

PRODUCT REVIEW

GRAHAM THORNTON VK3IY

The Bencher Iambic Paddle

An electronic keyer is an achievable project for the average home-brewer; however, the construction of a mechanical paddle to operate it presents difficulties to most amateurs. The Bencher Iambic Paddle is designed to meet this need.

For the uninitiated, a definition of 'iambic' is in order. If the dot and dash paddles of such a keyer are actuated simultaneously, a series of alternating dits and dahs results. This closely resembles the sound of iambic pentameters beloved by poetry teachers. Hence the name. Such keyers are characterised by dot memory - a following dot may be initiated during the transmission of a dash. This has the advantage of economy of motion.

The Bencher Paddle is mounted on a solid steel base 1.5 cm thick. The base is 10 cm wide by 9.4 cm deep. The total weight of the instrument is 1.25 kg. Three finish options are available: black, chrome or gold. The instrument has mirror symmetry about a vertical plane mid-way between the two clear-plastic paddles.

A bracket connects each paddle to a movable, gold plated, solid silver contact. Seen from above, the face of this contact is at an angle of 135 deg to the paddle. A similar but stationary contact opposes frontwards. This latter contact is mounted on the end of an Allen-keyed grub screw, which is threaded into a split stud projecting vertically from the base. A further screw compresses the 'split', firmly locking the adjustment screw.

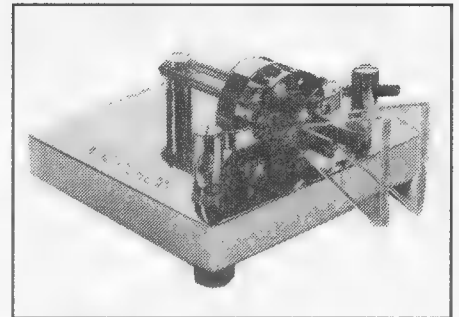
The contact-paddle bracket connects to a front-facing outward-curving semi-annulus, at the axis of symmetry of the latter. Two nylon bushes are vertically opposed near the inner extremity of the semi-annulus. Horizontal steel spindles with tapered ends, project forward from the flat face of an immovable short cylinder mounted to the rear. These spindles fit neatly into the nylon bushes, forming needle bearings which together act as the fulcrum of the rotary system. The tension spring mounts onto a radially directed set screw, projecting inside the semi-annulus. The entire rotor system is held in place on the spindles exclusively by this tension spring. Rotation of the set screw alters the point of application of

the spring tension, thus varying its moment about the fulcrum.

Three solder lugs are fitted underneath the base, together with a cable clamp to protect the connections. The Allen key, supplied with the equipment, fits neatly under the base in a special battery - connector type clip. Three rubber feet ensure a firm grip on the operating table.

I found the instrument very pleasing indeed to use. A magazine review cannot really do justice to the device. A hands-on (and eyes-on) appraisal is really necessary for an individual to appreciate its quality. I could detect no tendency whatever for the instrument to slide when one paddle only was used; a variety of surfaces was tested. With the particular tension setting on the model supplied for review, only one or two grams of thrust was necessary to actuate the contact. 200 grams of thrust (the limit of the spring balance) did not produce any sliding whatever. There was a tendency for the feet to lean somewhat when keying; however this resilience gave a pleasant cushioning effect.

This device cannot be described as an 'el cheapo'. It is perhaps not appropriate for the occasional CW user. However, for dedicated morsiacs (such as this review author!) it is an investment which deserves honoured place in the shack. From the quality of its design, materials and workmanship, it can be relied on to give a lifetime of faithful service. It should also maintain a high resale value. You can see your face in the chrome plated version - perhaps this might be an added incentive for the YLs! The instrument almost justifies a place as a piece of purely decorative art! The gold plated option, at more than twice the price of the chrome equivalent, would be the exclusive preserve of the wealthy connoisseur! Seriously though, it is not a toy, but a precision instrument. It is a tribute to the watch-maker's art, from which it is obviously derived. If I am permitted one criticism, such a magnificent device should have a permanent dust cover - using a plastic bag as temporary protection between uses seems like sacrilege! (It seems that the Editors of QST share this view. Page 3-9 of the latest 'Hints & Kinks' shows a design for a plastic cover for the Bencher paddle.) The final price is not clear at the time of writing, but after the



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sales tax people and the Post Office are satisfied, there will not be too much change from \$200 for the chrome model, delivered by post. Thanks to Leigh Campbell of Pro-Foto Industries, Canberra for supplying the evaluation model. Sales enquiries should be directed to his firm whose address is: P O Box 501, Fyshwick ACT 2609.

Further Reference - Pounding Brass, Gil Griffith VK3CQ AR Jan '89.

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BENCHER IAMBIC PADDLE

THE ULTIMATE KEYER!

AS REVIEWED IN THIS
ISSUE

THREE MODELS TO
CHOOSE FROM:
BLACK; CHROME &
GOLD

AVAILABLE FROM:

PRO-FOTO
INDUSTRIES

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