

Pete Putman KT2B
353 Fieldstone Dr.
Doylestown PA 18901

ICOM's Classic IC-2AT: The Most Popular Hand-Held of All Time

The IC-2AT has left an indelible mark on the amateur radio world since 1979.

Step right up, folks. Don't be shy! Look at this little beauty. I'm telling you, it's a marvel of construction, full of features and easy to use. Small enough to fit in your pocket, too. Best of all, it costs only two hundred thirty dollars. At that price, you'll want two of 'em! Hurry...hurry." Snake oil? Nope. Just amateur radio's equivalent to the Model T: The ICOM IC-2AT hand-held, perhaps the most popular and enduring transceiver of all time.

Since it burst onto the scene in December, 1979, over 500,000 units have been sold world-wide according to ICOM America. It's been manufactured in several versions depending on the country of destination, and has spawned a wealth of aftermarket accessories ranging from quick-charge adapters to drop-in mobile docking boosters. The IC-2AT also single-handedly created a strong market for hand-held amplifiers, typically running 25-35 watts output for 1-2 watts drive.

73 readers first found out about this little marvel in the May, 1980, issue which featured a full-page advertisement with a life-size photograph. The copy read, "When Is ICOM Coming Out With a Hand-Held?" and below the transceiver was the reply: "The Answer Is: Now!". This sent thousands of hams to their phones, charge cards clutched in one hand while dialing with the other. Initial orders overwhelmed dealers! The IC-2AT pioneered a number of features commonly found on HTs today. It was the world's first synthesized hand-held to use both thumbwheel encoding and detachable battery packs. It also offered a range of these packs for various charge rates and output power levels. This approach kept downtime to an absolute minimum. Other hand-



ICOM's IC-2AT

helds on the market couldn't be used while charging. ICOM also forced the rest of the industry to standardize BNC antenna connectors.

Frequent visitors to hamfests will remember a long period in the early '80s when

hamfest organizers didn't have to advertise the door prize: an IC-2AT, of course. Many lucky winners went home with a second unit to back up their initial purchase of this HT. Some wound up with three and even four! In one case, the winner actually refused the prize and negotiated to get the second prize (an antenna tuner). Failing that, he accepted and turned the 2AT into ready cash at a bargain price, which he then spent on the desired tuner. When asked why, he replied "I sure don't need four 2-meter hand-helds."

The First Runners

The first modifications for IC2A/2AT series radios made their appearance in the July, 1981, issue of 73, and (wouldn't you know it) they detailed the installation of a non-standard offset, using an extra CD4051 IC and a few crystals to do the trick. ICOM by this time had announced 10 accessories for the line, including 5 different battery packs. VoCom had come out with a neat little 2-meter amplifier that produced 30 watts with as little as 200 MW of drive—perfect for IC-2AT mobiling. A number of small enterprises introduced battery eliminators for use in the car or base station, perhaps fueled at the time by a shortage of the official ICOM factory version. Subsequently, an article in the August, 1981, issue of 73 detailed a way to roll your own accessories for the IC-2AT, specifically a PTT microphone, trickle charger and the use of a K-Mart 110 camera case to protect the hand-held.

By this time, both Yaesu and Kenwood were into their second generation of synthesized hand-helds, and Santec had jumped into the market to compete with ICOM. No problem, as ICOM stole the march on everyone by announcing the IC-3AT for 220 MHz