

Hot Tips

Good info for the new ham, and old stuff to refresh your memory



Buyer beware — or buyer be aware

Shopping online for ham radio gear can save you a ton of dough, or it can sink your hard-earned cash into things you might not need or understand. So, arming yourself with a little knowledge can go a long way toward a happy purchase.

Transceivers

There are a number of things to keep in mind when purchasing a transceiver ("rig").

- If the unit is an HF rig, make sure it comes with a mic and working mic cord; if it's a mobile, both mic and mounting bracket
- Be sure the rig is not so old that it's practically unusable, because maybe it's rock-bound, or drifts, or only supports FM, etc.
- Be sure you know whether it has tubes, if that's important to you, and what condition they're in
- If it has a digital display, be sure it has no lines on the display and that the entire face backlights (no bulbs are burnt out)
- Make sure all the displays (meters, LCD screens, dial faces, etc.) work properly and do not have significant burns, scratches or other damage, such as sun and weathering
- You need to see / hear / read the seller tell you that the rig is fully functional, as in, can transmit at the highest power levels on all applicable modes
- Make sure it's not been used or stored in a smoking or pet environment, if that's important to you
- Find out whether the internal battery has ever been replaced, and when
- Make sure the knobs aren't wobbly, especially the big tuning knob, and that they're easy to turn

- Make sure the pots aren't scratchy or intermittent
- If the rig is an HT, make sure it comes with the charger, plus a battery that can hold a full charge. If it's a mobile or base, make sure it comes with the DC power cable to an appropriate connector.
- Make sure your rig comes with a programming cable or (tuner, amp, etc.) controller cable, if those are important to you
- If the rig uses a modular (RJ-11, RJ-45, etc.) jack, be sure no bare wires are showing at the plug end outside the housing
- Might be good to know whether the rig was ever installed in a vehicle or exposed to physical shock or inclement weather
- Easiest to purchase a rig that has never been modified (*modded*), but if it has been, be aware of what mod was installed ("MARS/CAP" is the most popular)

Others

Things to understand when purchasing items besides transceivers

- If it's a tuner, be sure you know whether it's a manual vs. automatic tuner (as an aside, it's helpful to know at what maximum SWR an auto-tuner will match for, and at what minimum SWR it'll match down to...most typically match a maximum SWR of 3.0:1 and will match down to 1.2:1)
- When looking at a tuner, be sure it supports both the power level and frequency range you need
- If you're looking at an antenna, be sure you know whether its gain is listed in dBi or dBd, if gain is important to you. If it's listed as simply "dB", you must assume it's dBi.

Hot Tips, cont'd

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- When purchasing a PSU (power supply unit), be sure you know whether it's a linear PSU or a switching (switch-mode) PSU. Switching PSUs tend to be lighter and less expensive, but linear PSUs tend to present a cleaner signal and provide a higher amount of current.
- If you're looking at power supplies, get one that can supply at least the amount of current required by your equipment, and the greatest amount of current you can afford; I recommend using a 30 A PSU, whether you're supplying power to a base rig or a mobile unit, and in particular, the \$89 [MFJ MFI-4230MVP](#).
- If you're looking at an amplifier, be sure you know whether it requires 240 VAC or can accept 120 VAC
- When shopping for an amplifier, you might be amazed by its output power, but be sure you also know the input power that's required to drive it
- And speaking of power, understand whether the amplifier has tubes or FETs for its finals, if that's important to you
- Also, be sure the amplifier supports the frequency range you need
- Many more things about amplifiers just could not be covered here easily, but characteristics such as SWR protection, gain compression, rig control, and weight can also be considerations
- The success rate of purchasing *used* coaxial cable or other types of feed line, such as ladder-line, is fairly low
- Keep in mind that, the older a microphone is, the more spit and other unsavory liquids have been sprayed onto the device, so assume you'll spend some quality time cleaning this (and other) used equipment you might purchase

General

These are considerations that apply to just about any kind of online purchase you make.

- Look to be sure the item has not already been sold
- Make sure the price you're seeing is USD, not pounds or Canadian or something else
- If the price seems unusually low, be aware that it might be listed *as-is* (aka, not working) or for *parts only*
- Similarly, watch for words such as *needs TLC* and *vintage*
- Most of the time ads that say, "I'm not a ham, and I don't know much about this equipment my spouse left behind" are telling you the truth; however, once in awhile it means, "This equipment does not work at all, but I want to sell it to you at half the working price"
- Be sure you can have it shipped to you; some require *Pickup Only* and some ship to CONUS (lower 48 states only)
- Be ready to provide the payment type the seller requires; some require PayPal, some require Venmo, some require Postal Money Order, etc.
- Keep in mind that many do not accept returns, due to parts-swapping by unscrupulous shoppers
- A photo is worth a thousand bucks, especially if it shows the unit in operation, and not just a stock photo, or if it shows signs of damage and severe weathering not mentioned by the seller

Can you think of other tips? Please share on our [FB Group page!](#)

