RCU Review: Hobbico 72 Mhz Frequency Checker

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One of the most common issues at any flying field has been Frequency control and we know that all AMA sanctioned fields are required to have some type of frequency control system in place. Even with these control systems in place you are never 100% sure that no one is on your channel. This is where the new 72Mhz Frequency Checker from Hobbico comes in.

Specification

Input Voltage: 4.5V DC
Scan Frequency: 15 seconds
Dimensions: 3.14 x 0.94 x 2.36 in (80 x 24 x 60mm)
Weight: 2.05 oz (58g)
Requires: 3 AAA alkaline cells
Warranty: 1 year

Stock Numbers:
HCAP0340 72MHz Radio Frequency Checker

The Hobbico frequency checker is inexpensive, street price of $49.99 and very simple to use. All you have to do is take it out of the box, add 3 AAA batteries and turn it on. As it scans through each of the channels you will see the individual LED's light up. If it finds the channel active it will leave the LED light on as it continues to scan the rest of the channels. It takes the checker about 15 seconds to scan all the channels before cycling through them again.

The checker has a scanning range of 300 feet but you can increase its range to 1000 feet by buying the additional external antenna ($8.99). It is also small and light that you could carry it around in your shirt pocket.

Field Test

Now this sounds good but how well will this actual work out at the field. I received the checker the day before a competition that my club was hosting so I figured that this would be a great time to try it out. Since we were going to have someone controlling the transmitter impound and frequency board, I though the checker would be a good double check to make sure no stray transmitters were being turned on.

I started out using the checker without the external antenna to see how well it would work and it actual worked pretty well. I could watch as the competitors checked out their transmitters and see on the checker when they turned them on and off. I didn't get any stray channels showing up during this time so I was pretty impressed with it's performance.

Next I plugged in the external antenna and turned the checker back on. During the first cycle the checker showed that channel 34 was active. This was a bit of a surprise since all the transmitters where impounded and turned off. So I figured that we were picking up a stray signal on that channel but when it cycled through again it showed 34 off and now 35 on, then it showed 35 off and 36 on. It cycled through this pattern a couple of times before clearing. It would do this for about a minute, then disappear for awhile and then start up again. This pattern stopped once I removed the antenna but would reappear as soon as I re-attached the antenna. Now I had no real way of knowing if there was anything on these channels or if it was some glitch with the checker and the antenna. It would have been nice to have had a second checker with me to see if both were doing the same thing at the time. No one was flying on these channels which was probably a good thing but if there was I could have used their receiver to see if they were getting any glitches with their plane.

After getting home from the competition I tried the checker and had the same issue with the external antenna. I live over 20 miles from our flying field so I shouldn't be seeing the same behavior as I did at the field if it was caused by some type of stray signals.

I've used the checker a few more times at our field and at a few other locations and had similar results with the external antenna. I don't know if these are stray signals or a glitch but from reading Hobbico's Tech Notice it seems possible that this is more of a glitch with the system then it is from picking up a signal.

Tech Notice
May 13, 2005

1. *The "Special Features" section of the instruction sheet lists the range in meters instead of feet. The correct descriptions are: "Range is up to 300 feet w/o external antenna" and "Range is up to 1000 feet with external antenna". Elsewhere on the instruction sheet the proper ranges in feet are listed. We apologize for any confusion this may have caused.*
2. *Hobbico's Frequency Checker is designed to scan all fifty R/C frequencies in the 72MHz band and identify when another transmitter is operating on any such channel. It's important to note that the Frequency Checker is NOT well suited to show very brief, intermittent Rf signals that could cause interference which may be present in the environment near or between R/C channels.*
3. *Do not point a Tx antenna directly at the Frequency Checker. This will make it more difficult for the checker to detect the signal being emitted from the Tx.*
4. *For best reception do not lay the Frequency Checker on the ground during operation. Resting the checker on an elevated surface such as a table or flight box is recommended.*
5. *When using the optional external antenna: it's best to point the antenna skyward for best reception. Also, extra channels might appear to be in use if the checker is physically located very near a Tx which is emitting a signal. Moving the checker several feet away from the Tx will clear the problem. If used inside buildings which have a lot of steel/metal in the structure, extra channels might inadvertently be shown, and NOT using the external antenna may deliver the best results in this situation.*

Hobbico

Well we contacted Hobbico about the glitch and they figured that I had a bad unit so they sent me a new one with a new antenna. When the new unit arrived I tested both while I was at home. The new unit worked fine while the old one still had the glitch. I switched the antennas between the two units to make sure it wasn't a problem with the antenna but there was no change. I had the same results when I tested the units down at the field.

Conclusion

Overall I really like the Hobbico frequency checker since its inexpensive and its small size makes it easy to keep in my flight box or carry it in a shirt pocket. This is a great help to have at a competition as another way to monitor the frequencies that should be in use.

If you should run into the same problem that I had with the first unit just contact Hobbico for a replacement one. They were very helpful when I contacted them about the problem.

This frequency checker is well worth it's $49.99 price tag and nice addition to one's field box.

Vendor Info
Hobbico 2904 Research Road, Champaign, IL 61822 Available online from Tower Hobbies & other Hobbico retailers. Tower Hobbies Product Page Link

Comments on RCU Review: Hobbico 72 Mhz Frequency Checker

There are no comments

The comments, observations and conclusions made in this review are solely with respect to the particular item the editor reviewed and may not apply generally to similar products by the manufacturer. We cannot be responsible for any manufacturer defects in workmanship or other deficiencies in products like the one featured in the review.

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