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ATLAS

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210/215X Owners Survey

Read what over 100

Atlas owners have to say about their rigs.

As this summary was being prepared for the magazine, announcement was made stating that Atlas was closing its Amateur Equipment Manufacturing plant doors. This is saddening news from several points of view. It means that Amateurs have one less option when they start shopping for new equipment; it also increases their reliance on imported radios. Disheartening, too, is the realization that people who, in the past, have been responsive to Amateur needs are no longer feeding the pipeline that ends in the hamshacks of thousands of DXers, traffic-hounds, sailors, mobileers, and vacation-bound hams with a rig in a suitcase or tucked under an arm.

Here, again, we are reporting on a rig which is no longer produced - but our report is still valid because there are several thousand Atlas rigs out there. You'll find them offered for sale on supplier's shelves, in classified advertising, at flea markets, or perhaps at a local swap-fest or auction. This report will give you a "handle" on what is good or bad about the rigs, and an indication of the results you'll get from one perched on your desk. Read, enjoy, and make the best deal you can.

Note: For those of you who own Atlas equipment, or are concerned about service if you find a good buy on an Atlas, there is a place to get the rigs fixed. Specialty Communications, 2523 Peach St., Erie, Pennsylvania 16503, will handle both in- and outof-warranty repairs. Write to (or call) them before shipping your rig, however. Now to the report.

What's good about it?

Plenty of hams had good things to say about their Atlas rigs, but the majority, 59 per cent, liked the size best of all (lightweight, compact, portable), see **Table 1**. The next best- liked feature was "No Tuning" (broadband, ease of band changing), at 26 per cent. This was closely followed by "Simplicity" (ease of operation, not cluttered with knobs). Other well- liked features ranking near the top were Good (Ideal) mobile rig, 12-volt operation, Excellent performance, and Solid-state design. **Table 1** represents the number of times a particular feature was mentioned, tabulated from a total of 110 replies.

Some comments about likes and good features: "It's small, compact, and works from 12 volts. I have used

it all over the African. continent, portable and mobile." - **WA2RUD**. "Because the rig is solid-state it is not necessary to tune up each time it is to be used, or each time the band is changed. I use it mobile very often, and it has to be by far the best mobile rig on the market." - **WB9ZLO**. "Easy to operate in shack, car, or on boat - by me or any licensed ham, even if he has never used an Atlas before." - **WB3HZC**. "(I like) the slidein mobile bracket." - **N8DM**. "Small size and 12-volt supply make it great for mobile use." - **AL7B**. "(It is an) excellent mobile unit. I purchased it strictly for that purpose. Easy to use with minimum 'hands-on' time while driving." - **WA5CMC**. "Good sensitivity and selectivity, and ease of operation

when switching bands." **WA7SAA**. "I have taken this rig all over the world on many trips. Carried it as hand baggage, shipped it by mail, shipped it as baggage, and it always operates -sometimes for several days of continuous operation in a poor environment - **N5RM**. (Look at the list of calls this rig has operated under: **W9DD/KG6S, N5RM/C6A, /KG6, /KG6S, /KC6E, /KG6W, /NH2, /G5BYY, GU5BY,**

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ation." - W4YP/AFB2MC. "Special antenna tuner is required if large frequency excursions are anticipated." - (unnamed by request). "Rigs will not tolerate impedance mismatch or moderately high SWR." WB5VCU. "Worst Feature? Noise blanker . . . I'm not at all sure it works." - W7DFC. "Noise blanker . . . when it's on in high-signal-level conditions, causes noise and out-of-band signals to be heard." -AE9H. "Readability of VFO dial is a bit coarse, and I wish the calibrator had a 10-kHz position. I often find myself depending upon someone else for precise frequency setting." WB5A0H. "Rotary switch has to pass through 'Transmit' to get to 'CW,' unless an external switch is used. I am often in a noisy area, and with the microphone plugged in, there is a burst of noise before you can send M" —7 ZS6BBW. "Like most American-made rigs, it doesn't have all six high-frequency bands. I like to work six bands, not just five." W8HXC. "Too broadbanded for use with CW in QRM without an external filter." - K14X. transistors went west slightly after their warranty period, but were replaced free of charge by the manufacturer." -WA2QLT. "One (PA) transistor had high leakage current, consequently idling current was unstable and this caused distortion. Dealer sent a matched pair, free!" F6CVU/W2.

I noted some comments on other troubles as I skimmed through the reports: "A thermal-sensitive chip shut the receiver down when it was cold." -WAOVLT. "Exposed collector of driver transistor mounted on rear heatsink can destroy the transistor, along with several components, if shorted to ground." - AE9H. "The original noise blanker did not work perfectly. The replacement does." W4NSP. "FMing! I sent it back to the factory three times - the third time I got a new 210X. It's still bad!" WD4DAH. "Had to request information from the factory on adjustment of the noise blanker kit." - WA21CE. "Rig broke down three times so far. Repair took as long as 2 months from Atlas. Cost of repair was low from Atlas, relatively low from dealer." WA2QWR. "AGC was slightly out of adjustment when I purchased the set." - W8IFI. "Drift was excessive, but factory corrected it." WA8MQS. "Did not transmit and receive on the same frequency on 75-80 meters. Called manufacturer, and they repaired it and put in all the latest modifications free." - K9CGD.

Service

A natural follow-up to the listing of troubles and problems is question 13: Have you had the rig serviced? In reply, they said:

No = 40.9 percent yes = 49. 0 per cent No answer = 10. 1 per cent

GJ5BYY, FOEWY . . . "Probably 15,000 contacts in 3 years." The rig is well-traveled.) "The easy changeover from base to mobile operation." WA9DKG. "Fits my Dat-sun well ... the slide-in mount is great!" W6JEX. "No tuning involved for mobile use; does not take much room in the car." - WA6AKQ. "The Atlas 210X was easy to operate and never gave me a bit of trouble in the two years I owned it." - WB5YWX. .

And, finally, from WB7DBS - "It is easy to take mobile and portable, and I operate both. It is also very durable -the rig was in a car wreck and survived a big jolt which didn't seem to bother it. I leave it in the truck when it is bitter cold ... sure takes a lot of misuse." (In answer to a later question, he further states that there is a bit of drift, "But, then, it sits by a heater duct!").

Now for a look at the trouble spot, question 12 - have you had any problems? A quick totaling of the digits provides this information:

What's troubling you?

What's bad about it?

There were many comments about dislikes, too. The most-often-heard grumble was about the dial mechanism and the calibration of it (21 per cent). This was followed by VFO drift at 12.7 per cent, and "No Sidetone" and "No RIT" at 10.9 per cent each. Table 1 shows the list of "worst features, 11 as well as the good ones. "Too sensitive to SWR/mismatch" drew about 10 per cent of the vote in its unfavorable category.

Some owner comments on this side of the coin: "The dial readout had a total of 22 division marks. This means you have to guess where you are in the band. 25 divisions would have, been better." - WA15OWM. "Drifting is very noticeable, especially on 40 meters." -WA8KOQ. "No RIT . . . transmit and receive frequencies are not exactly the same." - WB6FBM. "VFO dial backlash . . . feels like you're winding up a spring. It's hard to tune in SSB signals." -WA0DYZ "I seldom use CW, but need to hear myself when I'm sending." W1DQ0. "I spent over \$150 to get the noise out of my car. I have other rigs in the car completely quiet, but not the 210X. When the noise blanker is on, the radio will pick up A-M/ FM broadcast bands." - WD4DAH. "No RIT makes it very difficult to use in RTTY QSO." -F6EYG. "Unstable VFO ... totally unsuited for Air Force MARS operation and RTTY oper

W7M

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No = 38.2 per cent

Yes = 61.8 percent

Some specific troubles are listed, by number of times reported, in **Table 2**. The most-frequently reported trouble, final transistor failure, seemed to be one of those "when the rig was new" phenomena. Several hams commented about the early failure, and some had nice things to say about the prompt service or quick replies from the factory in response to pleas for help.

"Diodes and transistors failed when rig was new." - WDOBYV "Final transistors failed in spite of protective circuits - there was no apparent reason, like high SWR or . . . ?" DL2QB. "Power-amplifier (transistor) went, was fixed by service rep in one hour." - WD4ASW. "Blew rf-driver transistor once, it took about 30 minutes to troubleshoot and fix, so no major problem." - N4SC. "Output Of those who had their rig serviced, 74 per cent went to the manufacturer, 7 per cent went to a dealer, and 18.5 per cent checked "other," which included "myself" several times.

As to the quality of the service, 85 per cent were satisfied and 11 per cent were unhappy; 4 per cent didn't

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Fig. 1. The answers to question 21, the ratings, provide this **group of "skyline"** profiles for the various categories. They show percentages of the number of respondents who answered each category. The features receiving a predominately good rating have more weight at the upper end of the scale.

say one way or the other. Perhaps I should have stated the question a bit differently. Some people answered question 13 with a "No," then indicated that they repaired it themselves. Others answered "Yes," when they serviced their own rig. This ambiguity meant that I couldn't just count the "No" answers, but had to read the whole response to see what happened. I foresee another revision to future questionnaires!

The question of quality of service may seem a bit academic at this point, in view of Atlas' closing their doors. However, there are still dealers who also service rigs. and there are other manufacturers who might like to know what their prospective customers like and dislike. Then, too, it might lead you to be a bit more inquisitive about what you buy and who is behind it - which is a benefit, in the long run. So, here are a few B00s and HISSes, and some applause:

"Factory service in (repairing) blunders on my part has been superb.,"
WB6AJR. Trouble with 220-CS power supply. (It was) in warranty

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and there was no trouble with dealer repair." - (Unnamed by request). "Poor reception . . . the person I talked to at the factory couldn't give me the answer. I sent (the rig) to the factory for service but they did it no good." - WA7GSM. "Receiver sensitivity not as good as on later models. Atlas has adjusted and tuned it up twice, at no charge!" -WB3HZC. "No power when rig was purchased, dealer obviously had not checked it. He advised me to send it to the manufacturer (why do I need the dealer?). Manufacturer handled it very promptly." - KB5BX. "RF finals (transistors) blew up into open feedline because of self-oscillation. Service was excellent, and Clint Call (service manager) was great!" - WA2RUD. "I can't use (the rig) because it's sitting on a shelf at the factory, waiting for a technician to look at it. At first, maintenance was exemplary, but there has been a change in Customer Service personnel, and it has not been an improvement!" - (Unnamed by request).

W4UD says, "Only rig I ever used for five years with no problems!"

Just in case you missed it at the start of this article, let me remind you again that there is still a place to get Atlas rigs serviced. If you have a problem with your Atlas equipment, either in warranty or out of warranty, get in touch with Specialty Communications, 2523 Peach St., Erie, Pennsylvania 16503. I suggest you write or call them first, before you ship the rig.

I'd like to have ...

Have you been able to obtain all the accessories and parts you need? In answer to this question, 80 per cent said yes, 4.5 per cent said no, and 15.5 per cent were not listening (I guess), or maybe they didn't need anything.

Of those who did buy accessories, (question 17), 72.7 per cent said **yes, we're satisfied with them, 9 per cent** didn't like them, and another 18.3 per cent didn't answer. **Table 3** shows a list of some of the things and goodies bought to go with their rigs.

A look at some of the accessories wanted includes: remote VFO, CW

filter, digital readout, antenna tuner, speech processor, noise blanker, line ar amplifier, phone-patch, carrying case, and a quick-disconnect for the dc cord.

Those, as near as I could interpret the answers, were accessories wanted, but not yet purchased. In the category of features they would like to see I find: RIT (top of the list), built-in sidetone, built-in VOX, bandpass tuning, full break-in, W capability, notch filter, digital dial, full 10-meter coverage, rf-output meter, better dial mechanism, pulsed calibrator signal, spinner knob for tuning, and better customer service!

Would you do it again?

If I asked this question now, in view of the latest developments at Atlas, the response would most likely be "Are you kidding?" However, the intent of the question was to find out if

Anyway, the ratings charts, called "histograms" by those who know about such things, sum up the opinions of Atlas owners for the various categories. Again, if a category was left blank, it was not used in the total.

Dealer or ?

For a clue as to where you might find Atlas rigs, here's a summary or those answers. Don't discount the "Dealer" category, because there are still plenty of rigs out there, and many will show up on shelves of Amateur equipment suppliers who are not necessarily "factory authorized" Atlas dealers.

Dealer = 69. 0 per cent Mail Order = 11. 8 per cent Individual = 11. 8 per cent 800 Number = 0.9 per cent

Flea Market = 0.9 per cent

Other= 5.6 per cent

the buyer felt that he got enough of a good deal that he would make the same deal again. So, on that basis, a look at the answers to question 25 reveals

No= 57.2 per cent

Yes= 28.2 per cent

Maybe= 4.6 per cent

No answer= 10.0 percent

A few added comments indicating poor service as the reason, but most who said no indicated that later rigs with more built-in features had caught their eye. Some had already traded their 210/215 for something with more knobs and goodies, but reported on their past experience with the Atlas transceiver.

The ratings

Fig. 1 shows the overall pattern of the ratings. Some respondents felt compelled to comment, instead of simply supplying a number, and others provided both a number and a comment. Others misinterpreted the question, and, in a spot marked "Price," answered with the exact dollar figure they paid out. That's *not* what I had in mind at all. I wanted an opinion of the price, based on the value you think you received. (Yes, I know, *everything* costs too much - especially to those of us who can remember buying enough parts to build a receiver for \$10. But, then, wages were a bit lower, too.)

Yes = 90.0 percent

No = 6.3 per cent

Undecided = 3.7 percent

Apparently, hams are not holding the rig's troubles against the dealers or other sources - in most cases. Of the 6.3 per cent who said "No," five of the replies showed that there was very poor service provided by either the dealer or the manufacturer, usually without the trouble(s) being fixed, or there were too many long delays involved in getting the repairs/modifications

done and done right. The remaining two forms, after careful reading, lead me to believe that the negative response was because the owners would go for a different brand of equipment next time around, but not necessarily because they were grossly dissatisfied with Atlas or their dealers. There's a lesson there **communication** and cooperation between parties is vital.

As you read this, I'll be fingering the buttons on my calculator, adding up the responses to our survey No. 2. It'll be interesting to see how people feel about three different rigs - Yaesu, Heath, and Ten-Tec. And then, farther down the road, some vhf rigs.

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A further look at this early part of the questionnaire shows that, in answer to "Would you buy from the same source again?" the totals are: