PRODUCT REVIEW

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The MicroHam Micro Keyer II

Micro Keyer II is a versatile transceiver USB interface that handles data and voice modes. Roger Cooke sees whether the Mk II is a worthwhile improvement on the original version

The MicroHam Keyer Mk II controlling the author's TS-940

The rear panel is fairly uncluttered. Transceiver-specific interface cables plug into the large D socket.

DESCRIPTION. The Micro Keyer II is a powerful multimode USB interface for CW, SSB, AM, FM, FSK and digital modes including RTTY, PSK31, SSTV, OLIVIA, MFSK and EchoLink. Using a single USB port it can interface with any Windows-based logging or control program to run any FSK, AFSK, CW, SSB, AM, or FM mode. It also has a rig control interface (CAT/CI-V) with interfaces for all radios, a powerful CW memory keyer based on the K1EL WinKey, and a buffer/sequencer for power amplifier and LNA keying.

The Micro Keyer II arrived well packed and accompanied by the appropriate leads for my transceiver, the FT1000MP. The Mk II is physically similar to the Mk I but 60mm wider, to accommodate the customisable LCD backlit display panel. The new version also has an internal soundcard, which eliminates the soundcard interface problems that occasionally occurred with the Mk I. The USB sound card has the added advantage of reducing the number of connecting leads.

The front panel has four controls, CW speed, TX Level, RX Main level, and RX Sub level. This will enable the user to invoke SO2V, which although not quite SO2R, is near enough for me. I think this would require some practice before trying it in a contest. There are seven LED indicators and an external miniature 3.5mm stereo microphone jack connector.

The rear panel has a DC power connector, power switch, an RJ45 microphone connector, main multi-D connector, USB input, a socket for your paddle, plus a few others. A microphone converter cable is supplied to fit round-plug radios.

INSTALLATION. The installation manual is a PDF file. I prefer to print a copy out for reference, rather than skipping between screens on the PC. Providing the installation instructions are followed correctly, there should be no problem at all. It took me about an hour, possibly a little longer.

The keyer is prepared first, by connecting it to the transceiver and a 12V supply. In my case the FT1000MP has a suitable 12V output on the rear. Do not connect the USB connector yet. Then the router has to be installed after which the USB connector can be plugged in and the MicroHam keyer configured. Incidentally the USB is USB 2.0 Full speed, USB 1.1 compatible.

At this stage, if you are using Windows XP, or Vista, it is essential to make sure that your original PC sound device is selected in Control Panel/Sounds. If you don't do this, Windows sounds could be played on the air via the keyer.

OPERATION. Luckily I had the Mk 1 and had noted my original Ports configuration. It saved some time, and I was on the air within 30 minutes. Setting up from cold should be quite painless though. I tried it on RTTY first, with MMTTY as the operating program. I had a contact with K1XN with good copy and clean signals. I used FSK with my FT1000MP, a much preferred method. I then closed MMTTY and invoked N1MM. This worked flawlessly and I then hooked up another

audio lead so I could use the sub VFO. Again, no problem, but I don't think this is for me somehow.

The CW keying is very clean and the supplied K1EL Winkey program works very well. It's a pleasure to use. I then tried it with N1MM. I was keen to do this, as I had noticed some occasional glitches on CW on my MK 1. I set this up on dummy load and ran quite a few Q's with no weird keying effects at all, so it looks like that problem has been fixed.

Using the new keyer is much like using the old one, with most of the advantages not being seen. The main one is that the Mk II has its own built-in sound card, which dispenses with the need for three leads to the PC, plus it frees up the PC sound card for other things. The digital display is a more obvious advantage. This is programmable from the set-up window, and there a number of options to choose from.

Setting up for other digital modes is done in AFSK with FSK preferred for RTTY. I did not use it on any other digital mode. Interfacing it with N1MM is simple and I would imagine no problems with any other contest software.

The keyer has its own memory functions. There are 9 memories for CW and another 9 for RTTY, all user configurable. There are also 9 for DVK, but more banks can be selected if needed.

CONCLUSION. For those with a serious interest in DX or contesting, especially the digital modes, this would provide all that is needed with the exception of SO2R. For that you will need the MK2R. Nevertheless, it is possible to run SO2V with a transceiver such as the FT1000MP. I was sufficiently impressed to buy one, which is a pretty good endorsement.
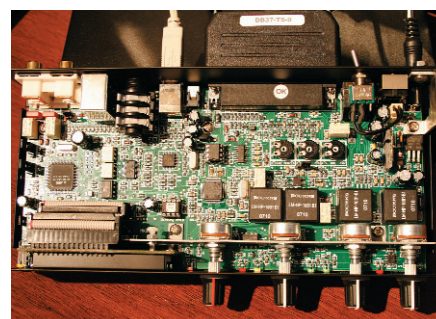
With the lid off you can see the complexity of the device.

SPECIFICATION
Dimensions: 305mm (12") W x 67mm (2.63") H x 106mm (4.17") D
USB power consumption: less than 100mA
Power supply requirement: 400mA at 13.8V (max. 16V)