpha Amp products.



Gordon West autographing one of his books.



ARRL President Rick Roderick, K5UR, doing the obligatory meet and greet.



Kenwood's new D Star, APRS, analog FM HT.



Last Man Standing, Bob Eshleman, W4DR, at the Southwest Ohio DX Association Dinner

