

# Ultimate2: QRSS Labs Multi-mode QRSS Beacon Kit

**v2.03**

## 1. Introduction

This is the operation manual for the second generation “Ultimate2” Multi-mode QRSS beacon kit. Please read it in conjunction with the assembly manual for building the kit. This version supports modes: QRSS, FSKCW, DFCW, Hell, DX Hell, Slow Hell, FSK, CW, WSPR, WSPR-15 and customisable patterns.

## 2. Operating instructions

The microcontroller has a 512-byte Electrically Erasable Programmable Read Only Memory (EEPROM). This is used for storing your individual settings such as mode, keyer speed, and message. When the kit is first switched on, it automatically enters the “run” mode, in which the message is being transmitted in the selected mode. This is so that in the event of power interruption, the kit recommences the message transmission as soon as power is restored, without user intervention.

When you have just built the kit, the memory will contain only certain default settings, and an empty message. An error will be displayed, saying “Error: Message”, which indicates that the message is empty:

It is now necessary for you to configure the message and settings for your use.

### 2.1 Menu system

The user interface consists of the 24-character LCD and two push-buttons. There are 17 user-configurable settings available. The menu system allows all of the settings to be edited. The use of only two buttons to edit so many settings necessarily means that you must scroll through various options by many button presses. Clearly, there is no full computer keyboard in the kit with which to edit your alphanumeric message. However, the use of these two buttons to control the kit is fairly intuitive.

The menu is a list of items, and the LEFT button is used to scroll through these items. When you see the item which you want to edit, press the RIGHT button to start editing it. The list of menu items shown (right) has example settings for sending the callsign “G0UPL” in FSKCW with 6-second dit symbols.

After cycling through the list of menu items using the LEFT button, the system is returned to the “Run” mode, transmitting the configured message.

Note the final item “Right button to start!”. When this final item is reached, you must press the RIGHT button, which then resumes the “Run”

```
Mode           FSKCW
Speed          006
Frequency      10,140,000
Callsign
Message        G0UPL
Frame          00
Start          00
CW Ident.     00
Locator
Power          23
Use GPS        Off
GPS Baud       009600,01,1
FSK (Hz)       4
Inv. Btn.      Off
Sys. Freq.     20,000,000
Ref. Freq.     125,000,000
Set Time       00:00
Right button to start!
```

mode. The reason for this is that if, for example, you only wanted to change the mode, which is the first setting. It would be tiresome to have to scroll carefully through the remaining items until the “Run” mode was resumed. There are many configurations and you could easily miss the run mode, re-entering the menu system again at the first item. With the right button start feature, you can simply keep the LEFT button pressed, relying on the key autorepeat to quickly cycle through all the remaining menu items and stop at the end. It is also useful for when you want to start the system at an exact time.

## **2.2 Editing a menu item**

There are three types of menu item: alphanumeric (e.g. callsign), numeric (e.g. frequency), and list (e.g. mode). Editing a configuration is slightly different depending on the type. When scrolling through the list of menu items using the LEFT button, you enter editing mode by pressing the RIGHT button.

### **2.2.1 List editing**

If the menu item is a list menu, such as the Mode menu, use the RIGHT button to cycle through the list to find the setting you want. An On/Off menu such as Use GPS is also a list, having only two settings (On and Off). When you have chosen the setting you want, press the LEFT button. This saves the setting into memory and returns to the menu list.

### **2.2.2 Number editing**

When editing a numeric setting, the RIGHT button is used to cycle through the numbers 0..9 until you find the number you want. The LEFT button moves rightwards one position to the next character to be edited. The current character being edited flashes. When the final (rightmost) digit has been chosen, a LEFT button press saves the setting into memory and returns you to the menu list.

Note that in some cases, there are restrictions on the value which may be chosen. For example, when editing the 10's of minutes digit, the RIGHT button only cycles 0..5 then returns to 0.


### **2.2.3 Alphanumeric editing**


The most complex editing is alphanumeric, which also includes certain punctuation characters supported by the Hellshreiber character set. The principle is the same as for Number editing: the LEFT button moves the cursor one character to the right, and the RIGHT button cycles through the letters, punctuation and digits. However facilities are also provided to delete one character, or the whole message.


The order of the letters, punctuation and numbers is as follows:

ABCDEFGHIJKLMN OPQRSTUVWXYZ /+ - ? , ' = ) ( :  
\* \* \* \* \* 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

The following characters have special function:

 **Backspace (delete):** If you select this character as the current flashing character using the RIGHT button, then when you press the LEFT button, the current character is deleted and the flashing cursor moves back left one position.

 **Delete all:** If selected as the current character, pressing the LEFT button has the effect of deleting the entire message, starting again at the left of the screen. There is no “undo”, so use with caution!

 **Enter (finished):** If selected as the current flashing character, pressing the LEFT button is used to finish editing the setting. The setting is saved, and you return to the main menu list. Note that the text that is saved is only the text to the left of the Enter symbol. If you select this symbol and press the LEFT

button when you are not at the furthest right position of the message, then everything right of your position is deleted.

Note that when you continue to press the RIGHT button, there is an automatic key-repeat feature so that you can cycle quickly through the characters without having to press the RIGHT button many times. When pressing the RIGHT button continuously, the character will stop cycling at the 'Z', '9' and 'Enter' characters. To resume cycling through the characters, release the button, then start pressing again. This makes editing easier and faster because you are not so likely to go too far past the character you are looking for, and have to cycle through them all again.

#### **2.2.4 Configuration validation**

In some cases, the configuration setting is validated at the time of entry. For example, the system does not allow the entry of an invalid time setting, or entering letters where numbers are required.

Additionally, there are many cases where particular combinations of settings produce an invalid situation for the transmission mode being used. In these cases, the configuration validation is done when the “Run” mode is entered, i.e. transmission started. If there is any reason why the configuration is invalid, an appropriate error message will be displayed, prompting you to return to the configuration setting to correct it.

#### **2.3 Menu configuration settings**

There are 18 user-configurable settings available in this kit. Not all of them are going to be relevant to the mode you wish to use, or to your hardware configuration. The following sections explain each setting in detail.



A rectangular LCD display with a grey background. The text 'Mode' is on the left and 'FSKCW' is on the right, both in a green, monospaced font.

The Mode setting selects the transmission mode. The available modes are: FSKCW, QRSS, DFCW, Slow Hell, Hell, DX Hell, CW, WSPR



A rectangular LCD display with a grey background. The text 'Speed' is on the left and '003' is on the right, both in a green, monospaced font.

The Speed setting selects the dit speed, in seconds, for the following modes: FSKCW, QRSS, DFCW. In CW mode, the Speed setting means Words Per Minute. In Slow-Hell mode, the setting is the number of seconds duration of one character (see later section for explanation). The setting has no effect at all, in Hell, DX Hell or WSPR modes, these modes all have a defined timing which cannot be changed. The default setting is “006” (6 seconds).



A rectangular LCD display with a grey background. The text 'Frequency' is on the left and '10,140,050' is on the right, both in a green, monospaced font.

This frequency sets the baseline RF output frequency (at zero FSK).

## Callsign G0UPL

The callsign setting is an alphanumeric setting, which may be up to 14 characters long. It can theoretically include punctuation but clearly that isn't normally used in a callsign. The callsign is NOT used for the normal message transmission in most modes.

The callsign is used only for TWO purposes:

- 1) The kit may be configured to automatically send your callsign in standard 12wpm CW at pre-programmed intervals, as a station identifier (read your license conditions)
- 2) The Callsign is used for generating the WSPR message encoding

Note that when using the WSPR mode, the callsign must satisfy certain rules. Firstly, it can only be a 5 or 6 characters long. The callsign must consist of the following:

- 1) One or two characters consisting of A-Z or 0-9
- 2) One character which must be a number, 0-9
- 3) Three characters which must be A-Z or space

These restrictions are placed on the callsign in order to satisfy the requirements of the WSPR encoding algorithm. If you are using the WSPR mode, and the callsign violates the above requirements, the program will try to use the contents of your Message setting, to see if that contains a callsign. If the program cannot obtain a valid callsign from either location, then an error will result and be displayed on the LCD (Error: Message).

Note that if your callsign is a 4-character callsign then you need to add spaces at the right, to comply with condition 3 above. If your callsign is of the form AB0CD then you need to add one space at the right, e.g. "AB0CD ".

## Message G0UPL

The message setting is an alphanumeric parameter which may be up to 250 characters long. For FSKCW, DFCW, CW, QRSS modes, it must be in the range A – Z, 0 – 9, / or a space character. Hell modes can use punctuation characters as well, but not the \* character.

Any message may be entered, but if the message is invalid for the mode being used, an error will be displayed.

The \* character has a special purpose, it is used to signify the start and end of user-customisable pattern generation specification.

**IMPORTANT:** remember to add a space character at the beginning or end of your message!

G0UPLG0UPLG0UPL... etc. is not easy to read, because it has no spaces. G0UPL G0UPL G0UPL is how you want your message sent, with a space between the messages.

Frame

00

This parameter is used to define the message frame length. A technique called “stacking” has been developed by QRSS'ers to improve signal-to-noise ratio even further. The transmitting station transmits messages defined into a frame of a precise length. The receiving station overlays multiple message reception frames on top of each other on the display. Any message which is repeating at that precise frame length gets re-enforced by the averaging of multiple message receptions; any other non-repeating message or QRM gets reduced.

As an example, consider a message which in the chosen QRSS mode and speed happens to take 8 minutes to transmit. You could set the “Frame” setting to 10. This means that after the message transmission has completed, the microcontroller will wait until 10 minutes after the message start, before starting the next transmission. Receiving stations who have are using QRSS decoding software with the stacking feature, and have it set to 10 minutes frame length, will be able to collect six (say) transmissions over one hour and average them together to improve the signal-to-noise ratio.

This parameter is also used for the WSPR mode. In the WSPR mode, the Frame parameter defines how often the WSPR transmission packet is transmitted. WSPR transmissions take just under 2 minutes and are always aligned to the start of an even minute. Therefore in WSPR mode, the Frame parameter must be an even number (a multiple of 2), e.g. 10 minutes (9 minutes is not possible).

Typically, Frame should be set to 10 minutes for WSPR. 10 minutes is also a popular frame length for “stacking” QRSS reception, as long as your message transmission fits within 10 minutes. If it does not, the controller will wait until the next 10 minutes have elapsed.

In WSPR-15, Frame should be a non-zero multiple of 15 minutes, typically 15 minutes.

When using GPS frequency stabilisation, you must choose a non-zero Frame parameter. This is because the frequency stabilisation must take place when there is no transmission from the kit, i.e. during a pause between transmissions. The frequency stabilisation takes 13 seconds and occurs just before the start of a transmission. Therefore you need to ensure that the Frame parameter is sufficiently large that there is a minimum gap of 13 seconds between the completion of your message transmission and the start of the next one.

**Default:** the default value is 00 which means no frame size is defined, and the stacking feature is not used. Frame must be set to a non-zero value for WSPR and WSPR-15.

Start

00

This parameter is used in conjunction with the Frame parameter described previously. It defines when the transmission cycle starts. For example if Start is set to 03, and Frame is set to 10, then the message transmission will start on the when time reaches 00:03 (or 3 minutes past any hour), and will repeat at exactly 10 minute intervals.

Again for WSPR, the Start parameter must be even (a multiple of two). For WSPR-15, a multiple of 15.

**Default:** the default value is 00 which means the Start parameter is not used.

CW Ident. 00

If the CW identifier feature is used, then this parameter should be set to a non-zero value indicating the number of minutes interval for sending the CW identifier. The CW identifier sends the callsign in standard 12wpm CW at regular intervals. If the CW Ident parameter is set, then a callsign must be entered in the callsign setting, otherwise an error will be displayed.

**Default:** the default value is 00 which means that a CW Identifier is not transmitted.

Locator I090

The locator setting is only used in WSPR mode, and is one of the inputs to the WSPR encoding algorithm. It is four characters, the first two are always A – R and the second two are numbers in the range 0 – 9. Editing this parameter automatically prevents incorrect entries. The locator is not needed for any other mode than WSPR and may be left blank.

If a GPS module is connected with a correctly configured serial data stream, then the locator is set automatically from the GPS data.

Power 23

The power setting is another input to the WSPR message. This setting is not needed for any other mode than WSPR. Although the parameter will accept any 2-digit value, only certain values are valid for the WSPR encoding scheme. The power is the transmitter output in dBm. It must be in the range 0 – 60, and the least significant digit must be 0, 3 or 7. The allowable values, with their corresponding power in watts, are listed here:

00 dBm	=	1mW
03 dBm	=	2mW
07 dBm	=	5mW
10 dBm	=	10mW
13 dBm	=	20mW
17 dBm	=	50mW
20 dBm	=	100mW
23 dBm	=	200mW
27 dBm	=	500mW
30 dBm	=	1W
33 dBm	=	2W
37 dBm	=	5W
40 dBm	=	10W
43 dBm	=	20W
47 dBm	=	50W
50 dBm	=	100W
53 dBm	=	200W
57 dBm	=	500W
60 dBm	=	1000W

The default value in this kit is 23dBm (200mW) which is closest to the measured prototype output power of 180mW.

An illegal value will result in a runtime error display.



Use GPS Off

This controls whether GPS is used or not. If set to On, and a GPS module is connected with 1pps signal, then the accurate time pulses from the GPS unit will be used to lock the frequency, and to keep precise time.

If additionally the serial data connection from the GPS unit is valid, the Maidenhead locator will be computed from the latitude and longitude received from the GPS module, and the internal realtime clock will be set using the time from the GPS module.

When using the connected GPS module for frequency stabilisation, you must choose a non-zero Frame parameter. This is because the frequency stabilisation must take place when there is no transmission from the kit, i.e. during a pause between transmissions. The frequency stabilisation takes 13 seconds and occurs just before the start of a transmission. Therefore you need to ensure that the Frame parameter is sufficiently large that there is a minimum gap of 13 seconds between the completion of your message transmission and the start of the next one.

Frequency stabilisation can also be provided by a 1pps signal derived from an accurate frequency reference. In this case, connect the 1pps signal to the 1pps connection, and set Use GPS to "On". With no serial data, the kit will not decode the Maidenhead locator or time, however the 1pps signal **will** be sufficient for frequency stabilisation.

When GPS is enabled, a heart symbol will appear on the display. When a GPS frequency calibration, location/time decode (WSPR mode only) has been completed, the symbol will beat in sync with the 1pps signal input. The heartbeat will go to a solid (non-flashing) display during the last 13 seconds of every frame, while calibration is in progress.



GPS Baud 009600,01,1

These settings determine the communication parameters for receiving a data input from the GPS module. They must be set to match the data output from the GPS module otherwise no data can be decoded. You will need to refer to your GPS module documentation to determine the correct speed and other settings.

There are three settings in the configuration string:

- 1) Baud rate: any baud rate can be entered here. 9,600 is common. The kit should be able to support 115kbps but higher than this may be subject to inaccuracies and not function properly.
- 2) Parity: the first digit is 1 to enable parity checking, 0 to disable it. The second digit is 0 for even parity, 1 for odd parity. Therefore the 01 setting shown above means disabled parity, odd parity.
- 3) Number of stop bits: this must be 1 or 2. In the example shown above, it is 1.

The default setting shown above, is for 9,600 baud no parity, 1 stop bit and 8-bit data. This is a common setting. Note that only 8-bit data is now supported, which suits every GPS module I know of.

FSK (Hz) 004

FSK size is determined by this parameter, and may be in the range 0 to 999Hz. For FSKCW and DFCW modes, the specified FSK is the height of the symbol shift. For Slow-Hell mode, it is the height of the text. The parameter does not apply for the other modes. Generally, you will want a shift of 4 or 5 Hz for the slow-speed modes. For the fast-speed FSK mode used for beaconing on the 10m band, a few hundred Hz is typically used.

Inv. Btn. Off

When this parameter is switched on, the left and right buttons are reversed. Refer also to the section above concerning LCD mounting options.

Sys. Frq. 20,000,000

The system clock frequency is the crystal oscillator frequency which clocks the microcontroller. In this kit, a 20MHz crystal is used, and there is no facility for adjusting its frequency – the trimmer capacitor sometimes used in such circuits is omitted here in order to keep the kit as simple and inexpensive as possible.

The system clock is used for timing purposes when there is no GPS module connected to lock the frequency. Where the frequency is slightly different to 20.000000MHz the time-keeping of the real-time clock will become inaccurate. Ordinarily this will not matter for most modes, the exception may be WSPR where the frames must coincide with the start of even minutes, within a second or two. Over some days, an inaccuracy of a second or two per day in the real-time clock can cause the WSPR signal decoding to become impossible.

Accordingly this parameter has been provided so that if you wish, you can set the frequency to the actual exact frequency of your 20MHz crystal. This will ensure that time-keeping is precise. The best way to measure the oscillation frequency will be to use a general coverage receiver having an accurate digital display, and listen for the 20MHz signal on the receiver, then tune the receiver to zero-beat, i.e. until the tone of the audio decreases to 0Hz. Then enter this frequency into the Sys. Frq. configuration setting.

An alternative method may be to measure the time gain or loss over a period of several days, and work backwards to determine the required value to use for the Sys. Frq. Parameter to correct it.

Ref. Frq. 125,000,000

The Reference Frequency setting is the actual frequency of the on-board 125MHz canned crystal oscillator module on the pre-assembled DDS module board. It is important to set it accurately, otherwise the actual output frequency of the kit transmission will not match the value set in the Frequency parameter (see above). Calibration of this parameter is discussed in section 9, see below.



The image shows a monochrome LCD display with the text "Set Time 00:53" in a pixelated font. The background is a light gray rectangle.

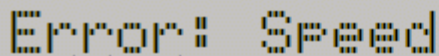
The kit has an internal real time clock which is used for the Frame (QRSS stacking), CW Ident, and for timing WSPR messages. This configuration allows you to set the real time clock. The clock setting takes effect, and the seconds (internally counted but not displayed) are set to zero, when the LEFT button is pressed after setting the minutes. **Accurate timing is critical for the WSPR modes.**

Note that if using a GPS module with "Use GPS" switched on, and if there is a valid serial data stream properly decoded (by correct choice of "GPS Baud" parameters), then there is no need to set the time, because it is automatically decoded from the GPS data.

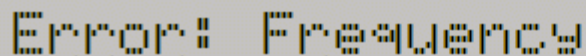
An accurate real time clock is not required other than for the WSPR modes. Even if the real time clock is not set, it will start from 00:00 when the system is powered up. This is sufficient for the production of CW identification (if enabled) and stacking if enabled (i.e. if Frame is non-zero).

#### **2.4 Understanding error messages, and how to fix them**

In the event of inconsistent parameter setting, an error message may be displayed on the LCD. The cause of these messages is well-defined. The following lists the possible error messages and their causes.

The image shows a monochrome LCD display with the text "Error! Speed" in a pixelated font. The background is a light gray rectangle.

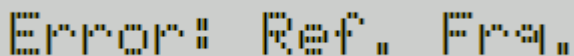
This error results from having a zero Speed parameter, or Speed > 200 seconds, in any mode other than Hell, DX Hell, WSPR and WSPR-15. These four modes have specific defined speeds which are not adjustable, and so the Speed setting is ignored for them.

The image shows a monochrome LCD display with the text "Error! Frequency" in a pixelated font. The background is a light gray rectangle.

The Frequency parameter is set to a value less than 500. You should enter a valid value. The purpose of this minimum is to prevent excessive heat dissipation in the PA transistors in the event that the output frequency is zero or too low.

The image shows a monochrome LCD display with the text "Error! Sys. Freq." in a pixelated font. The background is a light gray rectangle.

The system frequency is below 1,000,000. There should not generally be any reason why you would need to set a system frequency to any other value than close to 20,000,000.

The image shows a monochrome LCD display with the text "Error! Ref. Freq." in a pixelated font. The background is a light gray rectangle.

The reference frequency is below 1,000,000. There should not generally be any reason why you would need to set a reference frequency to any other value than close to 125,000,000.

## Error: Callsign

This error arises when the CW Ident parameter is non-zero, which means you have requested a CW Identifier transmission in plain 12wpm CW at a periodic interval, but the Callsign has not been set. The resolution to this error is to enter your callsign in the Callsign parameter.

## Error: GPS Baud

This error can only occur if the “Use GPS” configuration is On and if the configured Baud rate is less than 1,000. The solution is to correctly configure the Baud rate setting.

## Error: Message

This error concerning the transmission message can occur for three reasons:

- 1) The message is empty, and the mode is set to anything except WSPR. In WSPR mode, the message encoding is generated automatically from the callsign, locator and power settings. In all other cases, the message must be set, otherwise the kit has nothing to transmit.
- 2) In WSPR mode, if the Callsign is empty or invalid, then the WSPR encoding algorithm will try to use the main message. If the Message parameter also does not contain a valid callsign for WSPR, then this error display will occur. To resolve this: study the requirements for a valid callsign in the configuration settings section above, and ensure that the Callsign parameter is set with a valid WSPR callsign.
- 3) In modes QRSS, CW, FSKCW, DFCW, there is an invalid character in the message. Valid characters are A – Z, 0 – 9, space and /. In the case of FSKCW the message may also contain an asterisk \* which enables the user-customised pattern mode.

## Error: Frame

In WSPR mode, Frame (number of minutes between transmissions) must be even (a multiple of two), and it must be non-zero. 10 [minutes] is the recommended value. In the WSPR-15 mode, Frame must be a non-zero multiple of 15, with 15 [minutes] being the recommended value.

## Error: Start

In WSPR mode, the Start parameter must be an even minute (power of two), and in WSPR-15, a multiple of 15 minutes. In all modes, the Start parameter must be less than 60 (as there are only 60 minutes in an hour).

Error! Power

This error can only arise during WSPR mode. The Power setting must be in the range 00 – 60 and the last digit must end in 0, 3 or 7. i.e. 00, 03, 07, 10, 13, 17 are all Ok.

Error! Locator

Again, an error which can only arise in WSPR mode. The locator must be a standard 4-digit Maidenhead locator (e.g. IO90). If you are getting this error, it means you have not properly set the Locator configuration parameter – it should consist of two letters in the range A – R followed by two digits in the range 0 – 9.

### 3. QRSS Modes

The following is a short description of each kind of QRSS mode, and what to expect.

#### 3.1 FSK/CW

FSKCW6 800+4 -G0UPL G0U

The display will show FSKCW followed by the symbol length – in this example 6 seconds. Next comes the base frequency. In AF Output mode, that is Hz. In RF Output mode, it is the last three digits of the frequency – e.g. if the Frequency parameter is set to 10,140,050 then the display will show 050. The FSK shift in this case, from the “FSK (Hz)” setting, is 4Hz – indicated by the +4. Finally the message will show. The leftmost character is the one currently being sent, and the – before it indicates a dash is being sent. As the message is sent, the message will scroll to the left.

In the following image, the decoded letters have been drawn above the received signal in yellow, to show clearly how the mode is to be decoded.



In Frequency Shift Keyed CW (FSK/CW) the dahs and dits have the same timing as traditional (slow) morse i.e. QRSS, but the carrier is always on and “key down” is indicated by a slight upwards shift of a few Hz. FSK/CW is the most popular of the slow-signal modes.

**Good for:** The transmitter being continuously on, avoids any “chirp” (frequency pulling) of the oscillator, that can be a problem, particularly in more simple circuits. The signal is very readable in the presence of QRM or in weak conditions, because of the continuously present carrier. Decoding the signal is intuitive, just by reading the top line like ordinary CW.

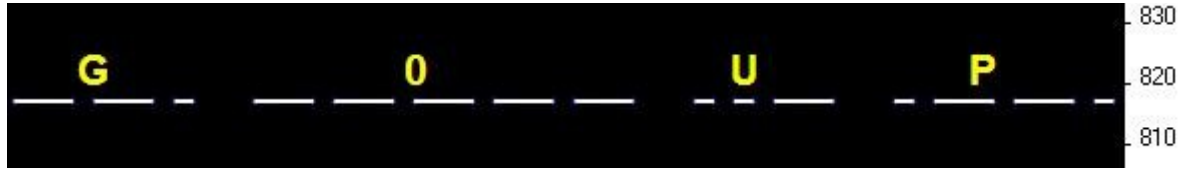
**Bad for:** Because the carrier is continuously on, it will take more battery power (if that's a concern), than an on/off keyed mode like plain CW. It also takes more bandwidth than the single sub-Hz bandwidth of plain QRSS.

### 3.2 QRSS



QRSS6 800 .0UPL G0UPL G

Here the display shows the scrolling message, with a – or a . (for dah and dit), to show which character and symbol is currently being transmitted. The dit speed follows the mode (QRSS), in this example 6 second dits. The frequency is as for FSK/CW (see above) – in this case 800Hz audio output.



The original plain QRSS mode is simply plain CW, but massively slowed down, typically with dit speeds from 3 seconds or slower, even all the way to 120 seconds in some cases.

**Good for:** Simple to decode by eye, since it is the same as what we can imagine hearing. Very narrow bandwidth and band occupancy, sub-1Hz.

**Bad for:** In weak signal conditions or where there is a lot of QRM, an interfering weak carrier may also look like an intermittent horizontal line, so the wanted signal can be hard to distinguish from the QRM. Fading (QSB) can cause interfering carriers to look like QRSS too. In simpler circuits, “chirp” (oscillator pulling) can be a problem.

### 3.3 DFCW



DFCW6 800+4 .0UPL G0UPL

The display will show DFCW followed by the symbol length – in this example 6 seconds. This is followed by the base frequency (see FSK/CW section above) and the FSK size. The scrolling message is shown as usual, with the – or . to show the current symbol of the current character.

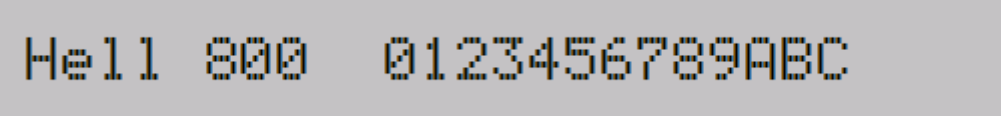


DFCW means dual-frequency CW. The dits and dahs are the same length, but dahs are shifted upwards by the FSK amount. A 1/3 dit-length gap inserted between symbols improves the readability.

**Good for:** The mode is faster than QRSS, with the same signal-to-noise ratio improvement, because the dah's are the same length as the dits. In QRSS dah's are three times longer. So the message transmission is faster.

**Bad for:** Not very intuitively easy to read as QRSS is. If the signal is a bit weak and hard to decode, the eye/brain may have more trouble “filling in the gaps”, because it is not so intuitive.

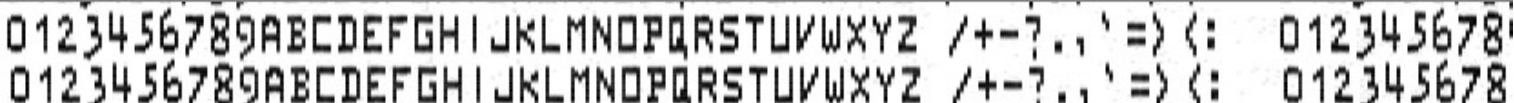
### 3.4 Hellschreiber (also called FeldHell).



A screenshot of a Hellschreiber display. The text 'Hell 800 0123456789ABC' is shown in a monospaced, dot-matrix font. The characters are formed by a grid of dots, with some characters having a distinctive shape. The background is a light gray.

As usual, the display shows the mode, frequency and the message scrolls to the left as it is sent.

The screenshot fragment below is from IZ8BLY's excellent Hellschreiber receiving (and sending) software.



A screenshot of a Hellschreiber display showing two lines of text. Each line contains the alphanumeric characters '0123456789ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ /+-.?.,' =) (<:'. The characters are formed by a grid of dots, with some characters having a distinctive shape. The background is a light gray.

Hellschreiber is a fax-like mode designed in the 1920's by Rudolf Hell in Germany. It was later used in WWII. The literal translation into English would be “Light Writer” and of course rhymes with its inventor's name. Each character is made up of a 7-row, 5-column grid. Technically there are 14 half-rows, but there are no lonely half-pixels in the characters, half-pixels are only ever seen in groups of at least two. This was an ingenious idea to minimise transmission bandwidth yet improve readability. The baud rate of a standard Hell transmission is 122.5. Most of the characters fit into a 10-half-row, 5-column grid, but the numbers are extended above and below this in some cases.


**Good for:** Fun, history, and easy readability.

**Bad for:** Bandwidth. Hell is not a slow-signal mode; the bandwidth is said to be around 400Hz.

I am proud to be using the original Hell font in this kit as carefully designed by Rudolf Hell. I know this because Pierre ON5SL, who owns a real antique FeldHell machine, kindly sent me a scan of one page of the operator's manual. This page shows the drum pattern of the machine.

Various software is freely available that can send and receive Hellschreiber, using any Windows font. Specially designed fonts are available. One called “FeldReal.fon” claims to use the original Hellschreiber character design but I am not convinced – if you are interested, look for example, at the K. FeldReal.fon's K actually looks nicer, but it doesn't quite match the one in the machine, look at the top right of the K.

### 3.5 DX Hellschreiber



A screenshot of a DX Hellschreiber display. The text 'DX Hell 800 0123456789' is shown in a monospaced, dot-matrix font. The characters are formed by a grid of dots, with some characters having a distinctive shape. The background is a light gray.

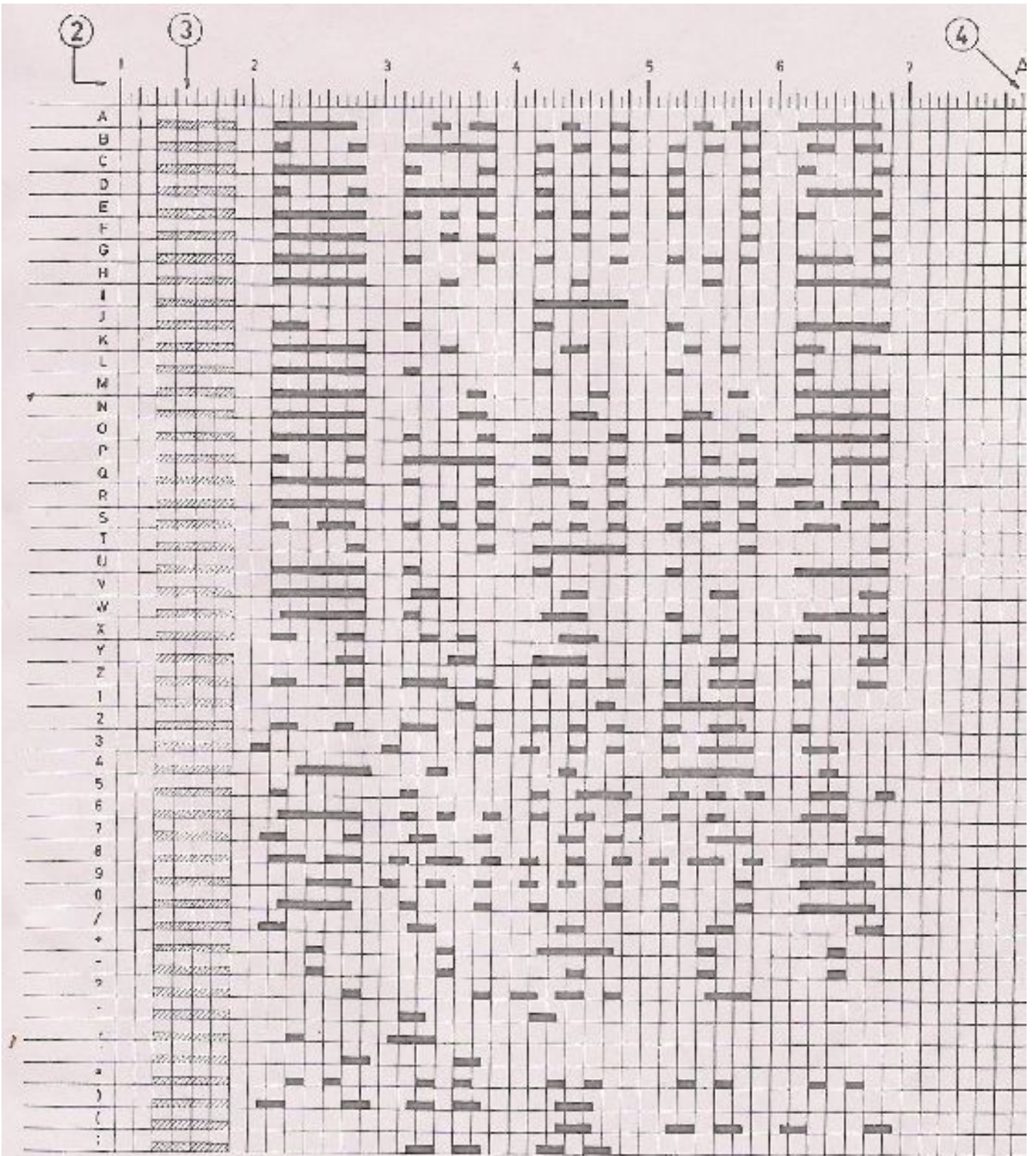
As usual, the display shows the mode, frequency and the message scrolls to the left as it is sent.

The screenshot fragment below is from IZ8BLY's excellent Hellschreiber receiving (and sending) software.




A screenshot of a DX Hellschreiber display showing two lines of text. Each line contains the alphanumeric characters '0123456789ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ'. The characters are formed by a grid of dots, with some characters having a distinctive shape. The background is a light gray.

So-called DX Hellschreiber is the same as ordinary Hellschreiber described above, except that every column is sent twice. The characters are therefore twice as wide, the message takes twice as long to send, but it has the advantage of potentially being more readable in weak conditions.



- ① Abwicklung der Sendenocken
- ② Einteilung der Meßscheibe
- ③ Anlaufschritt
- ④ Nullstellung der Senderachse

### 3.6 Slow Hellshreiber



As usual, the display shows the mode, frequency and the message scrolls to the left as it is sent.

Slow Hellschreiber is the slow-signal Hellschreiber equivalent. Each Hellschreiber letter row is shifted slightly in frequency. Typically the single pixel rate is very slow, for example 1 second per pixel (0.5 seconds per half-pixel). The character pattern is “scanned” one column at a time from bottom to top, shifting the frequency as the row increases up the character. In this way an image of the character is built up at the receiving station.

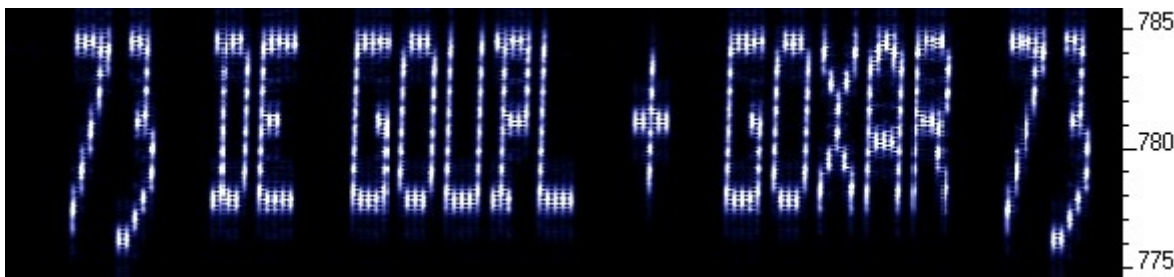
In Slow Hellshreiber mode, certain configuration settings in the kit require special attention:

**Speed:** The speed setting is the number of seconds required to transmit one whole character. Recall that a Hell character is composed of 7 rows (14 half-rows) and 5 columns; there is also one empty column as an inter-character space. Therefore each character is composed of 42 “pixels”. Therefore if you want the transmission time to be 1 second per pixel, set Speed to 042. If you wanted 1.5 seconds per pixel, you would set Speed to 063, and so on.

**FSK (Hz):** The FSK size configuration specifies the height of each character, it is the number of Hz for 5 rows of the character. Recall that most Hell characters, such as the letters, fit on a 7-column, 5-row grid. FSK (Hz) specifies the size of that grid; some of the numbers extend above or below the grid. For example an FSK (Hz) setting of 05 would result in characters 5Hz high, i.e. 1Hz per row (pixel).

Be aware of fundamental limitations of information theory. If the pixel rate is 1 second (Speed = 042), the minimum theoretical bandwidth is 1Hz. Therefore choosing a pixel size of less than 1Hz, i.e. FSK (Hz) = 05, does not make any sense. Faster transmissions require larger bandwidth, and you will have to set the FSK size higher to match. If you do not, the image at the receiving end will be blurred.

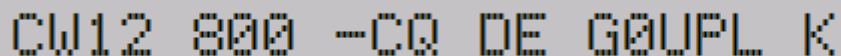
This example image was taken in Argo, in its 10 second “slow” mode. The message is “73 DE G0UPL + G0XAR”, the Speed is 042, and FSK (Hz) is 08. Note that even here, the characters start to look slightly blurred – a consequence of the fourier transform and minimum bandwidth, because the bucket size in Argo's 10 second mode is well under 1Hz so the 1Hz.



The following image shows part of the same thing in Argo's 3 second “slow” mode. The larger fourier transform bucket size means the image is more clear, but the faster scroll rate makes the letter's height to width ratio somewhat less attractive. Other slow-speed fourier transform software present more configuration options and may be more suited for slow-Hellshreiber reception than Argo.



### **3.7 CW**

A screenshot of a digital display in CW mode. The text shown is 'CW12 800 -CQ DE G0UPL K'. The characters are in a monospaced, pixelated font. The '12' is smaller than the other characters, indicating the speed in words-per-minute.

CW mode is just plain, ordinary on/off keyed CW (morse code) at ordinary speeds. The display will show CW followed by the speed – in this example, 12 words-per-minute (wpm), followed by the message which scrolls to the left as it is sent. The character position right before the message shows – or . depending on whether a dah or dit is being sent.

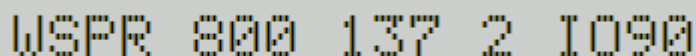
In CW mode, the Speed setting is the words-per-minute speed, e.g. 012 for 12 wpm.

Have you ever spent a lazy Sunday afternoon calling CQ on 80m CW with QRP power, with no luck? Why not use the kit as a CQ machine, and take the hard work out of calling CQ! In AF output mode, the AF output could be rectified and used to key a CW transmitter, with the Frame setting used to control how often the CQ message would be transmitted.

### **3.8 FSK**

This mode is designed for wideband fast FSK. It is in common use for 10m beacons using FSK shifts of several hundred Hz. The speed setting is interpreted as a words-per-minute speed, e.g. enter 012 for 12 words-per-minute.

### **3.9 WSPR**

A screenshot of a digital display in WSPR mode. The text shown is 'WSPR 800 137 2 IO90'. The characters are in a monospaced, pixelated font. The '137' is smaller than the other characters, indicating the symbol number currently being sent.

The WSPR mode display is composed of several elements. Given the example display above:

WSPR	The mode being used!
800	Baseline output frequency (last few digits only)
137	Symbol number currently being sent; WSPR messages are made of 162 symbols
2	Tone currently being sent – WSPR messages are made of four tones, 0 – 3.
IO90	Maidenhead locator setting coded into the WSPR message

WSPR stands for Weak Signal Propagation Reporter. The message consists of three parts: the operator's callsign, Maidenhead locator (4-character, e.g. IO90) and two digits specifying the power. At the receiving station, messages are decoded and uploaded to a central internet database.

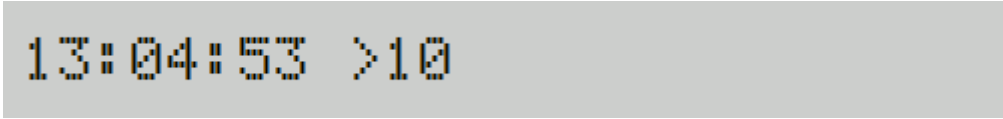
The WSPR message is encoded into a set of 162 symbols, each may be 0, 1, 2 or 3, using a compressed data format with forward error correction. The symbols are transmitted as tones, each tone separated by  $12,000 / 8,192$  Hz i.e. approximately 1.46Hz. The duration of each symbol is the reciprocal of the tone spacing, which is approximately 0.683 seconds. WSPR messages take about 110.6 seconds to transmit, and always start at even minutes past the hour.

**In WSPR, timing is critical, so when using WSPR you must set the time configuration parameter as exactly as possible. Be sure to keep the rightmost flashing 1-minute digit, watch your clock until the seconds turn over to 00, and then press the left button. This will ensure the seconds are in sync with your real clock time.** If careful attention is given to setting the frequency and the real time clock, then successful WSPR reports will be obtained. Of course these things are easier if you are using a GPS module: the Maidenhead locator will be calculated from the received latitude and longitude, and the time decoded nicely from the GPS serial data stream.



The microcontroller in this kit takes care of the WSPR message encoding algorithm, without any assistance from a PC host computer. It also calculates the tone spacing and symbol duration.

In between message transmissions, the display will show instead just a clock (see below), while we wait patiently for the next WSPR transmission to begin, according to the settings of the configuration parameters Frame and Start. [This is useful for checking that the time on your kit is accurately set.](#) The display also shows the minute at which the next frame will start transmitting. In the example below, the time is 13:04:53 and the next frame will start at 13:10:00.



On Argo, WSPR messages look ugly, like this:



WSPR decoding takes place in the WSPR program by K1JT (see <http://physics.princeton.edu/pulsar/K1JT/wspr.html>). This is a screenshot showing the WSPR 2.0 screen following reception of a few transmissions (output frequency = 1,500Hz, Frame = 02, Start = 00).

WSPR 2.0 by K1JT

File Setup View Save Band Help

300  
250  
200  
150  
100

202 GOUPL

05:22 05:24 05:26 05:28 05:30 05:32 05:34 05:36 05:38 05:40 05:42 05:44 05:46

Upload spots 87 Hz Band Map

Frequencies (MHz)  
Dial: 10.138700  
Tx: 10.140200

Tx fraction (%)  
0  
0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

Special  
 Idle  
Tune

UTC	dB	DT	Freq	Drift
0540	9	-0.6	10.140202	0
0542	9	-0.6	10.140202	0
0544	9	-0.5	10.140202	0

Erase

2012 May 19  
05:48:01

Rx Noise: 9 dB

Decoding Receiving

Choose a transmission frequency somewhere in the 200Hz-wide standard HF WSPR bands:

160m: 1.838000 – 1.838200

20m: 14.097000 – 14.097200

80m: 3.594000 – 3.594200

17m: 18.106000 – 18.106200

60m: 5.288600 – 5.288800

15m: 21.096000 – 21.096200

40m: 7.040000 – 7.040200

12m: 24.926000 – 24.926200

30m: 10.140100 – 10.140300

10m: 28.126000 – 28.126200

### **3.10 WSPR-15**

WSPR-15 is a relatively new experimental mode that is a variation of the common WSPR mode. It is used on the LF bands where the higher signal-to-noise ratio it offers is advantageous. WSPR-15 uses the same encoding algorithms as WSPR, but the tone spacing is 8 times closer (approximately 0.18Hz) and the speed is also 8 times slower.

In WSPR-15, the Frame parameter must be a non-zero multiple of 15 minutes, and the Start parameter must be zero (usually) or a multiple of 15 minutes.

## **4. Customised message patterns**

The kit has the ability to produce customised message patterns in the FSKCW mode. To enter or leave custom mode, a \* character is inserted in the message. The first two characters after the \* character specify the symbol duration of each symbol, in seconds. Subsequent characters specify the frequency shift of each symbol one by one, in units of 0.5Hz. For example, 5 means a shift of 2.5Hz. After the numbers, you can continue with letters. So A would mean a shift of 5Hz, B a shift of 5.5Hz, C a shift of 6Hz, and so on.

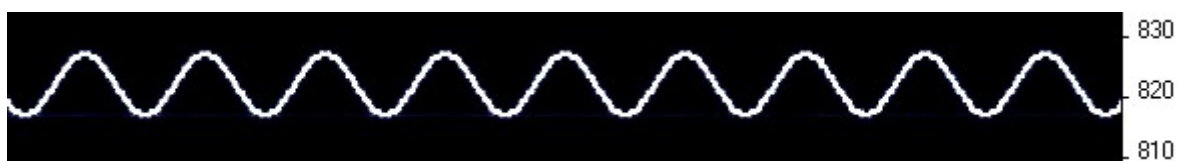
For example consider the following message:

```
Message G0UPL *032468*
```

The callsign G0UPL is sent in ordinary FSK/CW with height and speed according to the configuration settings. Next comes a custom message, the duration of each symbol is 03 seconds. The shifts are 1, 2, 3, 4Hz respectively. On Argo, this message produces (with kit configuration FSK (Hz) = 04, Speed = 003):



As an example of what kinds of patterns can be produced, the pattern below is created using message \*01ACDFGIJJKKKJJIGFDCA87542110001124578\*



## **5. Factory Reset**

On powering up the kit, a message is shown for a few seconds on the LCD, which indicates the version number. If the Right button is pressed during the display of this splash screen message, then the chip EEPROM contents are erased and returned to the original factory settings.

The effect of this feature is to entirely return the microcontroller chip to its original settings, it is the same as buying a new chip and inserting it. All calibration settings, message, frequency, etc. are erased and returned to the default settings.

## **6. Signal-generator mode**

Another use of this kit, is as an accurate, stable signal generator. If you set the kit in the FSKCW mode, and set the FSK to 0 Hz, then whatever message you've entered, the output will always just be a single un-modulated signal at the chosen frequency.

## **7. Resources**

Please see the kit page <http://www.hanssummers.com/qrssultimate2> for any information on latest updates and issues.

Use the QRSS Knights mailing list: [http://cnts.be/mailman/listinfo/knightsqrss\\_cnts.be](http://cnts.be/mailman/listinfo/knightsqrss_cnts.be) to announce your operation.

You should get reception reports by email and see your signals on the various online “grabbers” (see <http://digilander.libero.it/i2ndt/grabber/grabber-compendium.htm> for a set of links to “grabbers” worldwide).

Please join the Yahoo group <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/qrplabs/> to for new kit announcements, to discuss any problems with the kit, enhancements you've made, or just to tell everyone how much fun you're having.

For general information and more QRSS projects, links to other QRSS resources etc., see <http://www.hanssummers.com>.

Argo QRSS decoding software by Alberto I2PHD: <http://www.weaksignals.com/>

WSPR network home page: <http://wspnet.org>

Analog Devices DDS information: <http://www.analog.com/en/rfif-components/direct-digital-synthesis-dds/products/index.html>

# 8 Version History

## **1 24-Mar-2013**

- Initial draft version, for firmware version v2.00 and beta testers

## **2 20-Apr-2013**

- First official version, accompanies firmware version v2.01
- Bug fix: after frame wait, frequency didn't return to correct frequency until tone changed
- Bug fix: WSPR did not work with any system clock frequency > 16,777,216 Hz
- New menu item "Inv. GPS" for triggering on a negative edge 1pps signal
- Impose limit of 200 seconds on the speed setting, to prevent arithmetic overflow
- Pressing right button during Run resets frequency and forces key-up

## **3 07-Jun-2013**

- Separated assembly and operation manuals

## **4 15-Jun-2013**

- Operation manual for v2.02 and v2.02a which has the following features
- GPS: Prior v2.xx versions were very fussy about which GPS modules they would work with. The GPS interface is now returned as closely as possible to the original Ultimate (a.k.a. U1) kit operation. Note that there is no longer an "Inv. GPS" menu item, since the U2 will trigger off the correct edge by itself.
- DDS resolution on high frequencies: corrected the precision issue in the arithmetic, so now full accuracy shift steps are produced at any operating frequency.
- Removed the upper frequency limit of approx 42.5MHz, the full DDS range is now available
- New mode WSPR-15 is now supported, for experimental use on LF bands (8 times slower WSPR tones, 8 times closer together).
- New mode "FSK" which is a fast FSK mode for 10m beaoning, where the speed setting is interpreted in words per minute. The "FSK (Hz)" setting is now 3 digits (default "004" i.e. 4Hz) so that shift can be up to 999Hz. The "Inv. FSK" parameter has been discontinued in v2.02.
- "Heartbeat" indication on the display when the kit is GPS locked
- Baud rate setting extended to 6 digits, to support 115kbps rates for a particular GPS module
- GPS serial data is now set permanently to 8-bits, not configurable (suits all GPS modules anyway)
- Removed the DDS "reset" every time the frequency was updated, which caused the frequency to briefly go to zero before being updated to the new frequency. This improves output spectrum.
- Put a "stop" on the cycling through characters when editing the Message (and other text) parameters, by holding down the right button.
- Moved the "Time" parameter to the start of the menu, when the kit is in WSPR mode, because the Time parameter is what you would most commonly want to adjust, when operating in WSPR mode without a GPS to regulate it. In other modes, "Time" still comes right at the end of the menu.
- CW, FSKCW, DFCW, QRSS and FSK modes can support the '/' character in the message
- Bug fix (cosmetic only): When setting the time, the 10 minutes digit incorrectly allowed numbers >= 6. So it was possible to set a time such as 15:89.
- Bug fix (cosmetic only): If you went back in to the time parameter to edit it a second time immediately after finishing the first edit, the display was overwritten incorrectly, with the system clock frequency display.

- Bug fix (cosmetic only): If using FSKCW mode an 10 second dit speed (for example), in the interval between frames the LCD display did not have space to show the seconds digit of the clock. The "Waiting" screen has now been changed. It now only shows the time and the minutes to wait until. E.g. "15:43:21 >50" means 3:43pm and 21 seconds, and the kit is waiting for minute 50 to start the next frame. The "Waiting" screen also shows the GPS heartbeat if a GPS is connected and GPS lock is successful.
- Bug fix: In FSKCW mode, the GPS frequency stabilisation operating in the waiting period between messages, only worked the first time after cycling through the menu. Subsequent waiting periods did not perform the calibration because the kit was always in key-down (transmitting the low tone between messages).
- The default speed setting is changed to 006 which is a better default value
- The mode message "CW Ident" when transmitting the CW callsign identifier is replaced with "CW"
- v2.02a: In FSK/CW, key is always down following a message completion, until the start of the next frame. If using a GPS, key-up occurs during the last 13 seconds before the next frame, when calibration occurs
- v2.02a: In Hell modes, the frequency is now dropped to 6.25MHz during key-up in a space character or between message transmissions.

**5**

**01-Jul-2013**

- Operation manual for v2.03 which has the following features
- GPS: Improved handling of different varieties of GPS module
- Bug fix: 1's digit of the calibration of the 125MHz oscillator frequency was incorrectly set to the same as the 10's digit in the binary to decimal conversion