

IT'S A CLASSIC!

The Icom IC-202S Transceiver

Regular *PW* author Richard Newton GORSN tries out a radio which many regard as a modern classic - the popular Icom IC-202S. By all accounts it looks as though he really enjoyed the job!

Amateur Radio is one of those hobbies that invites, or even begs, for nostalgia. As we see the ever smaller, ever more versatile equipment appear on the market I think anyone who truly loves radio, real radio can not resist, every so often, spending a wistful few seconds looking back at the pioneering people and radios that have brought us into the 21st Century.

My chance to revel in nostalgia came when I walked into the *PW* offices one day and the Editor excitedly recounted how much interest there had been in the recent *It's A Classic* series in the magazine. He explained how he now wanted a v.h.f. rig to take the stage and asked me if I would do a piece on the Icom IC-202S as it is considered to be a true classic.

Ground-breaking & Pioneering

Ground breaking and pioneering are two words that could easily be used to describe the Icom IC-202S transceiver. Additionally and having now had the chance to use and enjoy it, I would add enduring to the list. I'm sure those lucky people who still own an Icom IC-202S would agree with me.

When I saw the radio I was carried back in time, and although this is a rig that you may not remember when hearing the model number...it's appearance is unmistakable. It's a portable 144MHz s.s.b./c.w., transceiver that stands upright, with the controls and tuning knob on the vertical panel. I recognised it straight away, as it was this radio that sparked my interest in Amateur Radio as a child.

My dad, **John G8EAM**, now sadly a silent key, owned an Icom IC-202S and was so proud of it. On seeing the radio I was transported back in time to the top of North Hill, near Minehead to the days when, sat in a car when my Dad working other stations with his Icom IC-202S and a Halo antenna.

The Icom IC-202S was certainly *cutting edge* technology when it entered the market around 1978/1979. It was a replacement for the Icom IC-202E that had been introduced about a year before.

Although I could not find any mention of *PW* having ever reviewed the Icom IC-202S, I found an advert for



It's a classic - the pioneering Icom IC-202 which Richard GORSN enjoyed using in the snow!

the radio was found in the March 1979 issue of the *Short wave Magazine*.

The IC-202S was billed as an improvement over the IC-202E due to the introduction of a c.w. side tone and the addition of lower side band! The advert went on to say that the receiver had been 'hotted-up' making it even more suitable for use as a base station.

On air the transceiver could run either 'barefoot' using its rather impressive 3W output, or as a prime mover. The transceiver was also said to have had an, extremely clean signal that was perfect for driving a linear amplifier.

A Cousin

The IC-202S had a 433MHz cousin...the IC-402S. And should you have wanted to have owned a IC-202S in March 1979 it would have set you back £199 including the VAT. The IC-402S would have set you back £288 including VAT.

So, what would you have got for your £199? Well the Icom IC-202S was **and still is**, in my opinion, a good looking radio. It has a rugged but somehow pleasing appearance and has a lasting a professional feel.

The aluminium die-cast frame protects the transceiver and houses the nine C cell batteries that provide the power for portable operation. The sides are designed to snap off easily to replace batteries and NiCad battery packs could also be used.

The IC-202S was supplied with a dynamic microphone, and microphone case. Also supplied were a shoulder strap, power cord, 3.5mm plugs for the Morse key and extension speaker, an ear phone, nine C type dry cells with tubes and of course the instruction manual.



Fig. 1: Close up view of the front panel showing the simple controls on the crystal-controlled IC-202S.

On the top panel of the radio - as originally supplied from Icom - there was a telescopic whip antenna. However, on the review radio a BNC antenna socket and a helical whip had replaced this.

There are also anchoring plates for a carrying strap and a microphone clip. On the rear panel was an SO239 antenna socket for connection of an external antenna. On the review radio this had been removed and blanked off as it had been made redundant by the BNC on the top. A three-pin 13.8V d.c. socket is provided on the rear panel for connection to external power or charging.

Plain & Simple

All controls on the IC-202S are on the front vertical panel and they're all plain and simple. At the top is a red l.e.d to indicate there's power to the unit and battery condition. There's also rather cute combined **S/R**F meter, well situated at the top of the panel giving an indication of transmitted power and received signal strength.

Next is the large tuning dial, which I found easy to use. The markings were accurate and I didn't miss the comfort of a digital read out at all.

As the transceiver is crystal-controlled there's also a switch to select which crystal you wish to use. The IC-202S operates between 144 and 144.400MHz using two crystals, which are then tuned using what proved to be a very stable VXO indeed.

There are also two spare crystal sockets - they had optional extras even then! The handbook points out, with considerable emphasis, that with the correct optional crystals, a lucky owner would be able to work through the OSCAR satellites.

The **On/Off Mode** switch, selects lower or upper sideband (l.s.b./u.s.b.). This can also select a rather good backing lamp illuminator that lights up the tuning dial and **S/R**F meter. There's also a **RIT** switch for resolving stations that are a little off frequency without changing your transmit frequency. Connection of a Morse key and extension speaker is by use of 3.5mm jack sockets.

The IC-202S is also fitted with a noise blanker, and from the accompanying literature, it would appear this was a major selling feature at the time. The **Volume** control is also located on the front panel

as is the four-pin microphone socket. The internal speaker is behind one of the side panels.

Instruction Manual

It was the IC-202S's instruction manual that first showed the difference between then and now. There was a wealth of information in the manual, far beyond what each button did!

The manual provides technical data and instruction for aligning the VXO, adjusting the final stage idle current and noise blanker sensitivity. In fact there was technical detail and instruction on how to align and adjust just about everything...it transfixed me, but suffice to say I did not adjust or align anything!

On pawing through the handbook, it would appear that it was fitted with a MuTek front-end in about 1989. This enhances the receive side of the radio and will be familiar to those who have owned other s.s.b. rigs such as the Yaesu FT-290.

On The Air

I was dying to get on air with the IC-202S. My head was still spinning with all those wonderful memories of watching Dad operating /A (remember /A?), and /P from North Hill and Dunkery Beacon on Exmoor with his IC-202S, his cobbled together mast and home-made 5-element beam. I'll let you guess what - or should I say **who** the antenna rotator was!

So, here I was all those years later and I was going to be able to operate an IC-202S, I just needed a rotator... (Have I ever mentioned my father-in-law **Terry Wood G7VJJ**?).

Terry and I set out to a hilltop in Dorset called Bulbarrow Hill. It was a cold, well actually, freezing day between Christmas and New Year.

As we got just beyond Blandford Forum we started seeing the snow. By the time we came to rest on Bulbarrow Hill, about 280m a.s.l. (915ft or so), we were in a couple of inches of snow! What I do for Rob Mannion! *Point taken Richard...see you at Christmas.*
Editor.

The view from Bulbarrow was incredible, it was cold but the sun was shining, we could see into Somerset, Wiltshire and - so it seemed - well beyond.

Product

The Icom IC-202S
Transceiver

Pros & Cons

Pros: Good looking, rugged, controls are plain and simple and performance proved excellent.

Cons: That I couldn't keep it for longer!

Summary

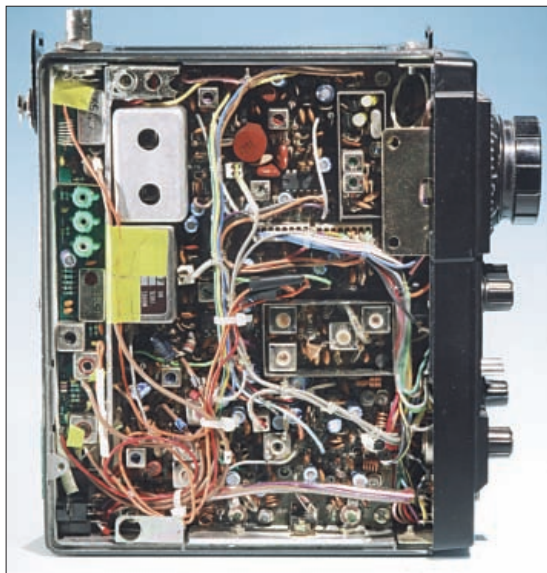
The bottom line is I would love to own an IC-202S, it offers an opportunity to do some QRP hill topping or will do just as well attached to a linear and external antenna at home. All-in-all it's a transceiver well worth a look if you see one at a rally or on the second-hand shelf. It would be the perfect rig to use in the annual PW QRP contest! I look forward to working you in that event later this year - you will be on the air then won't you?

Price

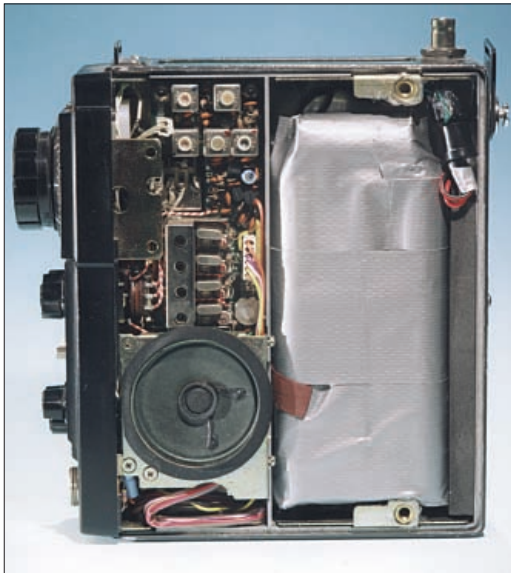
RRP: £199 when new

Thanks

Richard Newton GORSN and everyone on the PW Editorial team, would like to thank Roy Walker G0TAK for the loan of his precious IC-202S. Without Roy's help we would not have been able to provide the in-depth look at this classic little transceiver. Thank you Roy!
Editor.



● Fig. 2: Inside chassis view of the more than 20-year old IC-202S. Not at single surface mount component to be seen!



● Fig. 3: The battery compartment - providing a good idea of the size of the transceiver. Note the four crystals above the loudspeaker. Note that this transceiver has been modified to take a BNC antenna socket (see text).

Continued on page 42