

WHY I HATE FT8...

(...and why I'm also kind of in awe of it)

By Greg N5XO

The "Villain" of Modern Ham Radio

The screenshot displays the WSJT-X v2.6.0 software interface. At the top, a 'Wide Graph' shows a waterfall plot of the 14.074 MHz band with a green signal trace. Below the graph are various control panels including 'Controls', 'Bins/Pixel', 'Start 100 Hz', 'Palette', 'Adjust...', 'Flatten', 'RefSpec', 'Split 2500 Hz', 'N Avg 2', 'Digipan', 'Cumulative', and 'Smooth 1'. The main interface is divided into two tables: 'Band Activity' and 'Rx Frequency'.

UTC	dB	DT	Freq	Message
131330	-6	-2.2	2562	UV11 F55JH IN87
131330	-13	0.1	1763	CQ F4JGI IN94 France
131330	-14	0.1	2735	HS8AFA HZ15F LL34
131330	-6	0.2	2149	CQ SA0P0W J099 Sweden
131330	-2	0.1	1448	CQ URSUX K050 Ukraine
131330	-13	0.2	1954	SV1GSP BX5AA RR73 Taiwan
131330	-14	0.1	452	CQ DX F4HRG IN87 France
131330	-13	0.1	1077	N3IZ EA7LU -05
131330	-10	-0.9	808	C6AGU F4HRU JN07
131330	-11	0.1	2624	UA6AHR DF1KW R+10
131330	-19	0.1	2716	OE5EIN OV1T -09
131330	-16	0.3	1980	PD2GCM G3DR -10
131330	-18	0.0	484	IZ8PPI F5RPM 73 France
131330	-13	0.1	550	DL2BS HA1VG JN87
131330	-17	0.1	543	N0FW PD2SHB J021
131330	-21	-0.0	2091	CQ EA1EAS IN70 a7 Spain
131330	-5	-0.2	1129	CQ R7BL LN06 a7 EU Russia
----- 20m -----				
131345	7	0.1	2416	CQ ES1KK K029 Estonia
131345	6	0.2	1137	F6ARS HA3PT R+14
131345	6	-0.1	2680	RC18P <UE23NY> -12
131345	16	0.2	1897	VU2RS LY3AB K005
131345	2	0.1	2624	DF1KW UA6AHR RR73 EU Russia
131345	2	0.2	1215	YC1LIN SV1FA KM18
131345	3	0.4	1084	DK1AN EA3IGB -05
131345	2	0.1	2251	E74K YO2NAA KN05
131345	5	0.2	648	CQ DX LA6ZFA J059 Norway

UTC	dB	DT	Freq	Message
131030	-13	0.1	1584	JE6WKY DU3CQ RR73 Philippines
131055	Tx	2242	~	DU3CQ DG2YCB J042
131130	-14	-0.1	1574	C6AGU DL6ZFG -18
131130	-17	0.2	1584	JK3DJX DU3CQ -14
131200	-18	0.4	1584	JK3DJX DU3CQ RR73 Philippines
131200	-18	-0.1	1574	C6AGU DL6ZFG -18
131230	-11	-0.1	1574	C6AGU DL6ZFG -18
131230	-18	0.2	1585	CQ DU3CQ PK04 Philippines
131245	-18	0.8	1575	N9TF C6AGU 73 Bahamas
131330	-20	0.1	1585	VR2ZDA DU3CQ -09

Below the tables are control buttons: CQ only, Log QSO, Stop, Monitor, Erase, Decode, Enable Tx, Halt Tx, Tune, and Menus. The main display shows the frequency 14,074 000 and the mode FT8. A 'Generate Std Msgs' panel lists various call signs and messages. The bottom status bar shows 'Receiving', 'DG2YCB', 'FT8', and '13'.

File View Mode Decode Save AutoSeq DXpedition Misc Help

UTC	dB	DT	Freq	Message	Band	Activity
133830	-14	-0.5	1034	~ CQ OE4ATS JN87	Austria	
133830	-8	0.1	2045	~ CQ IT9QPF JM67	Sicily	
133830	-10	-0.5	2014	~ W1YRC OK1KM R-13	Czech Rep.	
133830	-15	0.3	2244	~ CQ LZ3CQ KN12	Bulgaria	
----- 28.02.19 13:39:14 UTC ----- 20m -----						
133900	2	0.1	2428	~ K5VRX RU6VJ LN04	EU Russia	
133900	2	0.1	2129	~ CQ ON7XT JO10	Belgium	
133900	10	-0.9	1237	~ DL5ZBA LZ3QE -09	Bulgaria	
133900	-3	0.1	1885	~ W1YRC UA1WA K047	EU Russia	
133900	-13	0.5	1496	~ EX8MLE IK1YPH -16	Italy	
133900	-5	0.2	319	~ EA6VQ WW1WW +02	U.S.A.	
133900	-9	0.1	480	~ KAIYQC R3FO R-18	EU Russia	
133900	-8	0.1	2335	~ CQ PA7EL JO22	Netherland	
133900	-8	0.1	1928	~ O05Z L24TL RR73	Bulgaria	
133900	-5	0.1	1122	~ CQ A41ZZ OH33	Oman	
133900	-3	0.1	1791	~ ZB2IF SV3IEG KM08	Greece	
133900	-5	0.1	1464	~ ON4RK UR3CFC -02	Ukraine	
133900	-1	0.5	877	~ CQ CO8EX FL20	Cuba	
133900	-4	0.1	405	~ CQ ON3CC JO21	Belgium	
133900	-11	0.1	2188	~ JA0MRW DF7FC JO40	Germany	
133900	3	0.1	1401	~ JS6TWW PA4C JO33	Netherland	
133900	-4	1.0	1721	~ A45XR DL9DAN JO41	Germany	
133900	-11	0.4	1993	~ AB1OC PA3EPP R+00	Netherland	
133900	-12	0.6	1651	~ UT4XU EA7GWD -09	Spain	
133900	-10	-0.2	948	~ CQ ER3EP JN25	France	
133900	-8	0.1	2071	~ RT4S G3PXT -07	England	
133900	-11	0.1	1337	~ PD1BU UY5MB 73	Ukraine	
133900	-16	0.1	1276	~ UR3CFC K1WY R-02	U.S.A.	
133900	-8	0.2	2045	~ CQ IT9QPF JM67	Sicily	
133900	-17	0.3	2171	~ KB1EFS UT8UM R-20	Ukraine	
133900	-5	0.4	426	~ ES4RM FIHFJ JN28	France	
133900	-15	-2.8	319	~ HD8M DL9ZW JN69	Germany	
133900	-13	0.6	1884	~ W1YRC UR3ITA 73	Ukraine	
133900	-13	0.3	1717	~ CQ DF0TWN JO32	Germany	
133900	-15	0.1	941	~ RW9QA GU0UVH IN89	Guernsey	
133900	-16	0.1	1851	~ RY6AAG DL7VAI 73	Germany	
133900	-7	0.2	1376	~ GD3YUM RW6HB LN13	EU Russia	
133900	-12	-0.1	1333	~ CQ HG8LXL KN06	Hungary	
133900	-15	0.1	1478	~ AB1OC SP2GR JO93	Poland	

14.074 000 13:39:34 TX 15/45 Pwr 0 W

20m Menus

DX Call: PA3EPP DX Grid: JO32

Az: 50 3532 mi

Tx FTS ~ Report -1 S meter

Tx 2390 Hz Tx=Rx Hound

Rx 1993 Hz Rx=Tx AutoTX

Wanted Tx/Rx Split AutoSeq7

UTC	dB	DT	Freq	Message	Rx Frequency
133630	-7	0.4	2381	~ FE1NPS UR5LCZ RR73	Ukraine
133645	Tx		2390	~ HD8M AB1OC FN42	
133715	Tx		2390	~ CQ DX AB1OC FN42	
133745	Tx		2390	~ CQ DX AB1OC FN42	
133730	-4	0.1	2391	~ AB1OC 2E0DBS JO02	England
133746	Tx		2390	~ 2E0DBS AB1OC -04	
133800	-4	0.1	2391	~ AB1OC 2E0DBS R-08	England
133815	Tx		2390	~ 2E0DBS AB1OC RR73	
133845	Tx		2390	~ PA3EPP AB1OC -01	England
133900	-13	0.5	1496	~ EX8MLE IK1YPH -16	Italy
133900	-11	0.4	1993	~ AB1OC PA3EPP R+00	Netherland
133915	Tx		2390	~ PA3EPP AB1OC RR73	
133900	-15	0.1	1478	~ AB1OC SP2GR JO93	Poland

Enable Tx Halt Tx GenMsgs CQ DX RRR SkipTx1

Log QSO Erase PA3EPP AB1OC FN42 Tx 1

PA3EPP AB1OC -01 Tx 2

PA3EPP AB1OC R-01 Tx 3

PA3EPP AB1OC RR73 Tx 4

PA3EPP AB1OC 73 Tx 5

PA3EPP AB1OC FN42 Tx 6

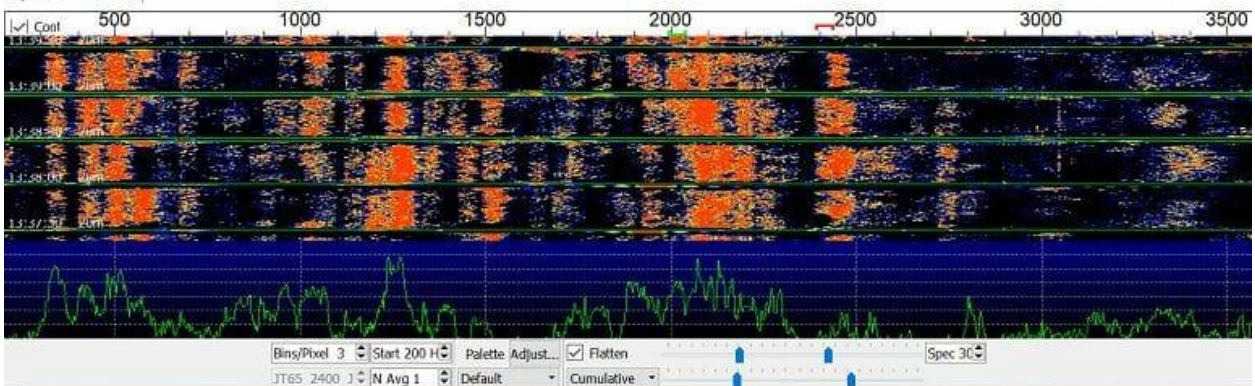
AGCc Filter

Flink SWL mode

Decode Clear DX

Receiving FTS Last Tx: PA3EPP AB1OC RR73 | WD 90m | 4/15 | Load PA3EPP | 28 Feb 2019 | FTS 5037

JTDX - Wide Graph





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Let me just say it right up front so nobody accuses me of dancing around the issue:

I hate FT8.

There... I said it.

Now before the pitchforks come out and someone fires up a 1.5 kW legal-limit keyboard response, let me follow that up with something equally true:

FT8 is one of the most brilliant things ever created in Amateur Radio.

And that, my friends, is the problem.

First — Credit Where It's Due

The software behind FT8, developed by Joe Taylor (yes, a literal Nobel Prize-winning physicist... not your average weekend code hacker), is nothing short of astonishing.

FT8 can:

- Decode signals **20–24 dB below the noise floor**
- Complete contacts in about **15 seconds per exchange**
- Allow stations with **modest antennas and low power** to work the world
- Perform reliably under conditions where SSB just throws its hands up and goes home

In plain English?

👉 Signals you *cannot hear*... FT8 casually logs for you like it's ordering lunch.

From a technical standpoint, it's **jaw-dropping**.

The Part Where I Start Grumbling Like an Old Guy

Now here's where I probably sound like those guys back in the day saying:

“When they dropped the CW requirement, the hobby was doomed!”

...and I used to laugh at them.

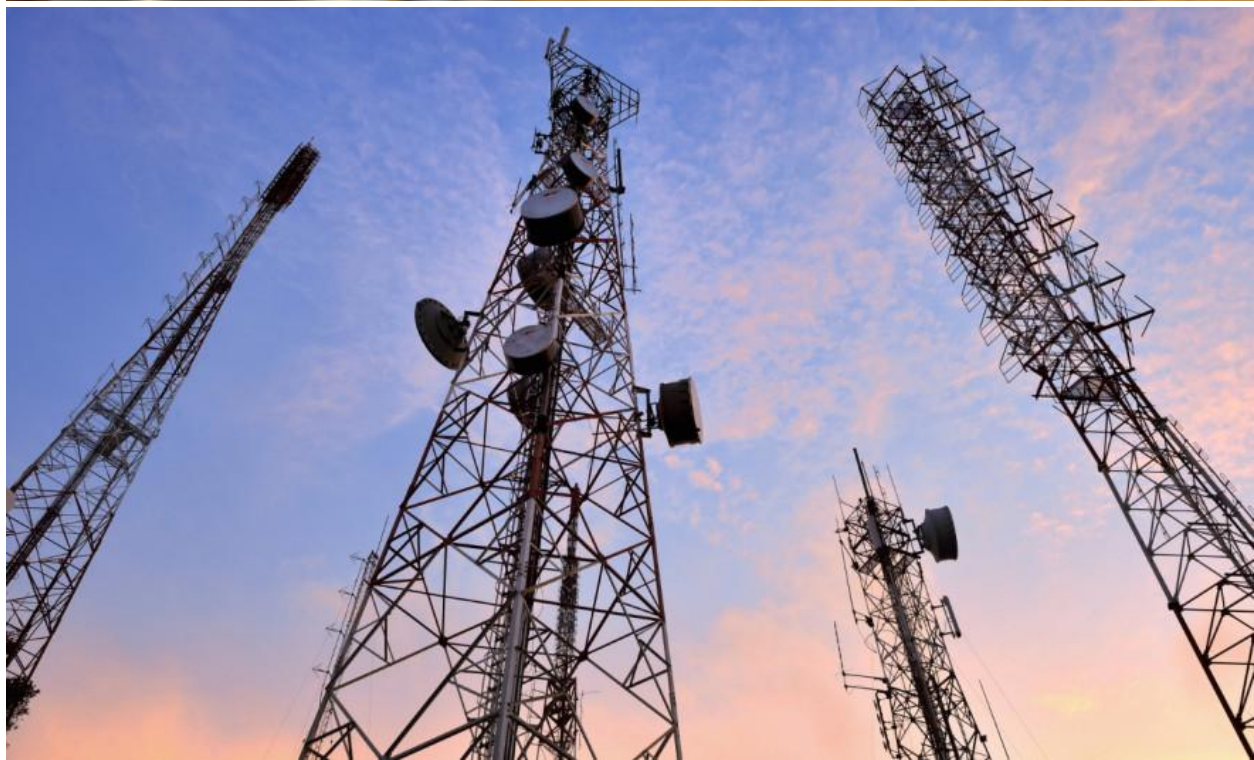
Well guess what...

I've become that guy.

“The Band Is Wide Open!”

...and nobody's there





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I cannot tell you how many times this has happened:

- 6 meters is **wide open**
- 2 meters is **rolling with propagation**
- Conditions are screaming “GET ON THE AIR!”

And what do you hear on SSB?

Crickets.

Dead silence.

Meanwhile, you slide over to FT8...

...and it looks like **Times Square on New Year’s Eve.**

The Contest Problem (This One Hurts)

During VHF/UHF contests, something has shifted — and not in a subtle way.

- SSB activity? Thin
- CW activity? Even thinner
- Actual *conversation*? Practically endangered

Unless you’re chasing:

- a rover
- a die-hard weak signal operator
- or one of us stubborn holdouts

...it’s quiet.

But FT8?

Packed. Wall-to-wall signals.

It’s like everyone showed up to the party...

but they’re all texting each other from different corners of the room.

What FT8 Gets Absolutely Right

Let’s be fair — because this matters.

FT8 has:

- Opened the hobby to people with **limited space, HOA restrictions, or modest stations**
- Made **DX accessible** to folks who otherwise wouldn’t have a chance
- Provided a **powerful tool for propagation testing**
- Enabled **scientific-level weak signal experimentation**

From a technical and accessibility standpoint:

👉 **FT8 is a massive win for Amateur Radio.**

No argument.

What It Gets... Questionable

Here's my issue — and it's not technical.

It's cultural.

FT8 contacts are:

- Automated
- Structured
- Efficient
- Predictable

Which sounds great... until you realize:

👉 **You're not really communicating.**

You're exchanging:

- callsigns
- grid squares
- signal reports

...and that's it.

No personality.

No conversation.

No "Hey, what antenna are you running?"

No "Where are you located?"

No "Man, the band is on fire tonight!"

Just:

Beep... decode... log... done.

The "Texting" Effect on Radio

This is where I get myself into trouble...

FT8 is doing to Amateur Radio what texting did to society.

We used to:

- call people
- talk
- laugh
- share ideas

Now?

We send:

- 👍
- “k”
- “ok”

FT8 feels like the RF version of that.

Efficient? Yes.

Impressive? Absolutely.

Satisfying?

...eh.

My Unpopular Opinion

I would **love** FT8 if it stayed in its lane:

- Bad band conditions? YES
- Testing antennas? YES
- Pushing weak signal limits? ABSOLUTELY

But when:

- the band is open
- conditions are good
- and people still choose automation over interaction

...it starts to feel like we're missing the point.

The Reality Check (Because I Have One)

Here's the part where I have to be honest with myself:

FT8 isn't destroying the hobby.

It's evolving it.

And whether I like it or not:

👉 A lot of operators **love it**

👉 A lot of new hams **start with it**

👉 A lot of stations **depend on it**

And that matters.

Final Thoughts from a Grumpy Weak Signal Guy

So where do I land?

- I **hate FT8** for what it's doing to conversation
- I **respect it deeply** for what it can do technically
- I **use it occasionally** (don't tell anyone)
- I **wish more people would get back on SSB and actually talk**

Because at the end of the day...

This hobby isn't just about making contacts.

It's about:

- sharing knowledge
- experimenting
- learning
- and yes... actually **communicating**

The Challenge

Next time the band opens:

👉 Slide up to 144.200

👉 Or 50.125

👉 Or wherever your weak signal calling frequency is

And instead of clicking "Enable TX"...

Pick up the mic.

You might be surprised who answers.

— *Greg N5XO*