

Going on the Air

Your new marine SSB transceiver has been pre-programmed by the manufacturer, a dealer, or distributor that sold the equipment. It is easy to reprogram different frequencies into your new equipment. Refer to your owner's manual for programming instructions. It's just as easy as pushing buttons on your telephone. Go on, give it a try!

The Federal Communications Commission requires that your marine station license is valid and covers the frequencies 2,000 kHz to 27,000 kHz or 2 MHz to 27 MHz before transmitting. Make sure you have this license posted before going on the air.

If you followed the installation instructions precisely for both your radio equipment and the automatic antenna tuner, your radio should perform up to specifications. If you have any questions, you might want a technician to check it out. The instruction manual with your new ICOM SSB lists several ways to verify full power output.

TIP!

Before transmitting on any frequency, listen! In fact, spend a complete week listening to different frequencies and different bands to get a feel for how marine SSB communications take place.

When listening to ship-to-ship and ship-to-private shore station calls, you will generally hear both sides of the conversation. This will give you an idea of how ship-to-ship communications take place. Always remember to give your official FCC call sign at the beginning of your transmission, at least once every 10 minutes, and when you sign off.

When tuning into the ship-to-shore marine telephone station, you will only hear the shore station side of the conversation. The marine telephone frequencies are duplex. Ship stations transmit on different

frequencies than the shore stations. Your ICOM SSB automatically knows where to transmit when tuned to the shore station telephone companies. The very professional marine telephone operators and their service technicians will expertly ask you the questions about where you are, who you are, and what number you want. Simply follow their instructions and you will have no problems communicating through the telephone service.

The same thing holds true with the United States Coast Guard AMVER stations. You will only hear the shore side of the conversation. The United States Coast Guard personnel expertly extract all of the information they need for any emergency. Once again, do a lot of listening before making any calls.

Probably your first call will be for a radio check. Don't use the United States Coast Guard or 2182 kHz for radio checks as they have far more important matters than giving out signal reports all day long.

When you are ready for a radio check, try the distant high seas marine operator. Wait until they are finished with their local weather reports before giving them a call. Always choose the band that sounds the strongest to you.

Follow the procedures for initiating a call in the upcoming chapters of this handbook. The marine telephone companies, if they're not real busy, are more than happy to accommodate a radio check.

You can also receive radio checks from other pleasure boats that you might hear on ship-to-ship frequencies. Most commercial vessels will probably ignore any calls for radio check, so try to select one that sounds like a fellow pleasure boat mariner, and exchange signal reports. You should generally receive reciprocal reports. If a station sounds very weak to you, they will probably say that you are weak to them. Same thing with the telephone service; if they're not coming in strong, you won't either.

Weak signals are not necessarily a result of something wrong with your installation. Sometimes ionospheric band conditions simply won't

favor any particular single sideband band. Try the next band up to improve signal reports. Try a different time of day, and expect that some days you'll have better signal levels than others.

Did You Know?

Since your radio waves are solely dependent on ionospheric conditions, it's quite normal for signal levels to change. You may also notice that signals will fade in and out on the higher frequencies, such as 12, to 27 MHz. Again, this is completely normal and should result in almost no loss of intelligibility during a call.

Another fun way to check the operation of your equipment is to receive as many foreign broadcast stations as possible. Refer to the back of this book for a listing of international shortwave transmitting stations. These stations should normally come in loud and clear, but are still subject to 20 second fades. If you are hearing plenty of activity on these frequencies, plus strong signals from other boats and shore stations, chances are your installation is working fine, and you will enjoy worldwide communications with single sideband equipment.

If you decide to have a licensed technician check out your equipment, most marine electronic dealerships will be more than happy to send a tech with the proper field strength equipment to "sign off" your station. Since you completely installed the equipment yourself, there will be little that the technician will need to do other than to check out your antenna tuner setup, double check all connections to insure that they are weatherproof, and to make some field strength measurements and exchange signal reports with distant stations. Since electronic technicians are quite familiar with the characteristics of single sideband frequencies, they can quite accurately assure you that your set is on the air and operating perfectly. If there is any way that they can squeeze a few more watts out of your system, they will also do that. Have them sign your log book with their license number to further verify that your system is 100 percent "go."