

DF4SA operating CT3EE in CQ WPX CW Contest 2003

Despite the foul 10m conditions this story has a happy end...

The claimed score is 9.5 million points, hopefully enough for a new world record!

(The old single op, all band, low power record is 7.8 million points).

But this is only the (happy) end of the story, as always, getting there was harder than expected.

Check-in at the airport on Thursday, 2 days before the contest, in the middle of the night, 02:30 local time, yawn... Unfortunately the airport staff of Hapag Lloyd does not feel like cooperating at all. First I have to leave some of my tools because I seem to be a dangerous terrorist armed with screwdrivers etc., then they charge me for quite some excess luggage. Afterwards I would like to take some part of this pricey luggage as hand luggage because it contains fragile electronic equipment but am refused again. This results in a notebook that turns out to be very difficult to boot after arrival in CT3 and is completely broken now that I am back in DL.

Arrival Funchal airport at 08:00 UTC.

That should be enough time for assembling the station and antennas. First of all I am going to pick up a little generator, to be prepared for power failures like in CQWW Contest last year. Afterwards have some coffees and a reunion talk with the local CT3 guys. Then to the supermarket to buy food for the next 4 days. And another round of coffee. Then the road is blocked because of a car accident, heavy traffic jam, well, slowly I do start getting nervous...

Arrival at the QTH is at 14:00 UTC, finally.

The bushes and flowers have been growing a lot since last November, so there is even less free space for antenna assembly. Also it is quite hot, at least 30°C in the shade and much hotter in the sun. I feel exhausted quickly and have drink breaks all the time.

The antenna setup is nearly as usual:

spiderbeam for 20/15/10m on a 10m aluminum push-up pole. The rotator is a small TV Rotator (Kenpro KR-250). For the first time I am adding a 40m rotary dipole. A vertical 3m fiberglass rod is put on top of the spiderbeam. Up there I mount the 40m feedpoint and string the dipole wires to the ends of two of the spiderbeam fiberglass spreaders. Radiation direction of the dipole is 90° offset, to minimize the interaction between 15m and.

So these two spiderbeam spreaders (the „boom“ spreaders) have to be extended to 8m length. That is nearly enough for stringing the 40m dipole. The last meter of the wire I just let dangling down from the spreader ends. So the whole antenna now has 16m span (width) in one direction and 10m span in the

other direction. Of course this makes for a lot of fun navigating the spider through all the bushes, flowers and trees...

In the end it takes me until around 20:00 UTC before the antenna is finally up, because the wind has also started blowing a bit, which does not make it easier to erect the push-up mast...

SWR Check. 20/15/10 is OK but the 40m SWR is 1:10 and the signals are weak.

Oh sh**! Well, but I am too exhausted to worry about it today. Instead I rather take a shower and then fall asleep immediately, after all, the night before was really short also.

Unfortunately I have to take everything down again the next day, because otherwise it is impossible to reach the 40m feedpoint...

It takes me a while until I find out that I really did make a bad soldering joint when soldering the connector to one of the dipole legs. Shame on me!!!

OK, but I manage to have the antennas up again until 14:00 UTC and at 15:00 the complete station is ready to rumble.

The antenna works good, signals are loud, the QTH near the cliffs also contributes its part for optimum signal radiation...

Unfortunately 10m is nearly completely dead. I really hope it will improve for the contest, because I had not thought it would be so bad already at this time of the sunspot cycle.

After all, if 10m stayed dead I would have only 3 bands as my playground. I did not put up antennas for 80m and 160m, because it always takes a lot of time putting up decent antennas on these bands. I also thought I would be occupied enough on 10m - 40m, and the multipliers do not count separately per band anyway, but only once...

At 00:00 I start the Contest on 20m, to avoid the chaos on 40m.

After roughly 2 hours I change to 40m and stay there until sunrise. The rates are good, about 100 QSO/h. As a QSO on 40m counts double points, this is comparable to a 200/h run on the high bands.

After sunrise I vote for a 3 hour break, then head back to 20m, changing to 15m at 09:30. And that is where I will stay almost the whole day, with a few random trips to 20m and 10m, and one longer break as the rate went down too low. It is a pity, but 10m is still nearly dead, only 50 QSO there today.

At 21:00 the QSO count is around 1800, more than half of them on 15m.

I am heading back to 20m, stay there until midnight and decide for a good sleeping break, with the QSO counter resting at 2088.

This is the first time I take part in the WPX in the allband category and planning the required 12 break hours nearly drives me crazy. Somehow I always have the feeling I am missing something...

Looking back now, after the contest, I also feel I made some mistakes here. Had I known that 10m would stay closed nearly the whole Contest I should have taken more breaks during the day and instead make as many 40m (double points) QSOs during the night. Oh, well...

Anyway, at 04:00 I am back at the station, milking 40m dry until sunrise, then jump to 20m where I enjoy a heavy EU pile-up for at least half an hour. After 08:00 I am back on 15m. Compared to Saturday the rates on all bands have gone down remarkably, which I try to compensate with more band changes. 10m is a little bit better than yesterday but I still waste much too much time there, always hoping to „be there when it opens“... One of these days I really need to acquire the skill of a SO2R operator, then these decisions will be much easier. Another very remarkable experience is listening to the pile-up of D4B for a few minutes. Well, to put it right, I am only listening to him, because even though he is hitting out EU and USA QSOs at a high pace I can only hear less than 10% of his QSO partners. Incredible, he is only about 2000km further south, but what a difference it makes!

Around 13:00 I am crossing the 7 million points border and the old lower power record (7.8 million) slowly comes in sight. But he is not alone, Murphy lurks in right behind him.

...Outside a storm has started to grow since the night between Saturday and Sunday. Well man, that is just like it is, sitting near a cliff on the north corner of an island in the middle of the Atlantic ocean... Meanwhile a branch broke off a nearby tree and is dangling pretty dangerously near to the antenna. Because I really need (?!?!) to work LO7H as a new multiplier on 10m (?!?!), I turn the antenna towards South America and bang! – it gets stuck in that branch and the rotator does not turn anymore... I work two more stations before I try to turn the antenna again and realize the problem. What to do now? South America really is the worst direction to have your antenna stuck at this moment...

Well, in these moments, on Sunday afternoon and under bad sleep deprivation, acting quick without wasting a second on a little bit of thinking is highly recommended... Because of the storm I am afraid of retracting the push-up mast, because it might simply fall down during the process. Instead I have another stupid idea. I grab the bottom section of the mast and start shaking the mast heavily, hoping to shake the branch off the antenna. The mast proves to be very flexible and swings back and forth like a snake head, but the antenna does not come off the branch. Well, shake it harder then, until finally – the little rotator breaks in two parts, the antenna falls down, suspended only by the coax cable, gets stuck halfway down, radiation direction straight up in the sky...

OH NO!!!

Here I am, the world record within easy reach, only about 200 QSOs missing, but suddenly without antenna, no way getting anywhere!

The dear reader may allow me 5-10 minutes for crying, lamenting and self-slapping, until I can finally force myself to use the last 2 hours of required break time to make the best out of the situation. So I take the mast down, throw out the totally damaged rotator, and put the antenna back on the mast. Very luckily the antenna pole has a diameter of 40mm and the upper section of the push-up mast has a diameter of 35mm, so I can just put it on top. The only problem is, I have no means of fixing it on the mast, so it would rotate endlessly in the wind. I only can use my last pieces of adhesive tape to „fix“ that problem... What follows afterwards is a masterpiece in my one-man-expedition career: putting up the mast again while the storm blows heavily. I can only push it up a few centimeters each time, before I have to run through the bushes again, loosening all 4 guy lines for a few centimeters again. When I have the antenna at about 7m height I decide that should be sufficient now, as the wind force is getting remarkably stronger with each meter of height. After all I want the adhesive tape to hold the antenna at least until the end of the contest...

Unbelievable, but the remaining 2h break time were enough for the whole operation and with new hope & power I jump back into the race. The antenna can only be turned manually now, so I reduce the turns to a minimum. Which is a bit annoying, because 15m and 20m are open to US and EU at the same time, and the beaming directions are 90° offset...

Of course I lose my frequency a few times while running outside into the garden to turn the antenna. Another irritating event happens in the evening on 20m, antenna pointing to US, while suddenly a JA pile-up starts to grow. But the signals are weak and I want to work more JA prefixes so I run out again and turn the antenna. Even manage to keep the frequency, but the JAs are gone!... 20 minutes later I turn the antenna back to US and the JAs are back again. OK, so its a skewed path, couldnt anyone tell me before?

But what does it matter anyway, the world record has been broken already hours ago and every single QSO only raises the smile on my face. From 21h on I am only on 20m, the flow is good and it looks like I will make 9.5 million points and I settle for this goal. Then the rate drops again, so in the last 30 minutes I head to 40m for some heavy searching & pouncing. The rate here is around 70QSO/h, even in S&P mode, so with the double points and a lot of last-minute multipliers I easily reach the 9.5 million goal. I am very happy when I switch off the rig, and fall into a deep sleep...

One last bad problem hit me on the way back, when the spare fuel can for the generator (which I never needed) started leaking several liters of gasoline, probably because it fell on the side in one of the many curves. The car started to smell really, really bad and I was afraid the rental car agency would never take it back again. During the next days I tried several cleaning liquids to no avail at all, until I found one that smelled very bad of chlorine itself. Miraculously the two bad smells completely neutralized each other and after I had let the whole bottle soak into the car, it smelled brand new again! Any chemists out there, please explain to me...:-)

So now I can hardly wait for the final results of course...

If the world record comes true, this would be the second record since I started traveling with the spider beam in the year 2000.

Many thanks to everybody who helped making this operation possible!!!

...and of course to everybody who called in for the QSOs!

73 & CUAGN

Con DF4SA (CT3EE)

----- raw score WPX CW 2003 -----

Call: CT3EE
Category: Single Operator Low Power
Band: All Band
Mode: CW
Country: Madeira Is.

BAND	QSO	QSO PTS	PTS/Q	PREFIXES
160	0	0	0.0	0
80	0	0	0.0	0
40	512	3050	6.0	225
20	1090	3264	3.0	285
15	1511	4529	3.0	284
10	234	686	2.9	35

Totals	3347	11529	3.4	829 = 9,557,541

Equipment Description:

TRX: ICOM IC-735

ANT: 10m aluminum telescopic pole and a TV Rotator (Kenpro KR-250)
carrying a spiderbeam on 20/15/10m plus a 40m rotary dipole atop

LOG: Toshiba T2130 running CT software