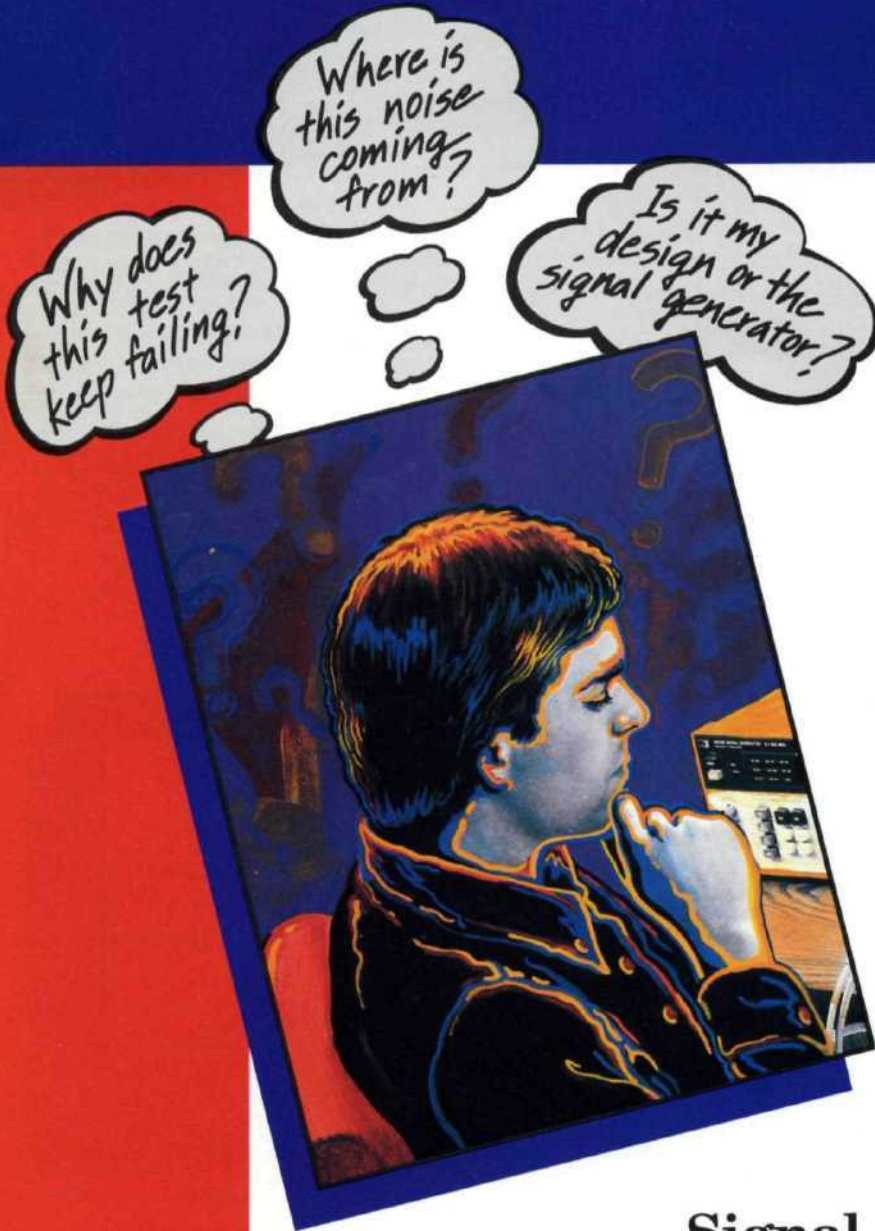


Why is Spectral Purity
Important?



Signal Generator Spectral Purity

Application Note 388

What Is Spectral Purity?

Spectral purity is the inherent stability of a signal. Does it change in frequency? Stabilities can either be short or long term. Drift or long-term stability is usually defined over a period of time greater than a second. Does the signal drift off frequency in minutes, hours, days or months? Current signal generator technology generally offers good long-term stability.

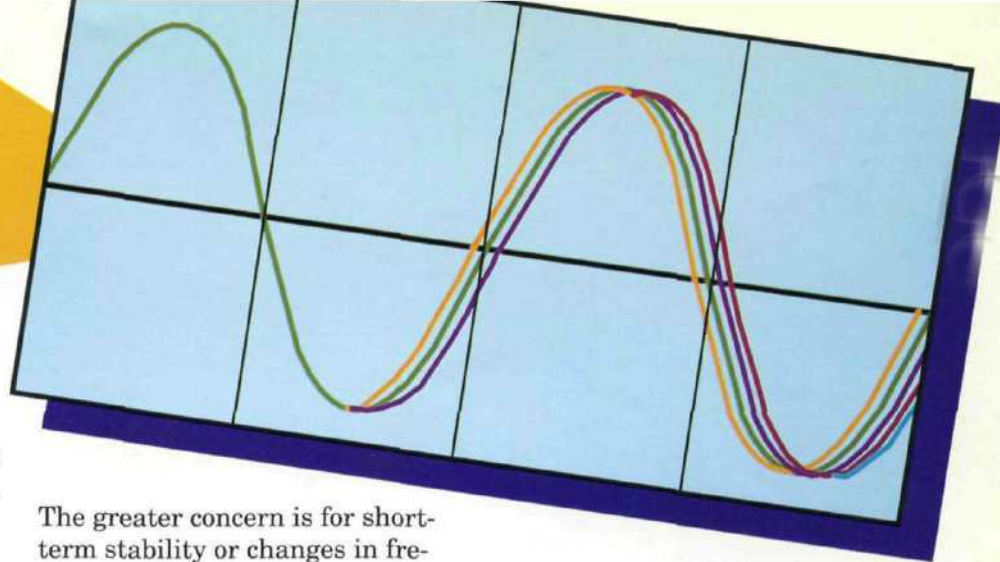


Figure 1. Oscilloscope display of short-term frequency fluctuations.

The greater concern is for short-term stability or changes in frequency in less than one second. These fluctuations come from non-deterministic signals; noise, shot noise and 1/f flicker noise that modulates the carrier. These affect both phase and amplitude.

What Are The Components?

SSB Phase Noise

There are many ways to define spectral purity. The most common and meaningful method of specifying short-term stability is a plot of the signal generator's single-sideband (SSB) phase noise in a 1 Hz bandwidth versus the offset from the carrier. This is illustrated in Figure 2. The SSB phase noise is expressed in dB relative to the carrier (dBc). A 1 Hz bandwidth is used since the noise in other bandwidths can then be easily calculated for comparison. This plot is a graphical representation of the phase noise distribution on one side of the carrier.

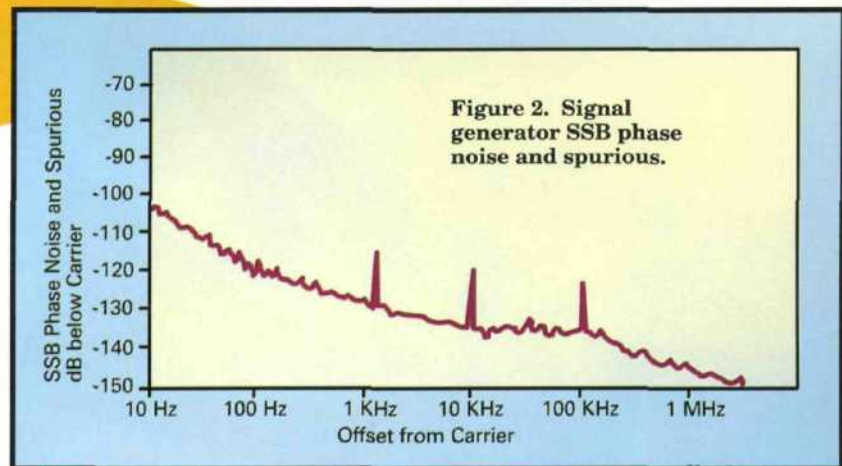


Figure 2. Signal generator SSB phase noise and spurious.

Spurious

Non-random or deterministic signals are created from mixing and dividing signals to get the carrier frequency. These signals may be harmonically related to the carrier and are called subharmonics. The non-harmonic spectral line is called spurious. It is specified in amplitude in relation to the carrier (dBc).

Residual FM

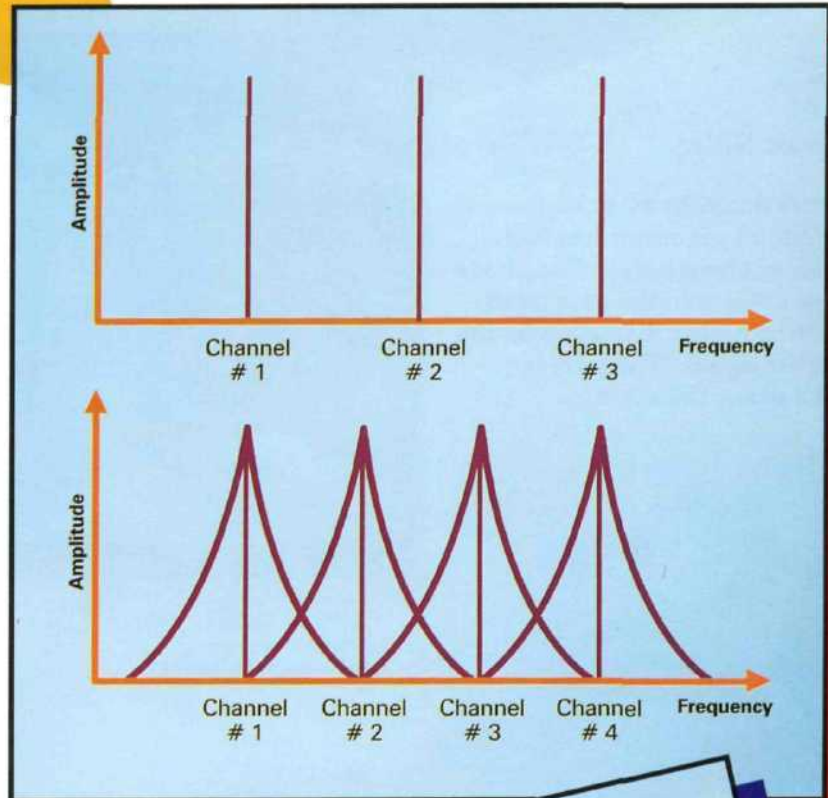
Residual FM is the undesired angular modulation or FM inherent in a signal generator with all the modulation turned off. It includes the effects of both spurious and phase noise. It is the integral or area under the SSB curve with limits set by the post-detection bandwidth. 300 Hz to 3 kHz and 20 Hz to 15 kHz are common bandwidths.

Why Is Spectral Purity Important?

Mobile Radio — Narrower Channel Spacings

As available spectrum becomes more and more scarce, radio channel spacings will decrease. This puts a tighter constraint on receiver designers to design more selective receivers. To test receiver selectivity, a signal generator must have good spectral purity. If not, you will be testing your generator and not your receiver.

Figure 3: Smaller channel spacings mean greater need for spectral purity.



The Measurement: Adjacent Channel Selectivity

One common measurement for testing receiver rejection of unwanted signals is adjacent channel selectivity. Figure 4 shows a receiver IF (intermediate frequency) pass-band with a signal in-channel at a set sensitivity level. A second signal generator is set one channel spacing away. Its amplitude is increased until the signal punches through the pass-band and distorts the in-channel audio signal a set amount. The difference of the two signal levels is called adjacent channel selectivity.

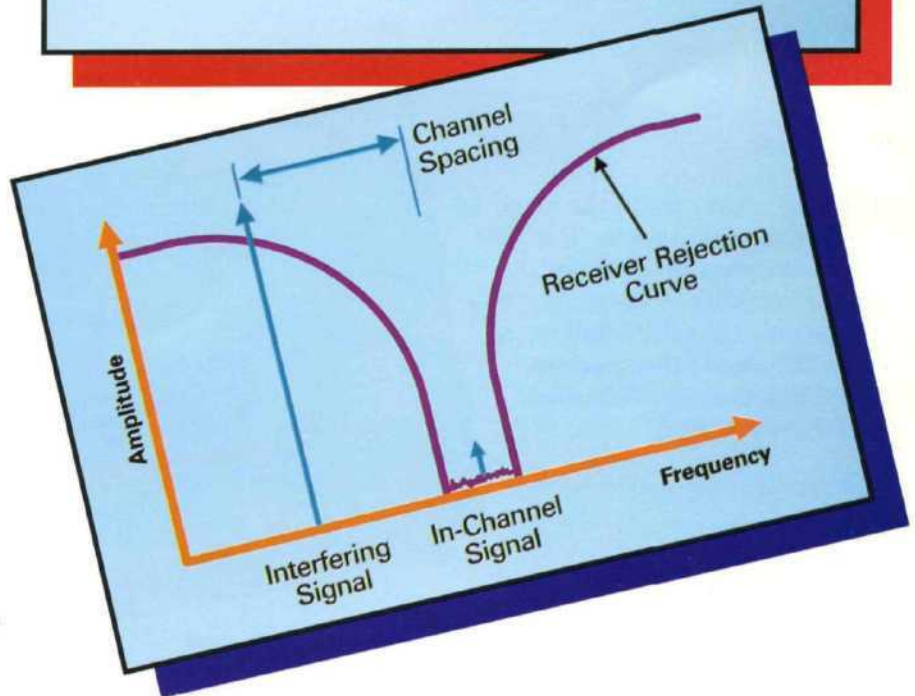


Figure 4. Receiver IF pass-band with in-channel signal present.

How Signal Generator Spectral Purity Affects Measurements

Phase Noise

Figure 5. shows what happens if the signal generator has high levels of phase noise. The phase noise spills into the pass band, creating higher distortion on the desired signal. The receiver looks worse than it is.

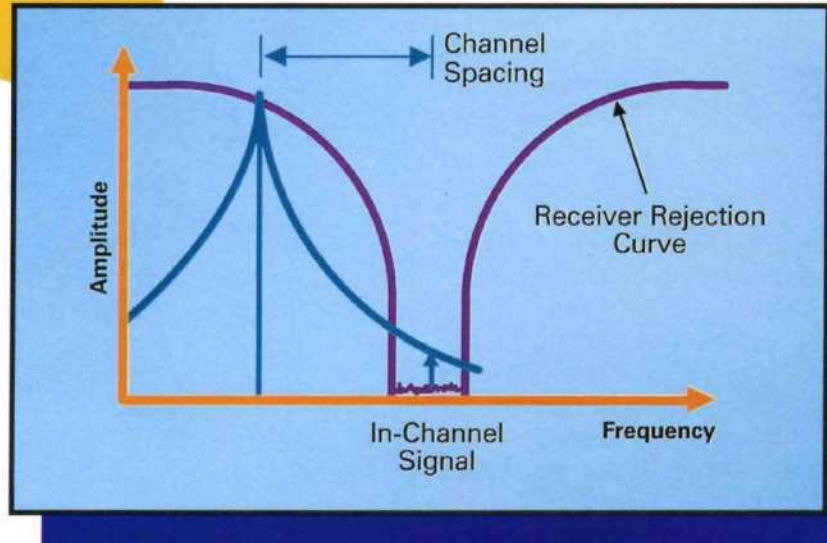


Figure 5. Out-of-channel phase noise causes in-channel distortion.

Spurious

Spurious causes much the same problem as phase noise. If a spurious signal shows up in the channel spacing of the radio, you will be measuring the difference in amplitudes of the spurious signal and the out-of-channel signal generator.

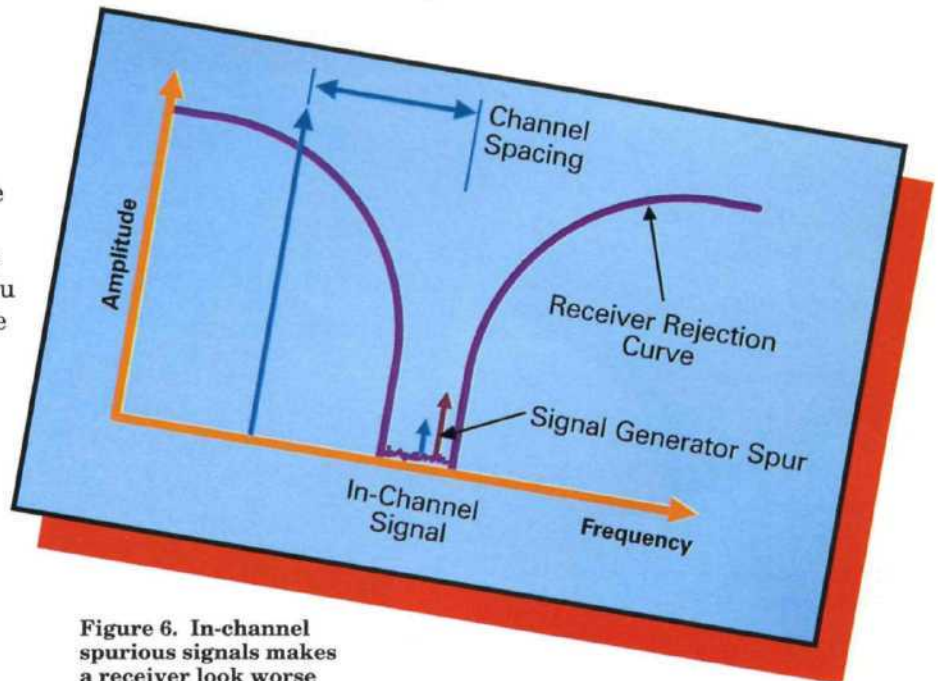


Figure 6. In-channel spurious signals makes a receiver look worse than it is.

Another Measurement for Receivers

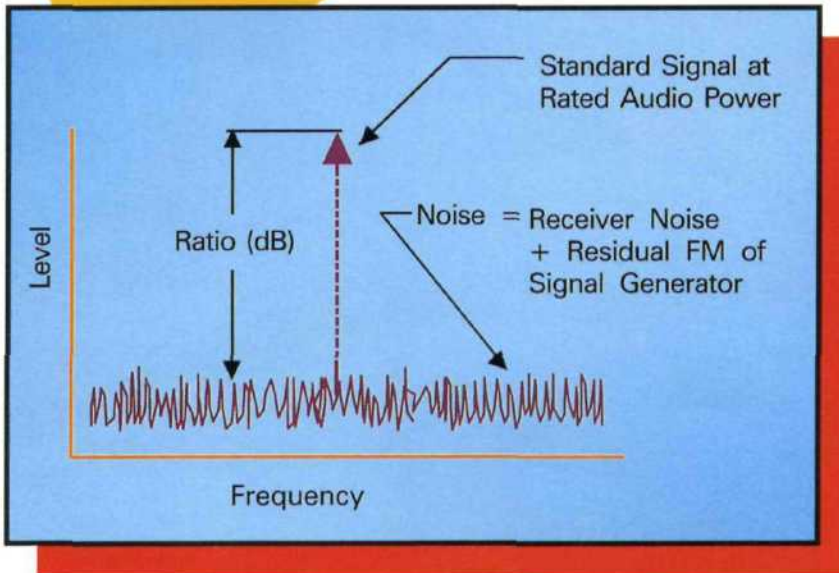


Figure 7. Signal generator residual FM adds to receiver noise levels.

Hum and Noise

Hum and noise measurement determines a receiver's signal-to-noise ratio. It is a ratio of a strong RF signal with audio present to the same signal with no audio present. It is measured in dB.

Signal Generator Residual FM

High noise of a signal generator is directly added to the receiver noise. This gives a lower hum and noise ratio. Again it makes the receiver look worse than it is.

Why is Spectral Purity Important for Local Oscillator Substitution?

Signal Generator as a Local Oscillator

Spectral purity is needed on signal generators used as local oscillators. Let's look at two signals, f_1 and f_2 in Figure 8. These signals are to be mixed with a local oscillator signal (Figure 9.) down to an intermediate frequency (IF) where highly selective IF filters can separate one of the signals for amplification, detection, and baseband processing. If the desired signal is the larger signal, there should be no difficulty in recovering it.

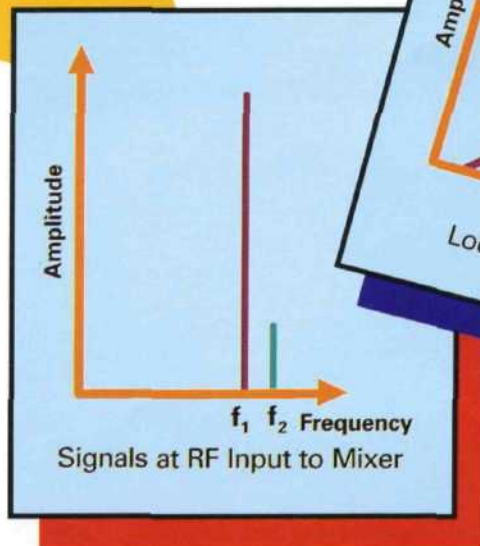


Figure 8. Two signals to be down-converted with a local oscillator.

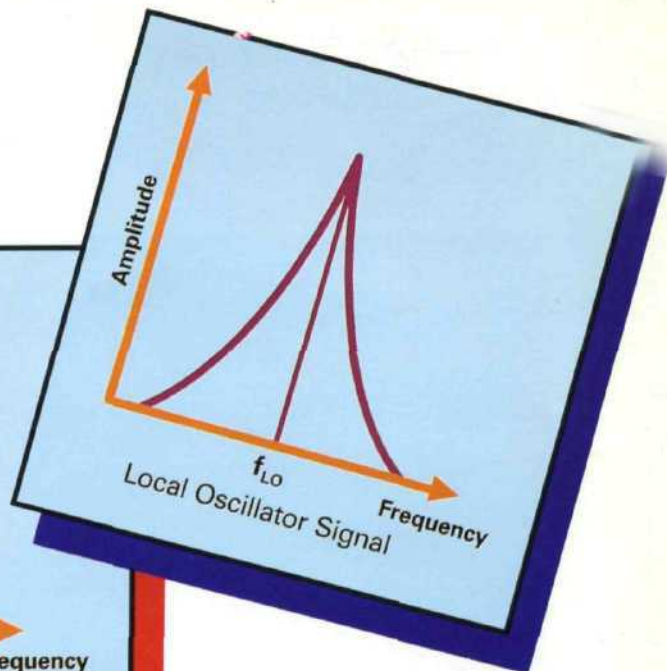


Figure 9. Local oscillator with phase noise.

How Signal Generator Spectral Purity Affects the Measurement

Phase Noise

Any phase noise on the local oscillator signal is translated directly to the mixer products. If the desired signal is the smaller of the two mixed signals, the translated noise in the mixer output may completely mask the smaller signal.

Even though the receiver's IF filtering may be sufficient to remove the larger signal's mixing product, the smaller signal's mixing product is no longer recoverable. This effect worsens in receivers with high selectivity and wide dynamic range.

Spurious

Spurious signals on a local oscillator will cause the desired output to vary in phase at the IF frequency. This is a possible source of intermodulation products.

Residual FM

Residual FM or noise is directly added to the signals at the output of the mixer. This effect becomes more critical, the closer the signals are together.

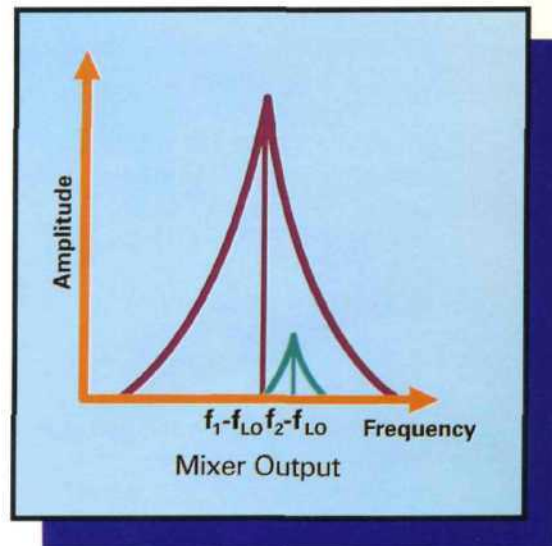


Figure 10. Phase noise masks the lower-amplitude signal.

Spectral Purity in Local Oscillator Applications

Testing Radar

Radar systems continue to demand greater resolution of targets. This puts higher requirements for spectral purity on local oscillators/ signal generators.

For example, airborne and over-the-horizon radars want to detect slow moving surface vehicles. They must detect very low level return signals which have very small doppler shifts.

Figure 11. shows signals from the ground return and the smaller doppler-shifted return from the moving vehicle. It also shows the effect of phase noise on the return signal. It will mask out the return or smaller signal.

Making Phase Noise Measurements of your Devices

Another application where spectral purity is critical for a local oscillator is in phase noise measurements. One of the most sensitive measurement techniques is the two-source phase detector technique. A signal is down converted with an L.O. to 0 Hz and examined on a low-frequency spectrum analyzer. This method is used by the HP 3048A Phase Noise Measurement System. This proven technique requires a local oscillator with as good or better phase noise than the device under test. It is directly added into the measurement.

Figure 11. The effect of phase noise on radar.

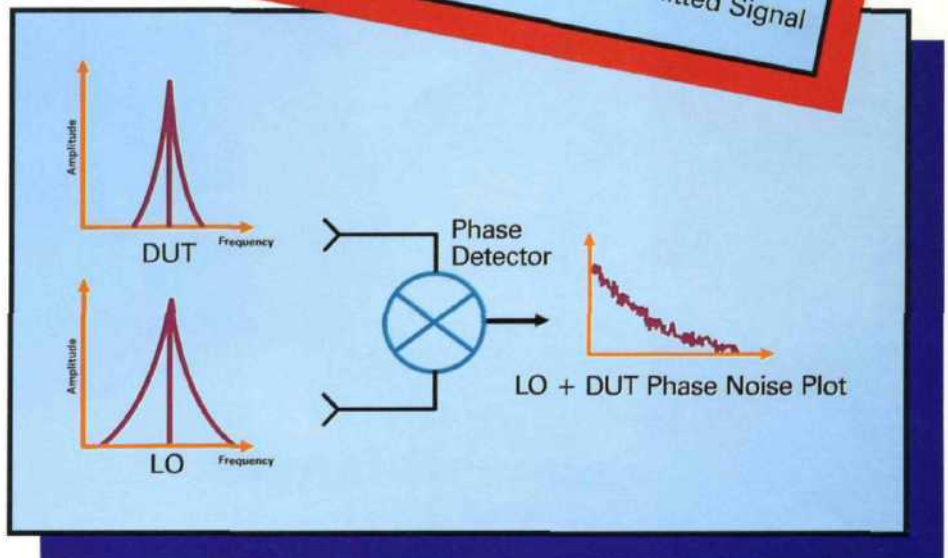
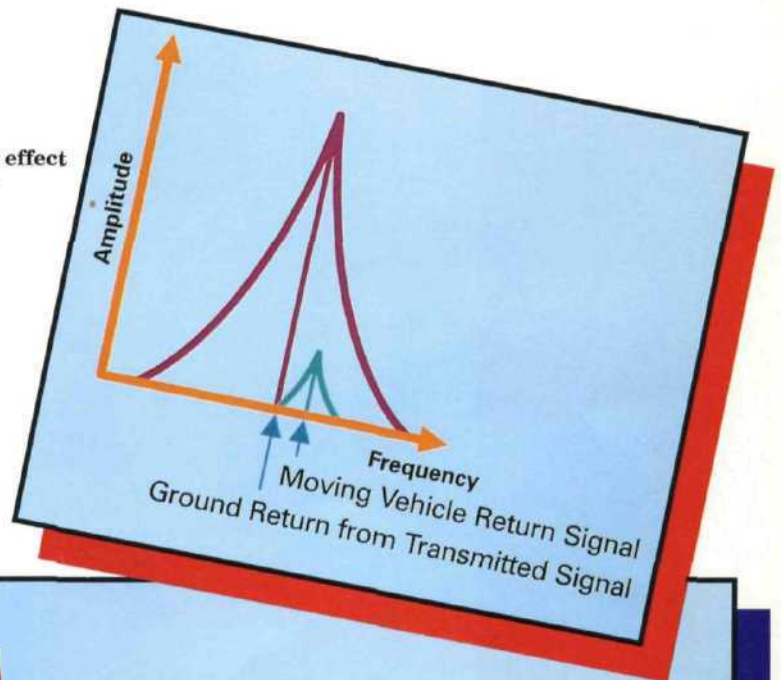


Figure 12. L.O. noise adds to the noise on the D.U.T.

**United States:**

Hewlett-Packard Company
4 Choke Cherry Road
Rockville, MD 20850
(301) 670 4300

Hewlett-Packard Company
5201 Tollview Drive
Rolling Meadows, IL 60008
(708) 255 9800

Hewlett-Packard Company
5161 Lankershim Blvd.
No. Hollywood, CA 91601
(818) 505 5600

Hewlett-Packard Company
2015 South Park Place
Atlanta, GA 30339
(404) 955 1500

Canada:

Hewlett-Packard Ltd.
6877 Goreway Drive
Mississauga, Ontario L4V 1M8
(416) 678 9430

European Headquarters:

Hewlett-Packard S.A.
150, Route du Nant d'Avril
1217 Meyrin 2
Geneva -- Switzerland
41/22 780 8111

Japan:

Yokogawa-Hewlett-Packard Ltd.
15-7, Nishi Shinjuku 4 Chome
Shinjuku-ku
Tokyo 160, Japan
(03) 5371 1351

Latin America:

Hewlett-Packard
Latin American Region Headquarters
Monte Pelvoux No. 111
Lomas de Chapultepec
11000 Mexico, D.F. Mexico
(525) 202 0155

Australia/New Zealand:

Hewlett-Packard Australia Ltd.
31-41 Joseph Street
Blackburn, Victoria 3130
Melbourne, Australia
(03) 895 2895

Far East:

Hewlett-Packard Asia Ltd.
22/F Bond Centre, West Tower
89 Queensway, Central, Hong Kong
8487777

For information about Hewlett-Packard products and services, telephone the local Hewlett-Packard sales and support office listed in your telephone directory. Or write to the appropriate address listed here.

Copyright © 1990
Hewlett-Packard Company

Data subject to change
Printed in U.S.A. 6/90
5952-2019