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Equipment review

The Yaesu VX-6R and FT-60R hand-held 144/430 MHz transceivers

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First the good news.

You might have noticed on the inside front cover of AR recently that Yaesu, under their new name of Vertex Standard, have set up their own operations in Australia. In fact, right here in Melbourne. A few weeks ago, Ernie Walls VK3FM and I paid them a visit. Firstly, to introduce a couple of faces from Amateur Radio magazine and secondly to see if we could borrow some equipment to review. It was a case of "what would you like to have?"

I thought that a couple of dual-band hand-held transceivers which might be suitable for new Foundation Licence holders would be a good way to go. Ernie

and I were presented with about six of their current range. What to pick? My thought was something with a reasonable power output that could at least access a few local repeaters for those in urban areas and perhaps cover 100 km with an outside antenna for country operators. On that basis, we picked two with five watts output which is about the upper limit for hand held transceivers.

The two chosen were the VX-6R and the FT-60R. Although the designations are similar, they have very different facilities which I will discuss later. For many years, I have used an ancestor of these transceivers, a FT-209RH. This 20-year old transceiver is about three times the size and nearly three times the weight

of these new rigs. However, it puts out 6 watts plus and has all of ten memories. Hand held transceivers have come a long way in 20 years. So, let's start off with the VX-6R.

VX-6R

This is the smaller of the two, weighing just 270 g and it has the greater receive frequency coverage. In fact, it has continuous coverage from 500 kHz right up to 999.990 MHz. Before you think you might be able to dispense with your good communications receiver, you need to consider a few things. First, the antenna is only about 19 cm long, not exactly an outside dipole. Next, although it has continuous coverage the tuning steps on the shortwave bands



The VX-6R

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is a minimum of 5 kHz. Taking all of that into account, with a piece of wire five or six metres long and a few turns around the stubby antenna, I was quite amazed at just what I could hear. The stronger international broadcast stations came in loud and clear. There is, in fact, a pre loaded memory bank with 89 short wave frequencies which cover most of the international broadcast channels. These are identified with the country to which you might be tuned. There are no facilities for SSB reception, so amateur band reception is not really possible. Standard broadcast band reception was reasonable but again a short wire improved performance greatly. Of course, the higher in frequency you tune, the better it gets, so the FM broadcast band is really quite good. The aircraft band is as good as a dedicated receiver that I often use and of course the sensitivity on the 2 m and 70 cm band is as good as, if not better than, many hand-held transceivers. The receive audio quality is better than average. Now, let's look at the operation on the two amateur bands.

First, its memories: How about 900? These are arranged into 24 banks, with two special banks. The first special bank I covered above, the second is programmed for the VHF marine channels. This leaves plenty for normal amateur operation. Memories can be labelled with their frequency or you can give them a name which could indicate location. Maximum power output is five watts, but there are three lower settings. These are 2.5, 1.0 and 0.3 watts.

If you like tuning around your choice of steps is 5, 10, 12.5, 15, 20 and 25 kHz. In most cases, I prefer to set it to 25 kHz, which fits in with the Australian band plan. Audio reports on transmit were very good and the received quality was well balanced with very good high frequency response. Sitting in my shack I was able to access several repeaters with the furthest about 120 km away.

All in, this transceiver was a delight to use. I spent hours just tuning around. If I owned a VX-6R, I'm sure I would spend more time listening than transmitting. As a passing thought, if you are a scuba diving enthusiast, take the VX-6R along with you. It's water proof down to about one metre.

The FT-60R

This unit is the heavy weight of the pair. It is exactly 100 g heavier than the VX-6R. However, at 370 g, it is certainly not overweight. It is very comfortable to hold and has quite a chunky feel. The full general coverage receiver is not available with a low frequency end starting at the start of the aircraft band at 108 MHz. From there it goes to 520 MHz. Then from 700 to 999.999 MHz. It also has five watts maximum output with two lower power settings. These are 2 watts and 0.5 watts. Memory capacity is an amazing 1000 plus. The 'plus' amounts to 50 band edge memories, and ten weather broadcast channels. These weather channels do not exist in Australia as yet. The normal memories are arranged in ten banks. If you are planning a visit to Europe, 1750 Hz tone burst is included, which will give you access to repeaters in that part of the world.

On-air testing resulted in excellent audio reports on transmit. On receive, I thought that the audio lacked high frequency response. I certainly preferred the sound of the VX-6R. However if you

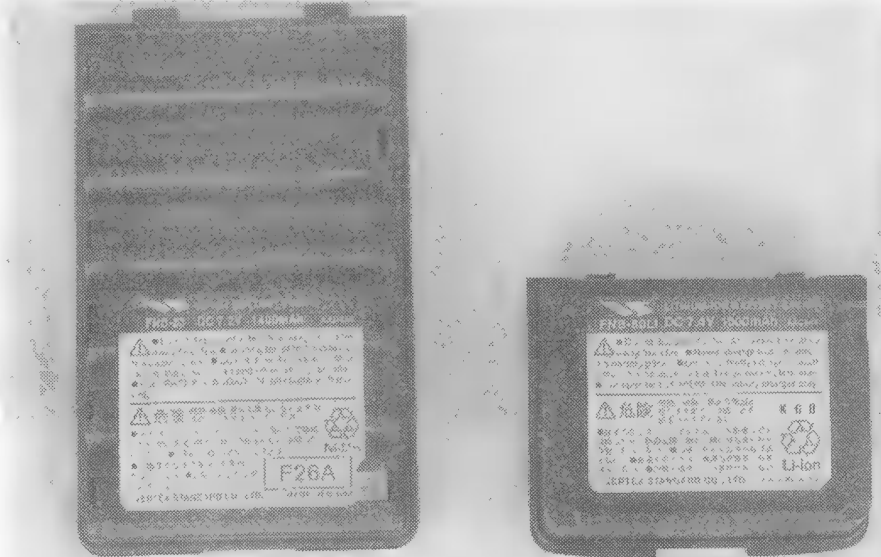


FT-60R

are buying one, have a listen to both, you may have a preference either way.

The batteries supplied with these transceivers are interesting. The FT-60R is supplied with the FNB-83 battery pack, rated at 7.2 volts 1400 mAh. The VX-6R comes with the FNB-80LI, which is rated at 7.4 volts and 1500 mAh. Look at the

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Two battery cases – similar capacity, but very different sizes due to differing battery technology

Equipment review: The YAESU VX-6R/E and FT-60R/E hand held 144/430 MHz transceivers *continued*

photo of the two battery packs side by side. You will see that one is twice the size of the other. It just goes to show the difference in energy density between Nickel Metal Hydride and Lithium Ion technologies

FT-60R and the VX-6R conclusions

The performance of these transceivers on the amateur bands is for all purposes very much the same. If you really need the extra receive frequency coverage then the VX-6R might be your choice. My pick is the FT-60R which provides good performance at a lower price.

It has been a pleasure to have a play with both of these transceivers. Both are excellent performers and if Yaesu quality is as good as it was twenty years ago, they should still be going strong in 20 years time, just like my old FT-209RH.

The current retail price for the FT-60R is \$369 and the VX-6R is \$499. However, as always, shop around. Vertex Standard tells me that when the first shipment of the new FT-2000 HF transceivers arrives, they will make one available for AR to review. Watch this space.



An "old-timer" with two of its modern successors

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