

Product Review

Yaesu FTDX101D HF and 6-Meter Transceiver

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The Yaesu FTDX101D is a 100 W 160 – 6 meter SSB, CW, AM, FM, and digital-mode transceiver. A 200 W version, the FTDX101MP, is also available, but this review just covers the FTDX101D version. The product name is interesting, as it commemorates the classic FT-101 series, a very successful and popular Yaesu 100 W transceiver family available from 1971 to 1985. Of course, the new model offers the features and performance that amateurs expect in today's high-end radios.

How It Works

The FTDX101D provides two independent, high-performing receivers, each (as I write this) at the very top of the receiver dynamic range performance sweepstakes with 2 kHz spaced, third-order intermodulation distortion measuring a remarkable 110 dB. This rejection is important when there are multiple strong signals in a packed band, such as

during contests and DX pileups. Just as important, reciprocal-mixing dynamic range and blocking dynamic range are also excellent. See the “Lab Notes” sidebar and test results elsewhere in this review for more information.

Yaesu has achieved this outstanding performance using a dual-conversion downconverting architecture. The first conversion is to approximately 9 MHz, where the roofing filters are located. Roofing filter bandwidths of 600 Hz, 3 kHz, and 12 kHz are provided. Optional roofing filters of 300 and

1,200 Hz are available but were not included in the review radio. (These filters must be factory installed.)

The second conversion is to 24 kHz, to what Yaesu calls the “narrowband SDR receiver” where digital signal processing (DSP) provides the operational bandwidth (narrower than the roofing filter) and many other signal processing functions. In addition to the bandwidth filtering, the transceiver provides an adjustable, sharp, capacitor-tuned RF preselector for the main receiver, **VC TUNE**, that can be moved across the bandpass to provide an additional aid in eliminating interfering signals. (A second **VC TUNE** unit for the sub receiver is available as an option.)

A third independent receiver is included for use by the spectrum scope. This receiver uses direct-sampling SDR architecture to provide wideband coverage, up to 1 MHz slices of spectrum. Some may wonder why direct sampling hasn't been selected for the main receiver channels — the simple answer is performance.

Bottom Line

The Yaesu FTDX101D is a very effective, full-featured, high-performance transceiver that would work well in most stations, especially those involved in serious contesting or DX chasing, where strong close-in signals abound. Its very low transmitted phase noise, narrow keying sidebands, and good IMD characteristics will be appreciated by other operators using nearby frequencies.

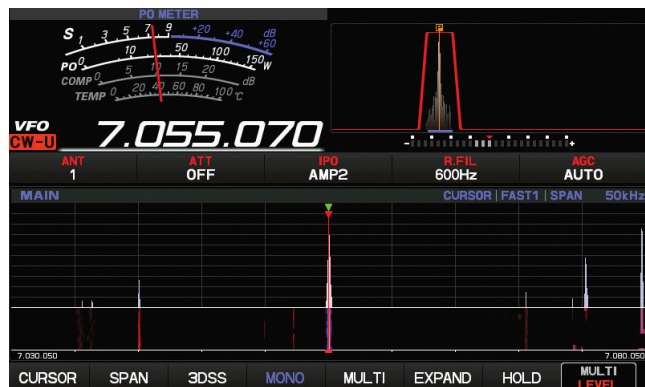


Figure 1 — The Yaesu FTDX101D display showing a single pan-adapter, with waterfall below, for 50 kHz of the 40-meter band centered on the frequency tuned by VFO A. The “filter function display” at the upper right shows the received passband with the received signal within. The spectrum span can be adjusted from a width of 1 kHz to 1 MHz in 10 steps.

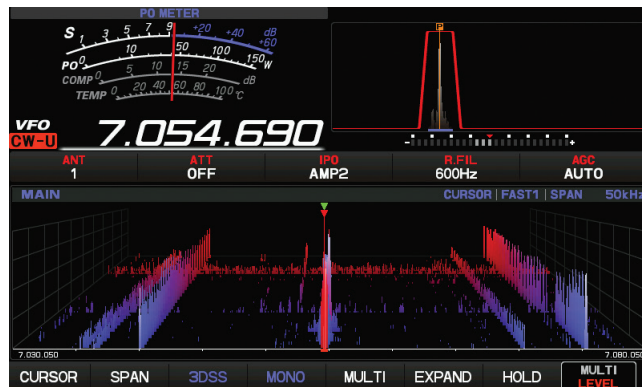


Figure 2 — Same as Figure 1, except we have tapped the 3DSS on-screen button and now have a three-dimensional view with time marching out the back of the screen, instead of the waterfall. This way, you can see what happened before, as well as what's happening now.

Current Amateur Radio technology does indeed support direct-sampling SDR in high-end radios, as evidenced by recent transceivers from multiple manufacturers. However, their close-in dynamic range, as measured in the ARRL Lab, has been around 100 dB — somewhat lower than the FTDX101D. While 100 dB close-in dynamic range is better than top-notch receivers of just a few years back and more than sufficient for most real-world operation, for now, if you want the transceiver with the best-performing close-in dynamic range, a downconverting design with roofing filters near the antenna is required. The dynamic range of the direct sampling receiver is more than enough for the panadapter.

The FTDX101D Display

After first looking over the ARRL Lab measurements, the most noticeable feature of the '101D may be its 7-inch color TFT display, and all that it can do. While many similarly-priced HF transceivers offer similar-sized displays, this one is incredibly versatile, in terms of both what it can show and how it shows it.



Figure 3 — Same as Figure 2, except a second spectrum view of the sub receiver display has been added to the right of the first spectrum display for the main receiver. Note that the second receiver is on a different band and using a different mode, bandwidth, and antenna. Either receiver can be tuned anywhere within the FTDX101D's tuning range, independent of the other receiver's settings. The two displays can also be one above the other, if you prefer — lots of flexibility available.

Its most basic spectrum display is shown in Figure 1, providing a look at the spectrum around the desired receive frequency in usual pan-adapter (amplitude versus frequency) and waterfall (time and relative intensity versus frequency) views. The graphic at the upper right, next to the frequency display, shows the detailed spectrum of the received passband. By selecting the on-screen 3DSS button, the traditional waterfall is eliminated, and the display becomes three-dimensional, as shown in Figure 2. With 3DSS enabled, the display combines infor-

mation from the direct sampling receiver and the main and sub receivers. I find this very useful, because it's more intuitive to see what's been happening on the band while you were looking elsewhere.

A big plus is looking into what's happening on both the main and sub receivers at once. This is largely a reflection of the flexibility of the dual receiver architecture, which is more independent than most. A careful look at the two 3D spectrum plots in Figure 3

highlights this. Note that the two receivers are not just on different bands, but also on different antennas and modes. This allows for easy monitoring of quiet bands, each on their own (or the same) antennas, as well as diversity reception — the A and B VFOs can be locked together.

The display can also provide other functionality. Figure 4 shows a view of the RF spectrum combined with an oscilloscope (time versus amplitude) display of the received audio, as well as the associated audio spectrum. Figure 5 shows the top-level menu selections. Pressing the FUNC button



Figure 4 — In this view, the 40-meter RF spectrum is shown and below that, the received audio is shown with both oscilloscope and spectrum analyzer views.



Figure 5 — Pressing the **FUNC** button (below the screen) opens up the top menu display. The **MULTI** button is used to select the desired function, and then pressing the **MULTI** button brings up the adjustable parameter, or an additional layer of menu items.

below the screen opens up the top menu display. The **MULTI** button is used to select the desired function, and then pressing the **MULTI** button brings up the adjustable parameter or an additional layer of menu items. The menus are all straightforward and in plain English — resorting to the manual is not generally required to understand menu choices.

Default meter scales are transmit power and receive signal strength. Other meter choices, such as compression or ALC, can be selected by touching the meter area to bring up a menu. Touch the **EXPAND** button on the bottom right of the screen, and all scales are shown simultaneously with a corresponding reduction in panadapter size.

If you need an even larger display, the **EXT DISPLAY** video connector on the rear can be used to drive a DVI-equipped monitor, so you can watch band activity from across the room.

Computer Connectivity

The FTDX101D includes USB and RS-232-C serial ports. The RS-232-C cable requires a female connector on each end, but is wired straight through. If you've connected other Yaesu radios to your PC, you already have the cable. If not, a standard female-to-male, nine-pin, straight-wired serial cable can be used with a

nine-pin, female-to-female gender adapter. The RS-232-C connection worked well for computer control, as well as for PTT functionality while using sound card modes.

To use the USB interface, before connecting the cable between radio and computer, you need to install the Silicon Labs CP210x virtual COM port driver, available from Yaesu's website. Once this is installed, connect the FTDX101D to your PC with a standard USB-A to USB-B cable and apply power to the radio. In your PC's **DEVICE MANAGER** screen, look under **PORTS (COM & LPT)** for **SILICON LABS CP210x USB TO UART BRIDGE (COMxx)**. There will be two new virtual COM ports, one "standard" and the other "enhanced." The enhanced port can be used for CAT functionality, while the standard port is used for PTT connectivity. This information was based on communication from Yaesu and was recently added to the *CAT Operation Reference Manual* available from Yaesu's website. I found that the enhanced port worked well for CAT and also for PTT with CAT selected as the PTT method in *WSJT-X* digital mode software.

Other computer-related interconnections include front-panel USB jacks for a keyboard and mouse and a front-panel slot for an SD memory card. The mouse can be used to

select options on the screen, while the memory card can be used to save settings and memory contents or for upgrading the radio's firmware. I used the memory card to save the screen images used in this article.

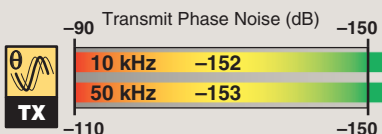
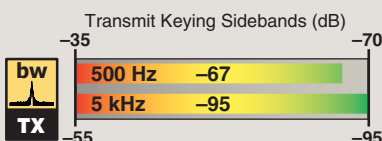
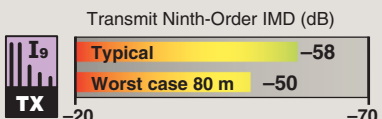
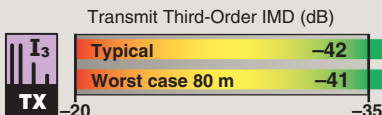
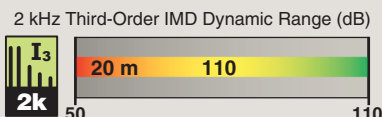
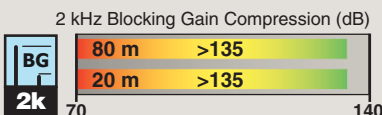
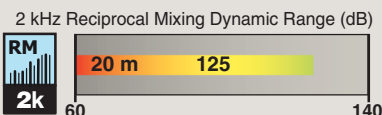
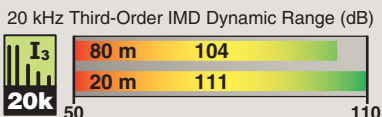
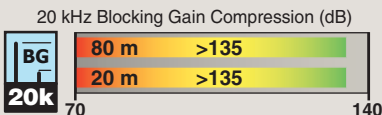
The FTDX101D does not provide a direct ethernet connection for LAN or internet access, although an external optional LAN unit was announced but not yet available when this review was written.

Firmware updates can be handled by downloading the new file and copying it to an SD card, and then plugging the SD card into the slot on the radio's front panel. Similarly, remote operation requires the use of software on a connected PC.

On the Air with the Yaesu FTDX101D

I enjoyed using the FTDX101D as my main station transceiver over a few months and had an opportunity to test it in most modes. While getting started was simple, as with most full-featured radios, expect to spend some time with the manual to be able to fully appreciate and learn to operate all the advanced features. You can almost assume that any feature or function you've encountered on any transceiver is also supported on this radio.

Yaesu FTdx101D Key Measurements Summary



KEY: QS1911-PR140
Measurements for Main receiver with preamps off.
Bars off the graph indicate values over scale.

Table 1
Yaesu FTDX101D, serial number 9F020045

Manufacturer's Specifications		Measured in the ARRL Lab																																		
Frequency coverage: Receive, 0.03 – 75 MHz; transmit, 160 – 6 meter amateur bands only.		Receive and transmit, as specified, including 60 meters on 5.332, 5.348, 5.3585, 5.373, and 5.405 MHz.																																		
Power requirement: Transmit, 23 A, Receive (with signal), 4 A at 13.8 V dc (±10%).		At 13.8 V dc: Transmit, 19 A (typical), 12 A (AM) at maximum RF power output; 7.7 A at minimum RF output. Receive, 3.24 A (maximum brightness), 2.99 A (minimum brightness). Power off, <1 mA.																																		
Modes of operation: SSB, CW, AM, FM, FSK, PSK, SSB data modes.		As specified.																																		
Receiver		Receiver Dynamic Testing*																																		
SSB/CW sensitivity (preamp 2 on): 0.16 μV (1.8 – 30 MHz) 0.125 μV (50 – 54 MHz) 0.2 μV (1.705 MHz – 24.5 MHz) 0.16 μV (70 – 70.5 MHz).		Noise floor (MDS), 500 Hz bandwidth, 600 Hz roofing filter: <table><tr><th>Preamp</th><th>Off</th><th>P1</th><th>P2</th></tr><tr><td>0.137 MHz</td><td>–121</td><td>–131</td><td>–124 dBm</td></tr><tr><td>0.475 MHz</td><td>–123</td><td>–132</td><td>–135 dBm</td></tr><tr><td>1.0 MHz</td><td>–125</td><td>–134</td><td>–137 dBm</td></tr><tr><td>3.5 MHz</td><td>–125</td><td>–133</td><td>–137 dBm</td></tr><tr><td>14 MHz</td><td>–125</td><td>–134</td><td>–138 dBm</td></tr><tr><td>50 MHz</td><td>–127</td><td>–135</td><td>–138 dBm</td></tr><tr><td>70 MHz</td><td>–128</td><td>–137</td><td>–138 dBm</td></tr></table>			Preamp	Off	P1	P2	0.137 MHz	–121	–131	–124 dBm	0.475 MHz	–123	–132	–135 dBm	1.0 MHz	–125	–134	–137 dBm	3.5 MHz	–125	–133	–137 dBm	14 MHz	–125	–134	–138 dBm	50 MHz	–127	–135	–138 dBm	70 MHz	–128	–137	–138 dBm
Preamp	Off	P1	P2																																	
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14 MHz	–125	–134	–138 dBm																																	
50 MHz	–127	–135	–138 dBm																																	
70 MHz	–128	–137	–138 dBm																																	
ADC overload level: Not specified.		–2 dBm for Main and Sub receiver.																																		
Noise figure: Not specified.		Preamp off/1/2, 14 MHz: 22/13/9 dB; 50 MHz, 20/12/9 dB.																																		
AM sensitivity: 6 kHz BW, 10 dB (S+N/N) 6.3 μV (0.5 – 1.8 MHz) 2.0 μV (1.8 – 30 MHz) 1.0 μV (50 – 54 MHz) 2.0 μV (70 – 70.5 MHz).		10 dB (S+N)/N, 1 kHz tone, 30% modulation, 9 kHz BW: <table><tr><th>Preamp</th><th>Off</th><th>P1</th><th>P2</th></tr><tr><td>1.0 MHz</td><td>3.16</td><td>1.00</td><td>0.78 μV</td></tr><tr><td>3.88 MHz</td><td>3.75</td><td>1.23</td><td>0.90 μV</td></tr><tr><td>29.0 MHz</td><td>2.57</td><td>0.90</td><td>0.86 μV</td></tr><tr><td>50.4 MHz</td><td>2.37</td><td>0.90</td><td>0.78 μV</td></tr></table>			Preamp	Off	P1	P2	1.0 MHz	3.16	1.00	0.78 μV	3.88 MHz	3.75	1.23	0.90 μV	29.0 MHz	2.57	0.90	0.86 μV	50.4 MHz	2.37	0.90	0.78 μV												
Preamp	Off	P1	P2																																	
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29.0 MHz	2.57	0.90	0.86 μV																																	
50.4 MHz	2.37	0.90	0.78 μV																																	
FM sensitivity: 12 kHz BW, 12 dB SINAD 0.25 μV (28 – 30 MHz) 0.20 μV (50 – 54 MHz) 0.25 μV (70 – 70.5 MHz).		For 12 dB SINAD, 3 kHz deviation, 16 kHz BW: <table><tr><th>Preamp</th><th>Off</th><th>P1</th><th>P2</th></tr><tr><td>29 MHz</td><td>1.03</td><td>0.38</td><td>0.33 μV</td></tr><tr><td>52 MHz</td><td>0.90</td><td>0.34</td><td>0.29 μV</td></tr><tr><td>70 MHz</td><td>0.94</td><td>0.34</td><td>0.30 μV</td></tr></table>			Preamp	Off	P1	P2	29 MHz	1.03	0.38	0.33 μV	52 MHz	0.90	0.34	0.29 μV	70 MHz	0.94	0.34	0.30 μV																
Preamp	Off	P1	P2																																	
29 MHz	1.03	0.38	0.33 μV																																	
52 MHz	0.90	0.34	0.29 μV																																	
70 MHz	0.94	0.34	0.30 μV																																	
Spectral sensitivity: Not specified.		9 kHz BW: <table><tr><th>Preamp</th><th>Off</th><th>P1</th><th>P2</th></tr><tr><td>29 MHz</td><td>0.98</td><td>0.34</td><td>0.32 μV</td></tr><tr><td>52 MHz</td><td>0.85</td><td>0.32</td><td>0.28 μV</td></tr><tr><td>70 MHz</td><td>0.89</td><td>0.31</td><td>0.29 μV</td></tr></table>			Preamp	Off	P1	P2	29 MHz	0.98	0.34	0.32 μV	52 MHz	0.85	0.32	0.28 μV	70 MHz	0.89	0.31	0.29 μV																
Preamp	Off	P1	P2																																	
29 MHz	0.98	0.34	0.32 μV																																	
52 MHz	0.85	0.32	0.28 μV																																	
70 MHz	0.89	0.31	0.29 μV																																	
Blocking gain compression dynamic range: Not specified.		Panadapter and waterfall, preamp Off/1/2++ 14 MHz, –128/–137/–144 dBm 50 MHz, –133/–143/–146 dBm 3DSS, preamp Off/1/2++ 14 MHz, –120/–128/–137 dBm 50 MHz, –128/–137/–145 dBm																																		
Reciprocal mixing dynamic range: Not specified.		Blocking gain compression dynamic range, 500 Hz BW, 600 Hz roofing filter:** <table><tr><th>Preamp</th><th>20 kHz offset</th><th>5/2 kHz offset</th></tr><tr><th>Off/P1/P2</th><th>Preamp off</th><th></th></tr><tr><td>3.5 MHz</td><td>>135/>143/145</td><td>>135/>135 dB</td></tr><tr><td>14 MHz</td><td>>135/>144/146</td><td>>135/>135 dB</td></tr><tr><td>50 MHz</td><td>>137/139/133</td><td>>137/>137 dB</td></tr></table>			Preamp	20 kHz offset	5/2 kHz offset	Off/P1/P2	Preamp off		3.5 MHz	>135/>143/145	>135/>135 dB	14 MHz	>135/>144/146	>135/>135 dB	50 MHz	>137/139/133	>137/>137 dB																	
Preamp	20 kHz offset	5/2 kHz offset																																		
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3.5 MHz	>135/>143/145	>135/>135 dB																																		
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50 MHz	>137/139/133	>137/>137 dB																																		
ARRL Lab Two-Tone IMD Testing (500 Hz bandwidth), 500 Hz Roofing Filter																																				
Band/Preamp	Spacing	Measured IMD Level	Measured Input Level	IMD DR																																
3.5 MHz/Off	20 kHz	–125 dBm –97 dBm	–21 dBm –10 dBm	104 dB																																
14 MHz/Off	20 kHz	–125 dBm –97 dBm	–14 dBm –5 dBm	111 dB																																
14 MHz/P1	20 kHz	–134 dBm –97 dBm	–23 dBm –11 dBm	111 dB																																
14 MHz/P2	20 kHz	–138 dBm –97 dBm	–31 dBm –17 dBm	107 dB																																
14 MHz/Off	5 kHz	–125 dBm –97 dBm	–15 dBm –5 dBm	110 dB																																
14 MHz/Off	2 kHz	–125 dBm –97 dBm	–15 dBm –6 dBm	110 dB																																

Manufacturer's Specifications

Measured in the ARRL Lab

Band/Preamp	Spacing	Measured IMD Level	Measured Input Level	IMD DR
50 MHz/Off	20 kHz	-127 dBm -97 dBm	-25 dBm -15 dBm	102 dB
50 MHz/P2	20 kHz	-138 dBm -97 dBm	-38 dBm -27 dBm	100 dB

Second-order intercept point:
Not specified.

IF and image rejection: IF, ≥ 70 dB (1.8 – 28 MHz, VC on), ≥ 60 dB (50 MHz); image, ≥ 70 dB (1.8 – 28 MHz), ≥ 60 dB (50 MHz).

Noise reduction: Not specified.

FM adjacent channel rejection:
Not specified.

FM two-tone third-order IMD dynamic range: Not specified.

Squelch sensitivity: FM, 28 – 30 MHz, 0.25 μ V, 50 – 54 MHz, 0.2 μ V, 70 – 70.5 MHz, 0.2 μ V; HF (SSB) 0.16 μ V.

S-meter sensitivity: Not specified.

Notch filter depth: Not specified.

IF/audio response: Not specified.

Audio output: 2.5 W at 10% THD at 4 Ω .
Receive processing delay time: Not specified.

Preamp Off/P1/P2 dB
14 MHz, +73/+71/+71 dBm
21 MHz, +77/+81/+81 dBm
50 MHz, +85/+85/+85 dBm

IF rejection: VC off/on, 7 MHz, 91/109 dB, 10.1 MHz, 66/97 dB, 14 MHz, 52/88 dB, 50 MHz, 114/114 dB; Sub receiver: 7 MHz, 64 dB, 10 MHz, 62 dB, 14 MHz, 97 dB, 50 MHz, 128 dB.

Image rejection: 14 MHz, 69 dB, 50 MHz, 70 dB. Sub receiver: 14 MHz, 69 dB, 50 MHz, 73 dB.

For S-5 level, 10 dB; S-9 level, up to 18 dB.

P2 on, 29 MHz: 86 dB; 52 MHz, 87 dB (FM and FM narrow).

20 kHz offset, P2 on, 29 MHz: 86 dB,† 52 MHz, 85 dB. 10 MHz offset, P2 on: 29 MHz, 120 dB; 52 MHz, 92 dB.

FM: P2 on, 29 MHz, 0.27 – 0.52 μ V, 52 MHz, 0.21 – 0.66 μ V, 70 MHz, 0.26 – 0.71 μ V. HF squelch: 0.47 – 20.4 μ V.

S-9 signal, preamp Off/P1/P2:
14 MHz, 115/40.7/14.8 μ V
50 MHz, 107/40.2/16.2 μ V
Scaling: 3 dB per S-unit.

Tunable notch filter, >70 dB; auto notch >70 dB, attack time 2 ms for one or two tones.

Range at -6 dB points:†
CW (500 Hz BW): 453 – 945 Hz;
Equivalent Rectangular BW: 489 Hz;
USB (2.4 kHz BW): 289 – 2,406 Hz;
LSB (2.4 kHz BW): 289 – 2,406 Hz;
AM (9 kHz BW): 98 – 1,668 Hz.

As specified. 0.3% at 1 V_{RMS}.
26 ms.

Transmitter

Transmitter Dynamic Testing

Power output: 5 – 100 W (SSB, CW, FM), 5 – 25 W (AM).	SSB, CW, FM (typical): 4.8 – 96 W; AM: 4.8 – 24 W.
RF power output at minimum specified operating voltage: Not specified.	At 12.4 V dc: 14 MHz, 94 W; 50 MHz, 90 W.
Spurious-signal and harmonic suppression: ≥ 50 dB (HF); ≥ 63 dB (50 MHz).	HF: 71 dB typical; 62 dB worst case (160 m); 50 MHz, 77 dB. Complies with FCC emission standards.
Third-order intermodulation distortion (IMD) products: Not specified.	3rd/5th/7th/9th order, 100 W PEP: -42/-41/-48/-58 dB (HF typical) -41/-44/-46/-50 dB (worst case, 80 m) -36/-37/-51/-66 dB (50 MHz)
CW keyer speed range: Not specified.	At 50 W RF output: -32/-44/-57/-64 dB (14 MHz) -35/-42/-51/-66 dB (50 MHz)
CW keying characteristics: Not specified.	4.8 to 60 WPM, mode A, B, Y, ACS. See Figures 6 and 7.
Transmit-receive turn-around time (PTT) Release to 50% audio output: Not specified.	S-9 signal, AGC fast, SSB, 62 ms; AGC fast, CW, full break-in, 26 ms.
Receive-transmit turn-around time (TX delay): Not specified.	SSB, 12 ms; FM, 16 ms (29 & 52 MHz).
Transmitted phase noise: Not specified.	See Figure 8.
Amplifier key line closure to RF output: 15 to 30 ms (adjustable).	As specified.
Size (height, width, depth, including protrusions): 5.9 × 16.5 × 15 inches; weight, 26.5 pounds.	

Second-order intercept points were determined using S-5 reference.

††Measurements with scope sensitivity set to **NORMAL**, scope level +30.0 dB and span 5 kHz. Scope sensitivity varies with settings.

*Main receiver values shown. Sub receiver performance is identical unless indicated.

**Blocking dynamic range exceeds these values. No blocking was observed with up to +10 dBm signal at the antenna jack, the maximum level used in ARRL Lab testing. See Lab Notes.

†Measurement is noise limited at the value indicated.

††Default values; bandwidth is adjustable.

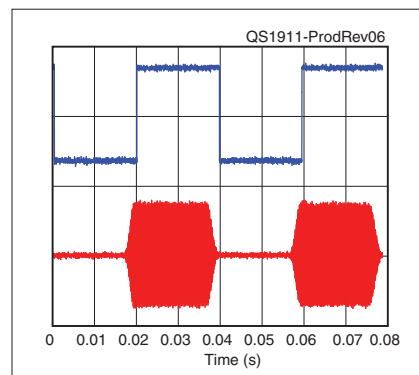


Figure 6 — CW keying waveform for the Yaesu FTdx101D showing the first two dits in full-break-in (QSK) mode using external keying and the default rise time setting. Equivalent keying speed is 60 WPM. The upper trace is the actual key closure; the lower trace is the RF envelope. (Note that the first key closure starts at the left edge of the figure.) Horizontal divisions are 10 ms. The transceiver was being operated at 100 W output on the 14 MHz band.

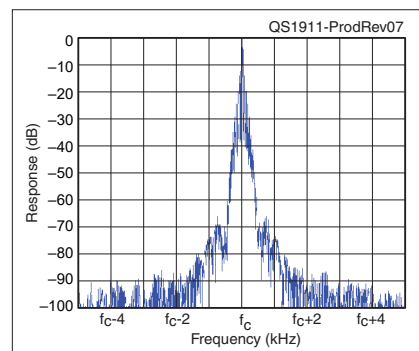


Figure 7 — Spectral display of the Yaesu FTdx101D transmitter during keying sideband testing. Equivalent keying speed is 60 WPM using external keying and the default rise time setting. Spectrum analyzer resolution bandwidth is 10 Hz, and the sweep time is 30 seconds. The transmitter was being operated at 100 W PEP output on the 14 MHz band, and this plot shows the transmitter output ± 5 kHz from the carrier. The reference level is 0 dBc, and the vertical scale is in decibels.

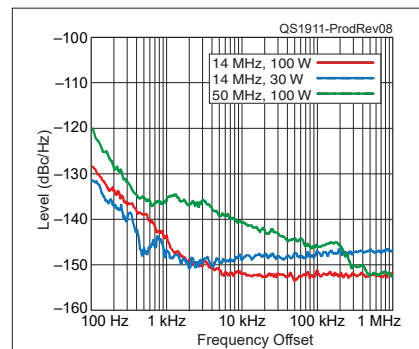


Figure 8 — Spectral display of the Yaesu FTdx101D transmitter output during phase-noise testing. Power output is 100 W on the 14 MHz band (red trace), 30 W on the 14 MHz band (blue trace), and 100 W on the 50 MHz band (green trace). The carrier, off the left edge of the plot, is not shown. This plot shows phase noise 100 Hz to 1 MHz from the carrier. The reference level is -100 dBc/Hz, and the vertical scale is 10 dB per division.

I operated the FTDX101D with my Elecraft 500 W linear amplifier and auto tuner, just using the Yaesu's amplifier keying connection. My amplifier requires drive in the 20 to 30 W range. While an automatic level (ALC) input is provided, the radio's power-level memory kept everything in line.

The transceiver also provides band data on a 15-pin rear connector. This can be used to automatically band switch a linear amplifier to follow the transceiver. Elecraft offers a cable that will connect to this radio to provide the required interface. Using this cable would have made it unnecessary to manually change the amplifier's band, or wait until it detected the RF and switched itself.

Running with Dual Receivers

The main and sub receivers both work very well. They can be locked together with the **SYNC** button for diversity reception, with one channel in each ear and receivers on different antennas, or they can be completely independent on the same or different bands. A push of the **MAIN/SUB** button interchanges the two frequencies.

There are three antenna connectors on the rear panel. The antenna connections for the main and sub receiver are selected by the **ANT** button on the main screen. The third antenna can be set by a menu item to be a third transmit/receive antenna, or it can be set to be a receive-only antenna while transmitting on antenna 1 or 2.

The main receiver VFO is controlled by the large center knob, while the sub receiver is tuned with a concentric ring to the rear of the main tuning. The outer ring can be set to be used for other things as well, which makes sense because the second receiver is not always in use. My main use of the second receiver is to be able to chase DX stations operating on split frequencies — listening on a frequency different from the transmit frequency.

The DX station is first tuned in on the main receiver and then the sub receiver is used to listen to, and help select, my transmit frequency. Push the **SPLIT** button to transmit on the sub receiver frequency. Fortunately, there is a **LOCK** button that fixes the main receiver frequency, so if you accidentally brush it while tuning the sub receiver, you won't lose the DX station.

The frequency memories also store the mode, selectivity choice, and other parameters, such as the repeater offset and tones needed for FM. The memories are added, loaded, or deleted from the main menu, with each selected from the list by touching a button on the screen. A cluster of three dedicated buttons handles memory operations — the fairly standard **V/M** (VFO or memory mode), **M>V** (copy contents of selected memory to VFO), and **V>M** (copy VFO frequency and other parameters to memory). The maximum number of regular memories is 99, which can be divided into five groups of up to 20 channels each. In addition, there are nine special memory pairs intended for setting upper and lower bounds for scanning particular regions, such as band segments. Also provided are 10 special memories for the 60-meter channels, five for SSB and five for CW.

The Spectrum Scope

The spectrum scope is quite useful and flexible. It can observe a portion of the spectrum near the tuned frequency, as shown in Figure 1. If set to cover a particular portion of a band that includes both the A and B receiver channels, they both are shown on the same scan. Alternately, the B channel could be on a different portion of the band, or even a different band and mode, and can be shown on a separate span (press the **MULTI** key on the display) below the first — each with its own width and tuning rate, as shown in Figure 2.

The width can be adjusted from

1 kHz to 1 MHz, by pushing the **SPAN** button on the bottom row of the scope display.

The rear panel also provides main and sub receiver output jacks with the full RF spectrum for use with an additional receiver, in case two receivers are not enough. There is also a jack that provides the 9 MHz first IF signal in wideband form (ahead of the roofing filters) for use with an alternate panadapter or other signal processing hardware.

Antenna Tuner

The internal antenna tuner quickly tunes an antenna system with up to a specified 3:1 SWR to near 1:1, and it remembers the tuner settings for that frequency. I found that it could tune some antennas with a higher SWR, but the internal SWR meter only shows up to a 3:1 value, so it can be hard to tell. Attempting to use an antenna with more than the specified mismatch can be a risky business. While the radio cuts back to 10 W out (adjustable) during tuning, it will try to push whatever power setting you select during operation, and damage to tuner components is possible in any tuner if ratings are exceeded.

Voice Operation

Voice modes all worked well with good audio reports received on SSB and AM. I was unable to make any FM contacts on 10 or 6 meters — not unusual here. The transceiver is supplied with a handheld Yaesu SSM-75G electret microphone that plugs into the eight-pin front-panel jack. The jack supplies electret bias voltage on a dedicated line, so a dynamic microphone can be directly connected to the **MIC** pins. To use an electret mic not designed to operate with Yaesu radios, you will need to fabricate a simple adapter to bring the bias voltage to the mic. One was described in a *QST* "Doctor is In" column.¹ Both the supplied electret

¹J. Hallas, W1ZR, "The Doctor is In," *QST*, Sep. 2015, pp. 56 – 57.

mic and a professional-quality dynamic mic worked well with the FTDX101D, and I received good reports.

While SSB and CW modes can be selected directly from front-panel buttons, a long push of the **MODE** button brings up a screen offering other modes, including AM, FM, and data (SSB data modes or FSK). For 10- or 6-meter FM operation, the FTDX101D provides easy split-frequency offsets, as well as CTCSS tone encoding for repeater access. The settings are available from the main menu's **RADIO SETTING** screen, which offers selections for each mode. Choices include AGC levels, frequency response, gain settings, and audio source (front-panel **MIC** jack or rear-panel **RTTY/DATA** or USB jacks).

A variable three-band equalizer can be selected from the **TX AUDIO** menu. There are separate groups of settings for operation with the speech processor/compressor on and off. This allows a setting for casual conversation, and a different set of parameters for DX or contest operation using the speech compressor if punchier audio is appropriate.

The three equalizer bands can be set to be centered between 100 to 700 Hz, 700 to 1,500 Hz, and 1,500 to 3,200 Hz, with each having a selectable bandwidth (**Q**) and gain. The equalizer can also be set to **OFF** in either mode, if you prefer the way you sound with just the microphone's audio characteristics. I found that I could use the equalizer to improve the sound from my flat-response studio-type mic. The equalizer is effective in SSB, AM, and FM, although AM and FM only use the equalizer settings with the speech processor off.

On receive, SSB bandwidth is adjustable from 300 Hz to 4 kHz, with the SSB bandwidths also available for SSB data modes. AM mode uses 6

Lab Notes: Yaesu FTDX101D

Bob Allison, WB1GCM, ARRL Test Engineer

Receiver tests showed that the Yaesu FTDX101D has an excellent receiver. Two-tone, third-order IMD dynamic range measured 110 dB at 2 kHz spacing, the highest of any HF transceiver tested at the ARRL Laboratory. Reciprocal mixing dynamic range (RMDR) is impressive at 125 dB, and blocking gain compression dynamic range is also impressive at >135 dB. Note that the blocking dynamic range is higher than indicated by the test results. The ARRL Lab tests with signals up to +10 dBm (10 mW), but Yaesu indicates that the receiver can handle signals up to +27 dBm. The blocking dynamic range test results would be higher if we tested with stronger signals. With such measurement figures, the user should not experience false signals, increased background noise, or reduced speaker audio from one or more strong, adjacent signals.

Speaker audio distortion is very low at normal listening levels, keeping fatigue at bay during long operating events. AM enthusiasts will appreciate the FTDX101D's good AM sensitivity, especially on the higher bands where background noise levels are low.

With digital processing being the norm for current transceivers, signal latency can be an issue, taking hundreds of milliseconds from the time a signal arrives at the antenna jack to when it comes out of the speaker. This is not an issue with the FTDX101D, with only 26 milliseconds of signal processing time. This is especially important for high-speed CW operation, where hundreds of milliseconds is an eternity.

Transmit quality is equally impressive, making the FTDX101D a good neighbor for others using nearby frequencies. For example, the FTDX101D greatly exceeds FCC requirements for harmonic and spurious suppression. It also has excellent transmit phase noise, keeping broadband noise low for other receivers tuned to the same amateur band. The CW rise time is adjustable, and the keying waveform and sidebands shown in Figures 6 and 7 are with the default 4-millisecond setting. As the rise time decreases, the keying waveform corners sharpen and the keying sidebands increase, potentially interfering with stations operating on nearby frequencies. The 6-millisecond setting is even better. Avoid the 1- and 2-millisecond settings. On SSB, the transmit intermodulation distortion (IMD) is relatively low, especially the higher-order products that can interfere with stations on nearby frequencies.

During transmitter testing, I observed some power overshoot on the first transmitted syllable or CW character, which might cause a problem with an external linear amplifier. Yaesu quickly found that there was a delay in the automatic level control attack time, and they corrected the problem in production. They published a list of serial numbers of the early production radios affected and offered to update any affected radio free of charge, and even pay shipping both ways. After the update, the review radio and another later production radio we tested had no signs of overshoot.

and 9 kHz bandwidths, and FM uses 9 and 16 kHz. Each mode has a receive audio filter, separate from the DSP bandwidth selection. This allows the setting of the low- and high-frequency cutoff points in 50 Hz steps, as well as the roll-off slope of each to either 6 or 18 dB per octave. This can all be turned off if desired, leaving the response to that of the DSP IF filters. The audio filter could

reduce any out-of-band noise entering the receiver beyond the IF.

In addition, synchronous AM reception (**SAM**) can be selected. Synchronous AM works better during fades through the use of an internally generated carrier instead of the one received over the air. The internal carrier will stay constant in amplitude, reducing the effects of fading.

Voice-operated transmit control (**VOX**) worked flawlessly, as did the anti-**VOX** function, which eliminated triggering from loud received stations, even with the mic pointed at the speakers. Enabling **VOX** just requires pushing a dedicated physical **VOX** button below the display screen, while setting (and remembering) **VOX** parameters is accomplished via buttons on the **MAIN** menu screen.

A monitor function is provided, and a recording function can be used to record and play back audio signals. It can be used to record either transmitted or received signals, and recordings can be reviewed off line or transmitted. The voice memory can store and replay often repeated contest messages. It includes five memories, each capable of storing up to a maximum of 20 seconds of voice audio. The optional FH-2 remote-control keypad may also be used to control the messages.

CW Operation

The designers of the Yaesu FTDX101D did a good job of including many useful features for CW operators. Full-break-in and semi-break-in operation are supported. The transmit-receive switchovers use relays, which are just barely audible, and not at all objectionable. There are both front- and rear-panel ¼-inch stereo **KEY** jacks, and each can be set up separately, so paddles can go in the front, with a straight key, computer keying, or external keyer connected in the rear — very handy.

The built-in iambic (mode A, B, or Y) or bug-emulating electronic keyer can be adjusted from a Lab-measured 4.8 to 60 words per minute. The keyer mode, weight, and contest serial number are settable independently for the front and rear key jacks. Automatic character spacing may be turned on to ensure precise spacing between Morse characters.

“The designers of the Yaesu FTDX101D did a good job of including many useful features for CW operators. Full-break-in and semi-break-in operation are supported.”

The **CW SETTING** menu button provides for five CW keyer memories, each able to store 50 characters. They are entered by selecting the **REC/PLAY** button on the **MAIN** menu, which is also used to send them. The message contents can be entered by sending with a paddle or via a virtual keyboard that appears on the display if **TEXT** is selected in the **KEYER SETTING** menu. The memories can also be controlled using an optional FH-2 remote-control keypad. This may be a worthwhile investment if you plan to use the keyer memories frequently, because this should avoid tying up the display during memory operation.

A CW decoder is available as well, with decoded text displayed on the screen. For best results, adjust the **MIC/SPEED** control to match the speed of the received CW signal.

The two receivers can be set independently to the default CW bandwidths of 50, 100, 250, 400, 500, 800, 1,000, or 3,000 Hz. The filter width and center frequency for any of these default settings can be adjusted using the front-panel concentric knobs. I detected just the slightest trace of ringing at the 50 Hz setting. A very sharp audio-peaking filter is available, which can help bring a CW signal out of the noise or interference.

The radio includes an on-screen CW tuning indicator graphic to help you manually tune in a received station for the selected CW offset. If you prefer to let the radio handle that, a tap of the **ZIN/SPOT** button beneath the display screen automatically sets the receiver tuning to match your

selected BFO offset (pitch). A longer push provides a steady tone of that frequency to use as a reference.

Data Modes

The FTDX101D offers several options for digital-mode operation. The radio has an internal decoder for RTTY and BPSK or QPSK modes, and you can program built-in memories to transmit on those modes. Connections are also available to use the radio with digital-mode software running on an external PC.

Text from the internal decoder displays on the screen in place of the spectrum scope, providing up to 11 lines of text. Five transmit memories, each up to 50 characters in length, can be programmed using either a text-entry virtual keyboard that appears if the **REC/PLAY** button is pressed, or via a USB PC keyboard plugged into one of the front-panel USB jacks (the other can be connected to a mouse, or equivalent). The memories can then be accessed via the main display or the optional FH-2 keypad.

Through the transceiver's USB port (with the CP210x drivers installed as described previously), you can also set up a connection to the radio's internal sound card for any of the “sound card” digital modes, such as FT8, PSK, or AFSK RTTY. When the radio is connected via the USB port to a Windows PC, Windows installs drivers and a **USB AUDIO CODEC** shows up as a sound device on the computer. For radio control and PTT with digital-mode software such as *WSJT-X*, supporting modes like FT8 and FT4, either a virtual or real COM port can be used, as described ear-

lier. For software that doesn't offer a setup option for the FTdx101 series radios yet, Yaesu suggests using the FTdx3000 settings as a proxy.

Alternately, the six-pin **RTTY/DATA** jack on the rear panel provides PTT, AFSK output, and accepts AFSK input to connect directly to your PC's sound interface and PTT ports, eliminating the need to set up the virtual COM arrangements. The same jack provides a **SHIFT** connection that can be used for frequency shift keying (FSK) for RTTY operation.

DSP Noise and Interference Reduction

The FTdx101D includes effective digital noise reduction (**DNR**) and noise blanking (**NB**) capabilities. These independent functions are provided for both receivers and can be used separately, or in combination. The **DNR** function is designed to improve the received signal-to-noise ratio of desired signals by eliminating much of the random background noise. The **DNR** function offers 15 different algorithms to help maximize the receive signal-to-noise ratio for your environment. It is likely that a selection can be found that mini-

mizes noise without significantly increasing distortion. The noise blanker is more focused on blanking out noise pulses, such as those from engine ignition-based sources. Both functions are quite effective and easy to implement.

A digital notch filter (**DNF**) effectively notches out multiple carriers within the passband. As with many radios, it thinks that CW signals are also carriers to be notched out, so be careful to turn off the **DNF** if operating or listening to CW. A manually tuned notch filter (**NF**) is also provided. This is manually tuned with a dedicated knob (one for each receiver) and can make an interfering carrier, or even an undesired CW signal next to the one you want, disappear. Both work very well, with sharp, deep notches. Just turning the knob makes the function active, with its position in the receive spectrum shown in the channel bandwidth display.

Documentation

The FTdx101D comes with a 118-page *Operation Manual* that does a reasonably good job at getting you started with the radio. A complete

schematic package is provided on eight double-sided 16 × 12 inch sheets. The *Operation Manual* is available as a PDF on Yaesu's website and is worth reviewing for a thorough look at all of this radio's features.

A *CAT Operation Reference Manual* is available for download from the Yaesu website. The *CAT Operation Reference* provides a detailed description of the command set needed to communicate from PC to radio — perfect if you want to write your own CAT software.

Final Impressions

The FTdx101D has a lot going for it. The display is large, of high resolution — helpful while using the spectrum analyzer — and the controls are easy to reach and operate. Receiver performance is top tier, and the transmitter is very clean.

Manufacturer: Yaesu USA, 6125 Phyllis Dr., Cypress, CA 90630; www.yaesu.com. *Price:* Yaesu FTdx101D, \$3,995; 300 or 1,200 Hz roofing filter (separate units for each receiver), \$260 each; FH-2 Remote Control Keypad, \$95.

SPE Expert 1.5K-FA Solid-State Linear Amplifier

Reviewed by Mark Wilson, K1RO
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In 2016, we reviewed the SPE Expert 1.3K-FA solid-state power amplifier from Italy.² That amplifier covered 160 through 6 meters and, at the **MAX** power setting, typically delivered 1,300 W on all bands except 6 meters, where output was

1,100 W. The 1.3K-FA is still available, and is offered with or without an internal automatic antenna tuner.

Bottom Line

The SPE Expert 1.5K-FA builds on the popular 1.3K-FA, increasing power output to 1,500 W. It's rugged enough for contesting, digital modes, and other demanding applications. Once the amplifier is set up, it requires very little involvement from the operator.

Overview

SPE recently released the 1.5K-FA, which is very similar in operation but easily delivers 1,500 W output on 160 to 10 meters, and 1,410 W at 50 MHz. Like its predecessor, it has **MID** (1,000 W) and **LOW** (500 W) power settings. If you want to operate at less-than-maximum power, the lower power settings are recommended because the amplifier operates more efficiently than it would by just reducing drive at the **MAX** setting. The amplifier automatically

²M. Wilson, K1RO, "SPE Expert 1.3K-FA Solid-State Linear Amplifier," Product Review, QST, July 2016, pp. 50 – 52.



switches to the **MID** power setting if you transmit continuously for more than 8 minutes at the **MAX** setting, but is capable of operating at full power for long stretches of typical intermittent operation (some transmitting, some listening) in any mode.

The 1.5K-FA uses a single LDMOSFET power transistor with a higher power rating than the one in the 1.3K-FA. Amplifiers for the US market include attenuation at the input to comply with the 15 dB gain maximum required by FCC regulations. The review unit typically required 40 to 50 W for full output and exhibits higher gain at lower drive levels.

A significant new feature is the inclusion of a coupler for predistortion operation with compatible SDR transceivers. The transmitted signal is attenuated by 60 dB and available

at a rear-panel SMA connector labeled **-60dB**. This signal can be used to connect the amplifier to an SDR transceiver with predistortion capability to improve the intermodulation distortion (IMD) of the transmitted signal significantly. As shown in Figure 9, Lab testing with an ANAN 7000DLE MKII SDR transceiver confirmed that the predistortion feature is quite effective in reducing transmitted IMD, especially the third, fifth, and seventh order IMD products.

The 1.5K-FA includes an internal automatic antenna tuner (ATU) that will match SWR of up to 5:1, a significant increase in capability over the optional ATU in the 1.3K-FA. (The 1.5K-FA is not available without the ATU.) The amplifier has four PL-259 antenna connectors, as well as separate connections for two transceivers. The front-panel LCD displays the

amplifier's settings, operating conditions, and menus (see Figure 10).

The internal universal power automatically adjusts for 100 to 255 V ac input, but operation from a standard 15 or 20 A household, 120 V line will likely result in reduced output. The power supply senses the input voltage automatically. The entire package is compact and weighs just 22 pounds.

Setup

The manual is supplied as a PDF on a CD-ROM. It's also available for download from the Expert Linears America website, along with a *Quick Start Guide* by Jeff Cantor, K1ZN. If you're doing a basic installation, I'd recommend the *Quick Start Guide* to get it on the air, followed by reading the manual to learn about the amplifier's many features.

The amplifier comes without a plug on the ac line cord. I needed to install a 240 V, 20 A connector.

There are separate sets of RF input (SO-239), TR relay (phono), ALC (phono), and transceiver interface/band data (DB-15) connectors for two radios. The 1.5K-FA is capable of interfacing with transceivers from Elecraft, FlexRadio, Icom, Kenwood, TEN-TEC, and Yaesu. Although the band data interface is recommended so that the amplifier follows transceiver frequency changes, the

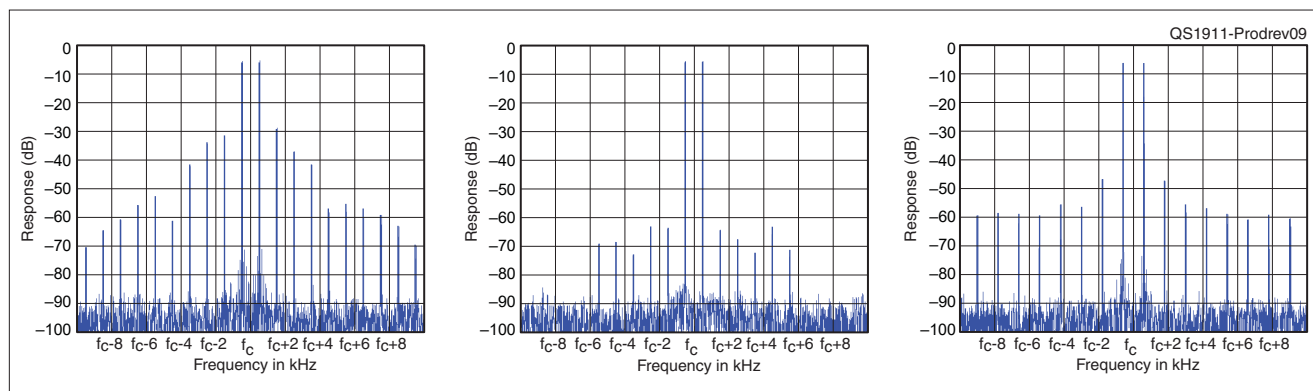


Figure 9 — Two-tone intermodulation distortion (IMD) testing on 14 MHz in the ARRL Lab. On the left, the SPE Expert 1.5K-FA at 1,500 W output during normal operation. In the center, an ANAN 7000DLE MKII SDR with predistortion enabled. On the right, the SPE Expert 1.5K-FA driven to full output by the ANAN 7000DLE MKII SDR with predistortion enabled and the **-60dB** coupler port connected.

Table 2
SPE Expert 1.5K-FA, serial number 190400262

Manufacturer's Specifications	Measured in ARRL Lab
Frequency range: All amateur frequencies from 1.8 to 29.7 MHz and 50 to 54 MHz.	Tested on 160, 80, 60, 40, 30, 20, 17, 15, 12, 10, 6 meters.*
Power output: (Max), 1,500 W; (Mid), 1,000 W; (Low), 500 W, ± 0.5 dB.	1,500 W except 6 meters (1,410 W at 50 MHz and 1,110 W at 54 MHz).
Driving power required: Not specified.	160 to 10 meters, 37 to 54 W typical for 1,500 W PEP output; at 50 MHz, 47 W for 1,410 W PEP output.
Spurious and harmonic suppression: HF, >60 dB; 6 meters, 65 dB.	HF bands, 57 dB (typical); 50 dB worst case (40 meters); 6 meters, 64 dB. Meets FCC requirements.
Third-order intermodulation distortion (IMD): 30 to 35 dB below PEP typical.	3rd/5th/7th/9th (14 MHz, 1,500 W PEP): -30/-38/-42/-53 dB. With Pure Signal: -47/-55/-56/-60 dB.
Port-to-port isolation: Not specified.	With 1 kW RF output (+60 dBm) at Ant port 1 (14 MHz), RF level observed at: SO2R port, -24.3 dBm; Input 2 port, -18.6 dBm; Ant 2 port, +18.3 dBm; Ant 3 port, +11.2 dBm; Ant 4 port, +3.2 dBm.
Keying time: Not specified.	Unkey-to-key, 10 ms; key-to-unkey, 12 ms.
Primary power requirements: 100 – 255 V ac, 47 – 63 Hz.	Tested at 240 V ac. Operation from 120 V may result in reduced output power.
Size (height, width, depth): 4.7 × 11.1 × 15.1 inches; weight, 22 pounds.	

*In the US, the legal power limit on 30 meters is 200 W PEP output, and on 60 meters, it is an ERP of 100 W PEP relative to a half-wave dipole.



Figure 10 — Indicators along the bottom of the LCD show radio, band, antenna port, and selected bank, along with CAT (transceiver interface) setting, output level (**MAX**, **MID**, **LOW**), SWR on the amplifier side of the ATU, and temperature. The upper portion of the display shows RF output (both on a bar graph and as a numerical display) and PA current when the amplifier is ready to operate. A front-panel switch changes the upper display to PA voltage, indicators showing that the fans are running, and SWR on the antenna side of the tuner. In standby, the LCD shows exciter power (up to 200 W) and SWR on the antenna side of the ATU.

1.5K-FA uses a frequency counter that can sense the RF input when you transmit and adjust the amplifier accordingly when you speak a syllable or two, or send a dit or two on CW. The instruction manual provides information illustrating the various interconnections.

We ordered transceiver interface cables from Dan Tassell, KC5PCB,

who is mentioned on the Expert Lin-ears America website. Using the 1.5K-FA **CAT** menu, I chose the Kenwood and 9600-baud settings for my TS-590S, and immediately the amplifier followed band changes on the transceiver and was ready for use.

Finally, I used the menu to set up the amplifier for my antennas (see Figure 11). Note that you can set up two

separate banks of antenna settings — A and B — which would come in handy if you use the amplifier in multiple locations.

The internal automatic antenna tuner (ATU) is specified to match loads with an SWR of up to 5:1 (2.5:1 on 6 meters). During antenna setup, you can specify whether or not the ATU is used on each antenna. If the ATU is not used, or is not properly tuned, the amplifier protection circuitry gives a **HIGH SWR** warning when SWR exceeds 1.7:1. Above 2:1, the amplifier switches to standby.

I used the tuner on 160, 40, 20, and 17 meters. Each band is divided into segments shown in a chart in the manual. For example, 160 meters is divided into 10 kHz segments and 20 meters uses 50 kHz segments. Tune the transceiver to the center of the first segment. With the amplifier in standby and the transceiver set to 30 W output or less, press **TUNE** and transmit briefly (I used 10 W). The tuner typically found a match within a few seconds. Tune to the next segment and repeat the process.

If the amplifier cannot find a match automatically, you can adjust the inductance and capacitance manually while watching indicators that appear on the display (see Figure 12). I found that necessary in several 160-meter segments where the automatic tuning could not find a match.

Other Features

The 1.5K-FA protection system monitors heatsink temperature, input power, PA voltage and current, reflected power and SWR, and RF voltage on the tuner. Problems are classified as simple, serious, or fatal. For simple problems such as excessive input power, the amplifier sounds a warning beep and resets itself. For serious problems, such as excessive heatsink temperature or high SWR, the amplifier switches to standby and flashes an error message on the display and stores the error in memory.

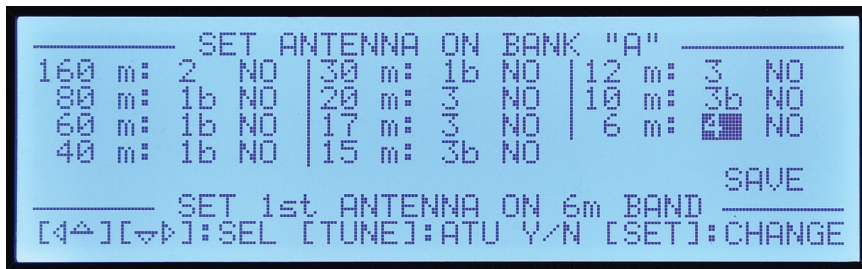


Figure 11 — The **ANTENNA** menu is used to set up an antenna configuration for each band from 160 through 6 meters. There are four antenna connectors on the rear panel. Select the proper antenna connector (1 – 4), or **NO** if you don't have an antenna for that band. You can set two antennas for each band and select between them with the front-panel **ANT** switch. You can also choose whether to use the automatic antenna tuner for each antenna/band selection. In this example, on 160 meters the first antenna is on antenna connector **2** and uses the **ATU**, and the **NO** in the next column indicates that there is not a second antenna. The same multiband antenna (**3**) is used for 20, 17, 15, 12, and 10 meters. The **b** next to the **3** indicates that the antenna tuner is bypassed and not used on 15 and 10 meters. This screen shows the setup for Bank A; you can create a completely separate set of parameters for Bank B.



Figure 12 — The **MANUAL TUNE** screen allows adjustment of the inductance and capacitance values if the internal antenna tuner can't find a suitable match automatically. SWR is shown on both the antenna and amplifier sides of the **ATU**.

For a fatal fault, such as a power supply or microprocessor problem, the amplifier power switches off and might be restarted by cycling the power switch on the rear panel. The manual recommends contacting the distributor if a fatal fault occurs.

The 1.5K-FA rear panel has four small cooling fans. An improvement from the 1.3K-FA is the inclusion of **NORMAL** and **CONTEST** fan settings. In **NORMAL**, the fans do not run with the amplifier in **STANDBY**. They come on at low speed when the amplifier is switched to **OPERATE** and increase in speed when you close the TR switch to transmit. Fan speed automatically increases with heatsink temperature and slows down as the heatsink temperature drops. The fans will stay on in **STANDBY** if the heatsink temperature is above 35 °C. In **CONTEST** mode, the fans run all the time, as

they do in the 1.3K-FA. Some people may find the fan noise at higher speeds bothersome. I wear headphones for nearly all operation, so it wasn't an issue for me.

The LCD includes a temperature display that's always visible. According to the manual, if the temperature reaches 105 °C, the amplifier automatically switches to the next lowest power level and displays a warning. I never saw temperatures above about 70 °C during operation.

Full break-in (QSK) is available for CW operation. The amplifier uses mechanical relays, which are quiet but some clicking is audible if you listen closely. The clicking is masked by fan noise when you are transmitting.

The 1.5K-FA includes the same SO2R (single operator, two radio) features found in other SPE ampli-

ers. It's useful, although it's not as versatile as an SO2R setup with a switching system that allows one transceiver to use any of the main antennas not being used by the other. The 1.5K-FA has connections for two radios with independent settings for each. There's an **SO2R** jack on the back of the amplifier for an antenna separate from the main antennas, and this antenna is used only for receiving. The transceiver connected to the active input uses the main antennas and antenna tuner. The other transceiver is connected to the **SO2R** antenna and can use that antenna for receiving while the active radio is transmitting. The idea is to use the second transceiver and receive-only antenna to find a station on another band that you want to work and then to switch that transceiver to the main transmitting antenna for that band in order to make the call.

The 1.5K-FA has USB and RS-232 ports on the rear panel that can be used for remote control of the amplifier or to upgrade the firmware. Terminal and control software is supplied on the CD shipped with the amplifier, or it is available for download from the SPE website. The remote-control software displays a replica of the amplifier's front-panel LCD and switches for monitoring and control.

Final Thoughts

The SPE Expert 1.5K-FA builds on the 1.3K-FA, bringing the power output to the full legal limit while adding features and refining operation. It is compact and lightweight, suitable for even the most demanding home station use or for DXpeditions. SPE amplifiers are found in a number of remote stations as well.

Manufacturer: SPE (Societa Per L'Elettronica), Rome, Italy; **www.linear-amplifier.com**. Distributed by Expert Linears America, P.O. Box 1224, Magnolia, TX 77355; **www.expertlinears.com**. Price: \$4,995.