

# Shutter-Dial DX 2004

by Al Klase

For this year's New Jersey Antique Radio Club DX contest, I thought it might be appropriate to make an effort with a home-entertainment receiver in Category D. I had campaigned the General Electric A-82 last year, and was looking for something different. There aren't a lot of "civilian" radios here to choose from, so I found myself carrying the Zenith 12S232 tombstone upstairs to the bedroom where the loop antennas work best.

I connected the Waltons set to my newly constructed, super-simple, ferrite loop antenna that had already proved effective with the Collins 51J-4. Now for AC - the power cord, that I had replaced about 12 years ago with something from a slightly antique lamp, was badly frayed. I tucked a folded scrap of paper between the two bare conductors, prayed, and plugged it in. So far so good!

It was 19:02 EST, just after 7PM, perhaps a little early for DX. I tuned to WMCA, 570 in New York City, and nulled the signal as best I could by rotating the antenna. Gee, that 6T5 eye tube is actually useful. Almost immediately I heard a couple of clock ticks under the religious stuff, and sure enough, straight up on the minute came a beep followed in a couple of seconds by "RR" in Morse code, and one of Cuba's Radio Reloj (say "ray low.") stations was in the log, an auspicious beginning.

Ok, time to get serious. I tuned up to 750 and peaked up the antenna, and pointed the rod to the Southwest to null out what was probably WSB in Atlanta. Sure enough there was Latin music and Spanish voices. Just a couple of minutes, and I was rewarded by a quick "erray-cee-erray" announcement. That's RCR in Caracas Venezuela, one of the few Latins that identifies with any regularity, and a great catch at 2097 miles. Rotating the antenna ninety degrees, yielded a WSB ID in just a minute or two.

Another perennial points generator, and fairly easy catch is WWL in New Orleans, some 1100 miles distant. Frequency is 870, just below WCBS. The steerable loop helped knock back the splatter. These guys sometimes drone on-and-on. This time it was round ball, so it was nearly 8 o'clock until they ID'ed.

I knew from last year that competition was likely to be fierce, so I decided to ignore the Chicago stations for the time being, and strive for real distance. I had to hang around 1120 KHz for a while to snag KMOX in St. Louis.

One of the stations you just have to log is Radiovision Cristiana down in the Caribbean on South Caicos Island, 1309 miles, rock-crusher signal, reliable ID on the hour, and totally in the clear on 530 kilohertz. I had heard them a couple of days ago on the one-tube regen with no trouble at all. The only problem was, the Zenith only tunes down to, maybe, 540.

Try as I might, I wasn't coordinated enough to get a screwdriver on the oscillator padder condenser to tweak the set down to 530 while looking through a mirror. Oh well, that power cord really needed to be replaced, so RVC went in the log with the chassis out of the cabinet.

Well, the low-hanging fruit had been picked, now it was time for serious DXing. Cubans were the answer, and a Google search, on the Internet, had yielded a fair amount of useful information. Fidel has a bunch of radio stations, and some are quite powerful. Many are associated with a number of networks such as Radio Reloj, Radio Progreso, and Radio Rebelde.

Reloj, clock *en español*, broadcasts normal programming plus a tick each second and a 1000 Hz tone on the minute followed by an “RR” ID in Morse code. I’m not sure what this does for Cubans, but it makes life easy for DXers. The R’s really cut through the clutter and are easy to hear: “dit-dah-dit dit-dah-dit.”

Progreso and Rebelde are a lot more difficult. They don’t seem to ID very often, and usually cruise right through straight-up-on-the-hour without so much as drawing a breath. However, if you know that two suspect stations, identified positively in frequency, are members of the same network, and they’re broadcasting the same program, it’s reasonable to claim them both. Hard-core DXers call them “parallel.” I’d worked this out the night before on two R. Rebelde stations.

I found the first candidate on 600, just below Philadelphia’s WIP, and the other on 670, just above WFAN. The “split-second” fine tuning dial on the Zenith made it easy to tune back and forth between them. Bingo! The same program was airing on both.

Next I went and camped out on 850, just below the French from CJBC Toronto on 860. This is the home of elusive KOA in Denver. I hadn’t been able to hear them this year, even on the Collins at 5 AM. You need to null out the sports from WEEI in Boston and listen carefully through a couple other stations. No good, but there was a Radio Reloj ID coming through. 850 is another of the Reloj frequencies on the list. In the log it went, and inspired, I dropped down to 830 and caught another “RR.”

My favorite catch was ZIZ, 555 KHz, in St. Kitts & Nevis. English from the Caribbean, what a novelty! I had heard them the night before on the Collins. This is another station that doesn’t ID often, but I had learned from their website that they went to BBC news at midnight. I tuned the big black “Robot Dial” just below WFIL (560), and fiddled with the antenna. There was something there, probably English, but no chance of an ID. I checked for another station at 550 to make sure I was on frequency.

I listened for quite a while with no results. I had the gain pretty far up to try to hear. I was almost ready to give up. I had Atlanta and Nashville in the log to make a total of ten respectable contacts, so I went downstairs to turn off the lights and say good night to the cats. Coming back up the stairs, I heard a woman with a Brit accent, it was the BBC news!

Well, now I had to give Denver another chance. 850 was cluttered with the same old stuff, including Radio Reloj. But then, I heard, not once, but twice, that wonderful call from just this side of the Rockies, KOA.