Receiver Performance Transmitted BW Contest Fatigue

Rob Sherwood
NCØB

Limitations to a better contest score may not always be obvious.

- **What is important in a contest environment?**
- Good Dynamic Range to hear weak signals in the presence of near-by strong signals.
- Be a good neighbor: i.e. Have a clean signal.
- Subtle factors affect receiver performance, but are never tested or even discussed by ARRL.
- You need a better receiver for CW than for SSB.
- **New technology is not automatically better.**
- Minimize fatigue factors to maximize you score.

What Parameter is Most Important for a CW Contester?

- Close-in Dynamic Range (DR3)
- (We have to know the noise floor to calculate Dynamic Range)

What is Noise Floor?

Sensitivity is a familiar number, normally applies to SSB.

Sensitivity = 10 dB Signal + Noise / Noise (10 dB S+N/N)

Noise Floor = 3 dB Signal + Noise / Noise (3 dB S+N/N)

Noise floor can be measured at any filter bandwidth, CW or SSB, for example, and is bandwidth dependent.

League normally only publishes noise floor for a CW bandwidth, typically 500 Hz CW filter.

Noise Floor – Rarely an Issue on HF

- On 20 meters and below, atmospheric, galactic and man-made noise predominates.
- On 15 meters, in a quiet rural location, the receiver is rarely the limit. Example:
- NC0B, 5 element yagi at 70 feet, 270 feet of 7/8th inch hardline, antenna pointed in the quietest direction (30 degrees) at 4 PM on 2/28/2010.
- No preamp, connect antenna noise gain + 3.5 dB
- 10 dB preamp, connect antenna noise gain 8.5 dB
- Receiver sensitivity, no preamp = 0.5 uV
- Receiver sensitivity, with preamp = 0.2 uV
- Receiver noise floor, with preamp = -135 dBm

LJ-155CA yagi in the previous example

What is Dynamic Range?

The range in dB of very strong signals to very weak signals that the receiver can handle At The Same Time

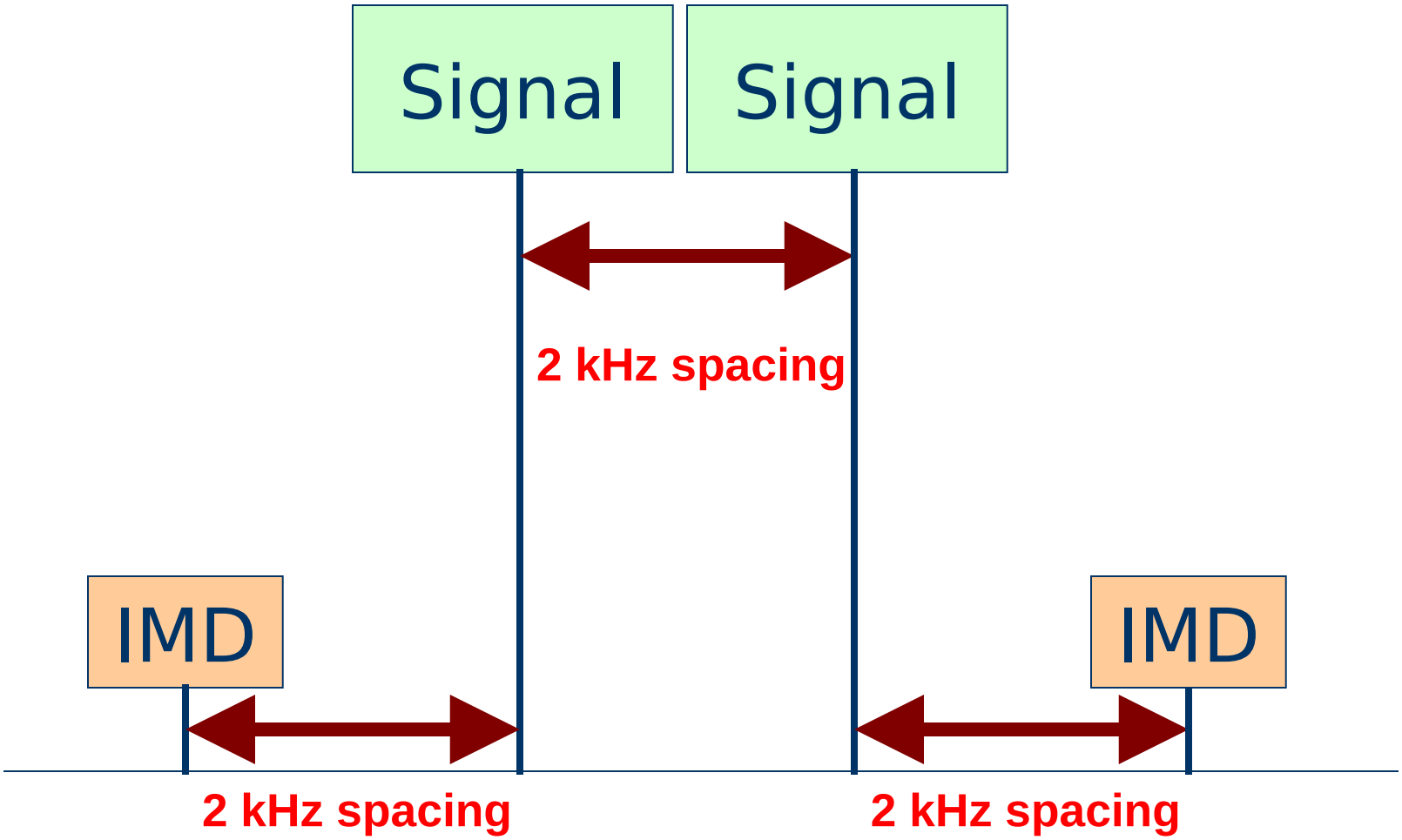
What is Close-in Dynamic Range vs

Wide-Spaced Dynamic Range?

Why is Close-in Dynamic so important for CW ops?

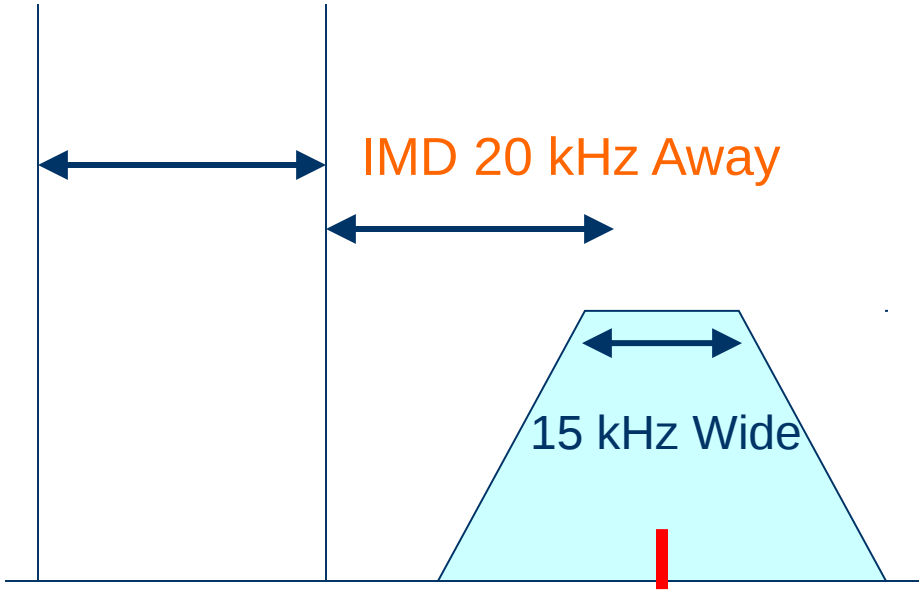
Why is it less important for SSB operators?

Third Order IMD to Measure Dynamic Range



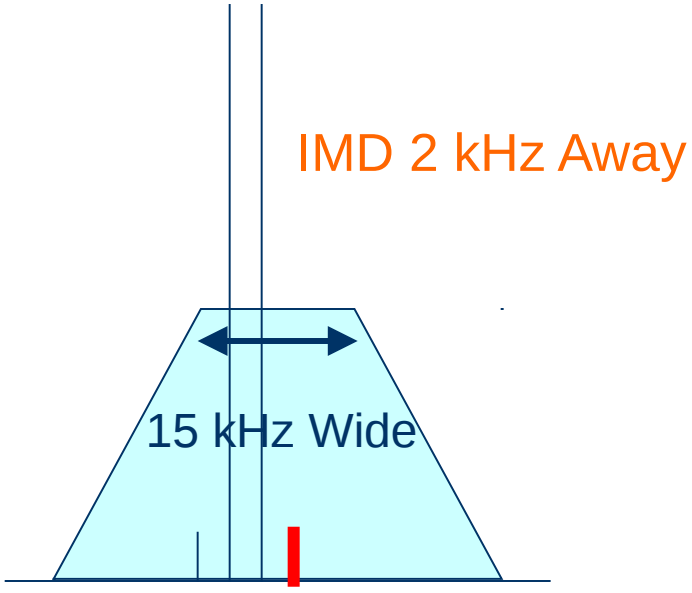
Wide & Close Dynamic Range

20 kHz Spacing



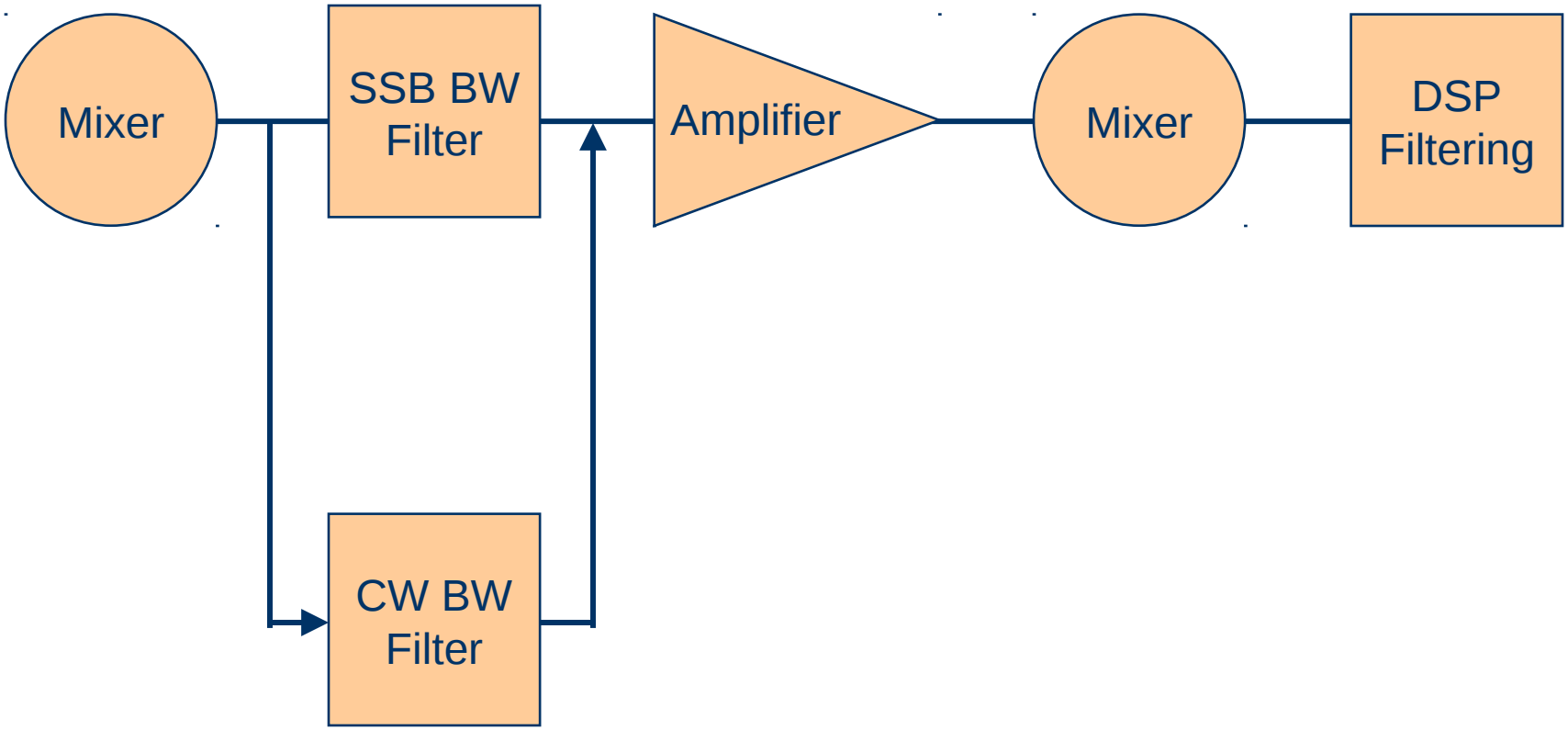
First IF Filter at 70.455 MHz

2 kHz Spacing



First IF Filter at 70.455 MHz

Highest performance with a bandwidth appropriate filter right up front after the first mixer, such as Orion & K3.



This keeps the undesired strong signals from progressing down stream to the next stages.

When are 2 Out of Pass Band Signals a Problem?

- If you know the close-in dynamic range of a radio, at what signal level will IMD start to be a problem?
- S Meter standard is S9 = 50 μV, which is –73 dBm
- Assume a typical radio:
  - 500 Hz CW filter
  - Noise Floor of -128 dBm
  - Preamp OFF

Dynamic Range	Signal Level Causing IMD = Noise Floor	
55 dB	S9	FT-757 (56 dB)
60 dB	S9 + 5 dB	FT-2000 (61 dB)
65 dB	S9 + 10 dB	IC-7000 (63 dB)
70 dB **Typical Up-conversion**	S9 + 15 dB	1000 MP / Mk V Field (68 / 69 dB)
75 dB	S9 + 20 dB	756 Pro II / III (75 dB)
80 dB	S9 + 25 dB	Omni-VII / IC-7800 (80 dB)
85 dB	S9 + 30 dB	R9500 (85 dB)
90 dB	S9 + 35 dB	Flex 3000 (90 dB)
95 dB	S9 + 40 dB	Orion II & Flex 5000A (95 / 96 dB)
100 dB	S9 + 45 dB	K3 (95 to 101 dB, roofing filter)

The DR3 “window” is not fixed

The dynamic range of a radio is the same with an attenuator ON or OFF.

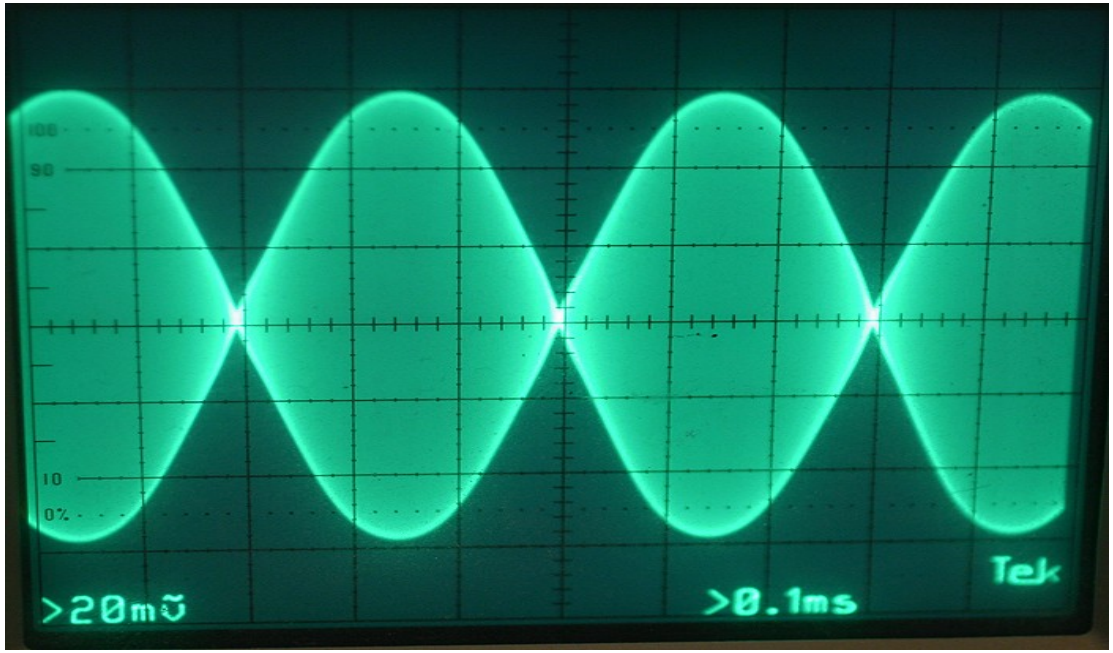
If on a noisy band, attenuate the noise and all signals to make better use of the dynamic range, and reduce the chance of overload.

If band noise goes from S6 to S2 by turning on the attenuator, you have lost nothing, yet your radio is being stressed much less.

Lets now move from CW to SSB

Why are the dynamic range requirements less stringent on SSB than on CW?

Let’s look at 2-Tone IMD Tests.

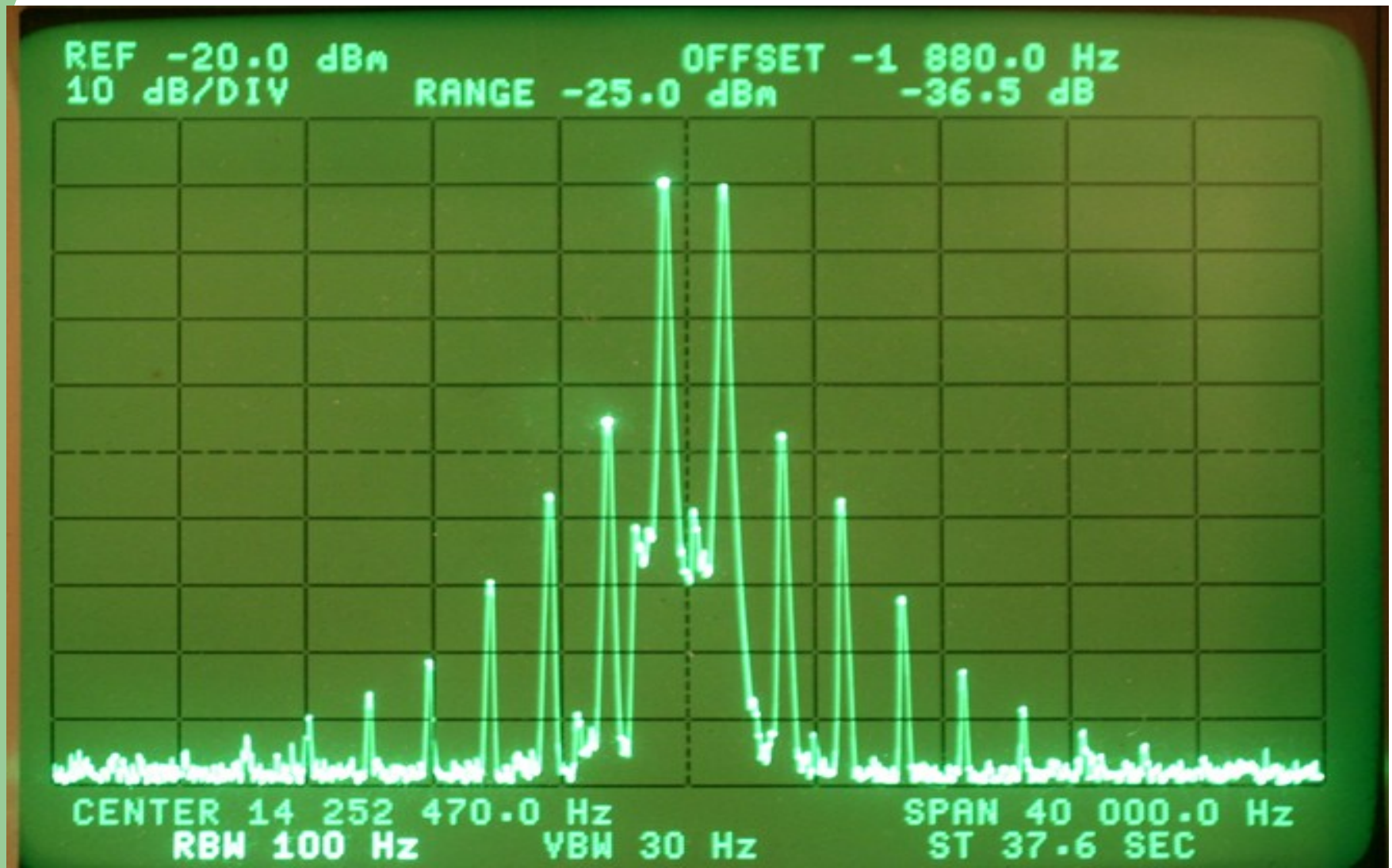


Normal time domain scope picture.

My cleanest transmitter

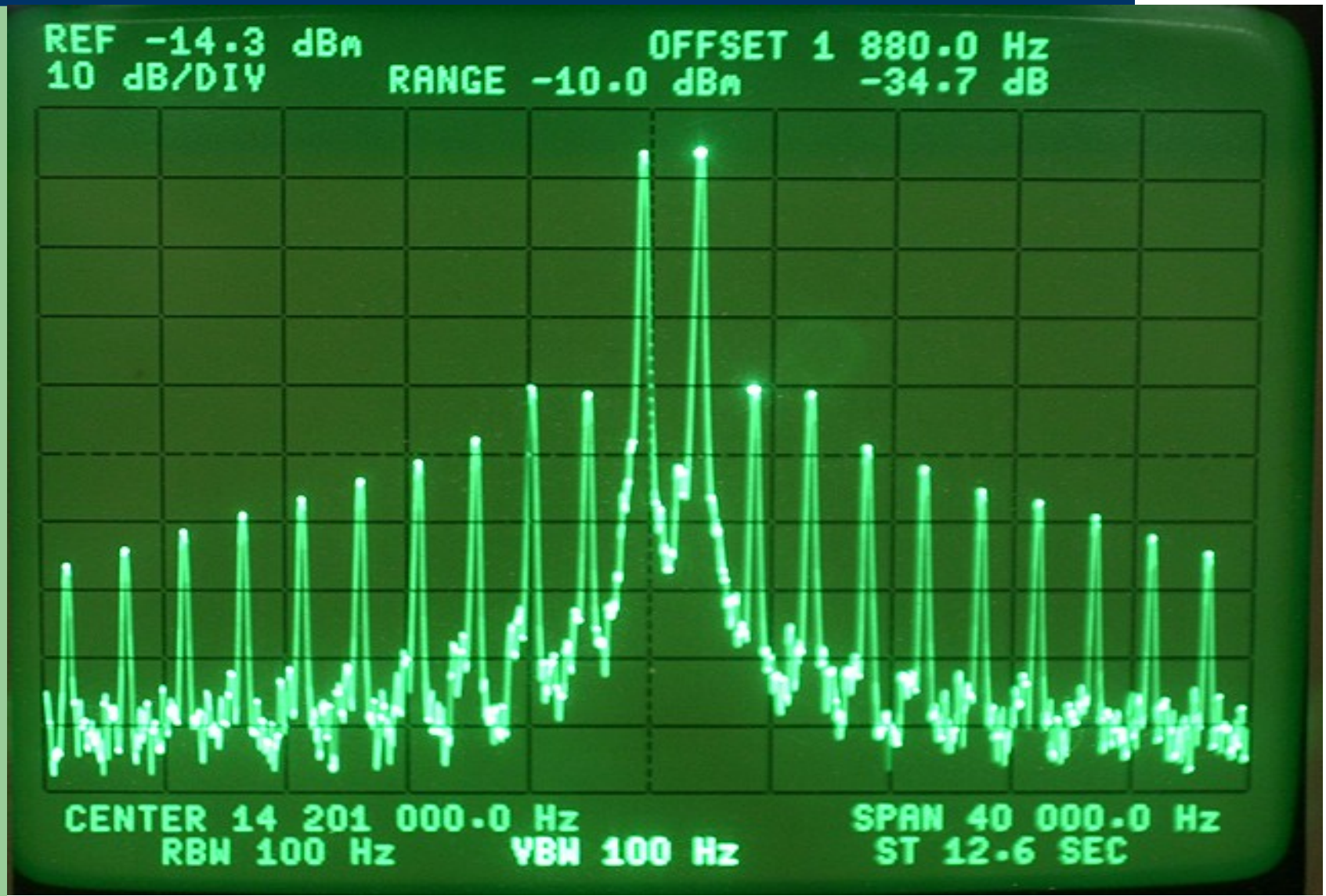
-36 dB 3rd Order, -60 dB 7th Order

Collins 32S-3 on 20 meters @ 100 W



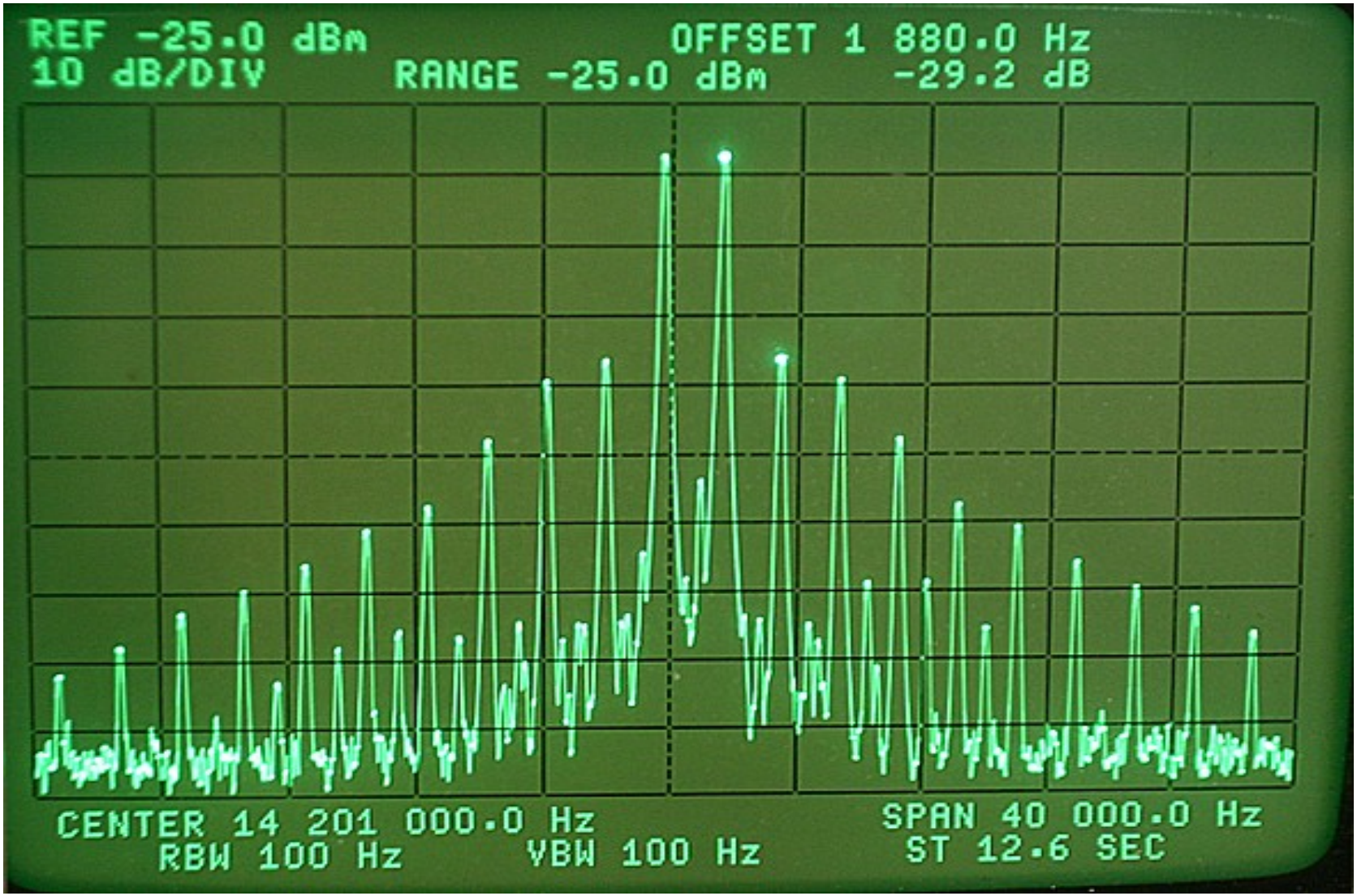
-34 dB 3rd order, -43 dB 7th order

Icom 781 on 20 meters @ 150 Watts



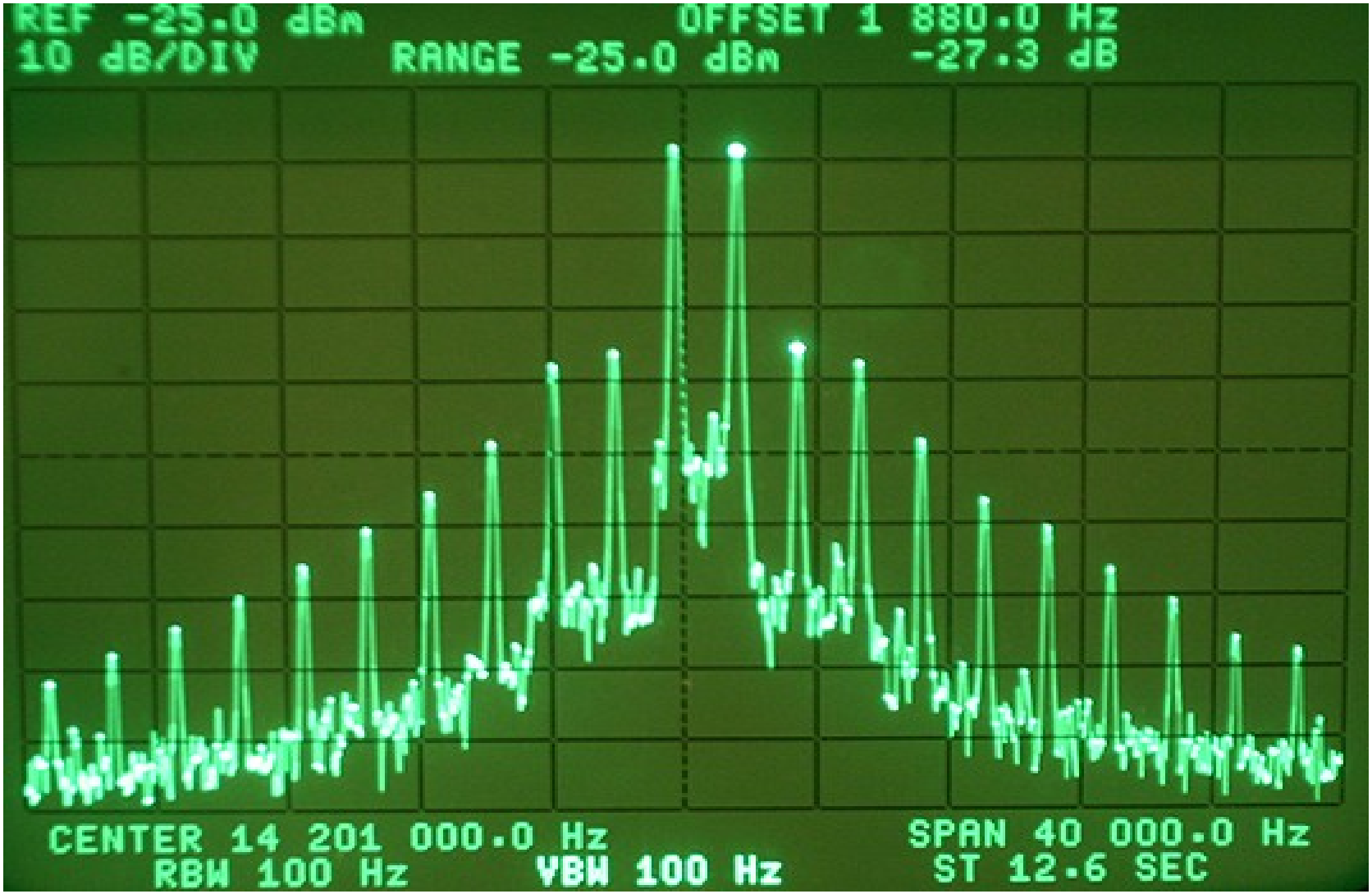
-29 dB 3rd order, -41 dB 7th order

Flex 5000A on 20 meters @ 70 Watts



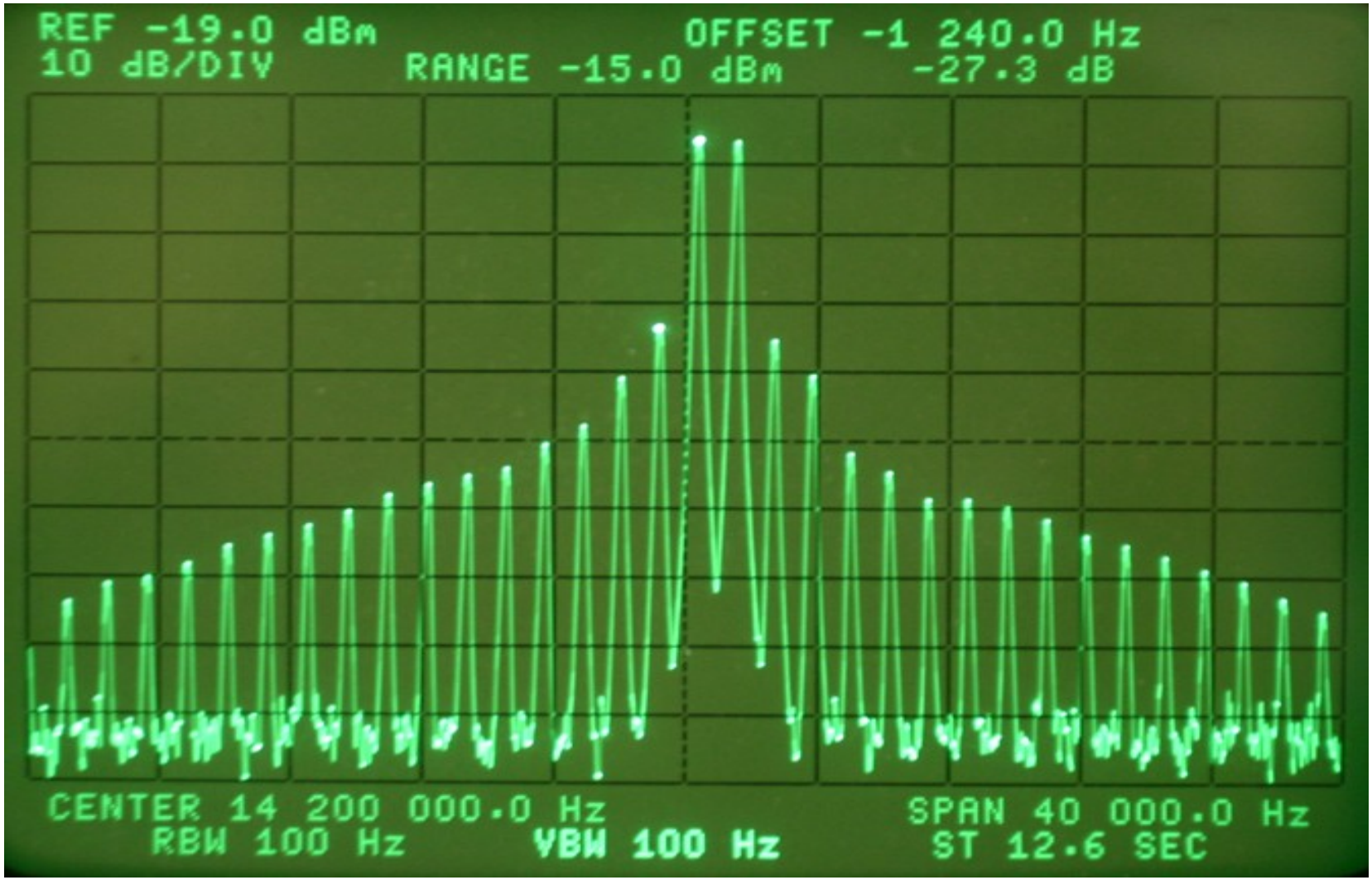
-27 dB 3rd order, 40 dB 7th order

Icom 756 Pro III on 20 meters @ 70 W



-27 dB 3rd order, -42 dB 7th order

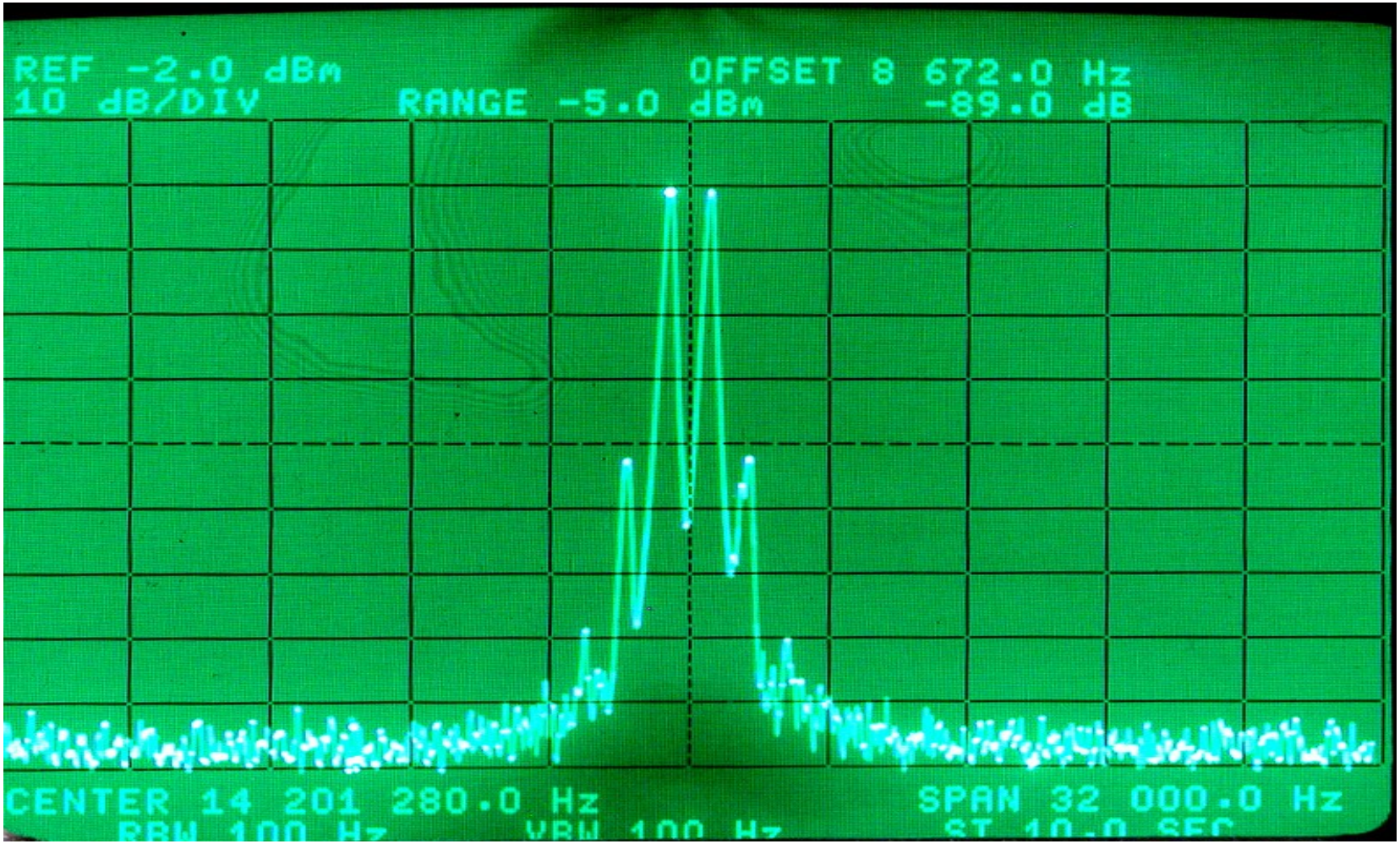
K3 Transceiver on 20 meters @ 100 W



-42 dB 3rd Order, -70 dB 5th Order

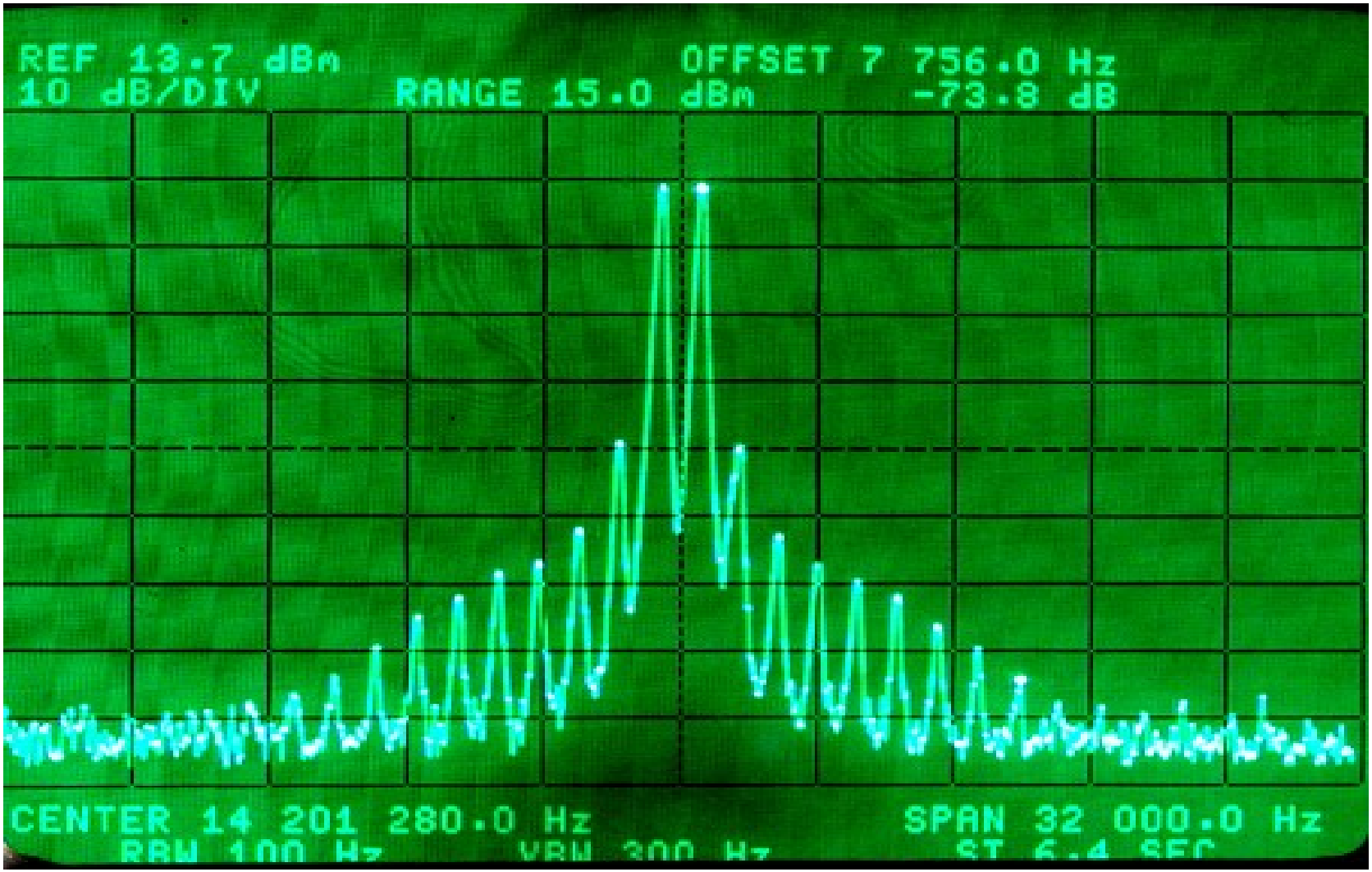
Yaesu FT-1000 Mk V, 20 M, Class A @ 75 W

Provided by Pete, W6XX



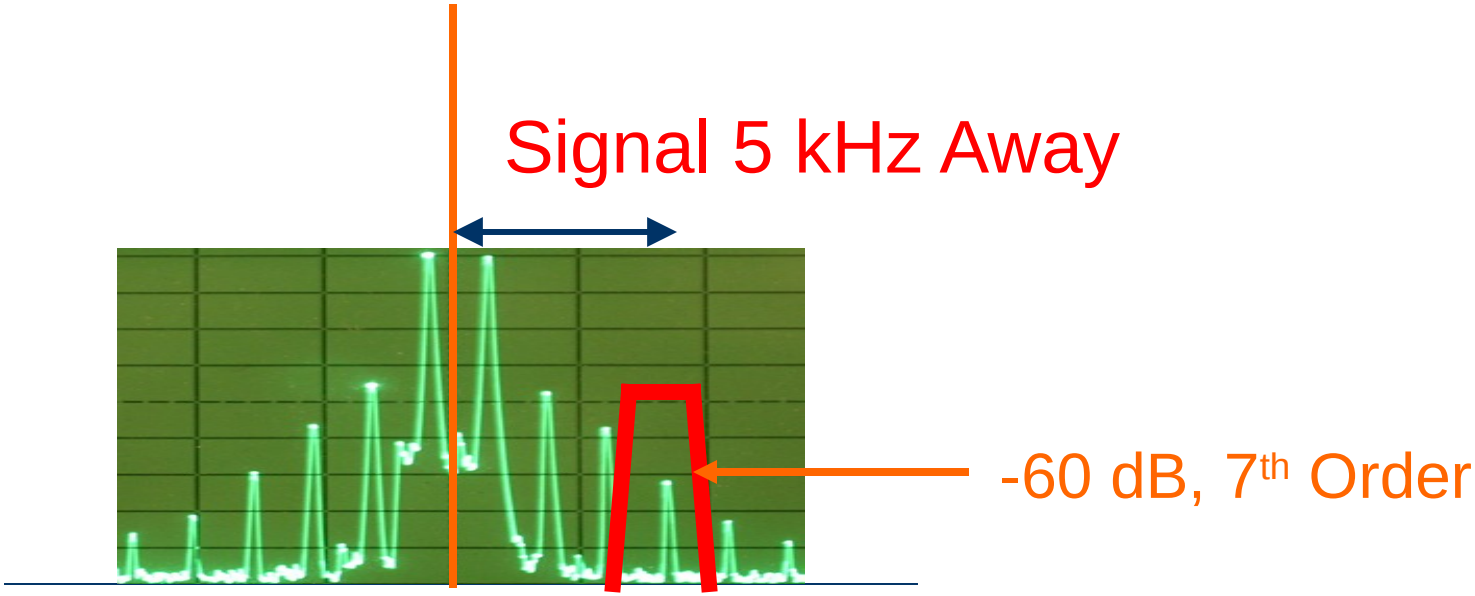
-40 dB 3rd Order, -57 dB 7th Order

Mk V Class A + 8877, 20 meters @ 1.5 kW



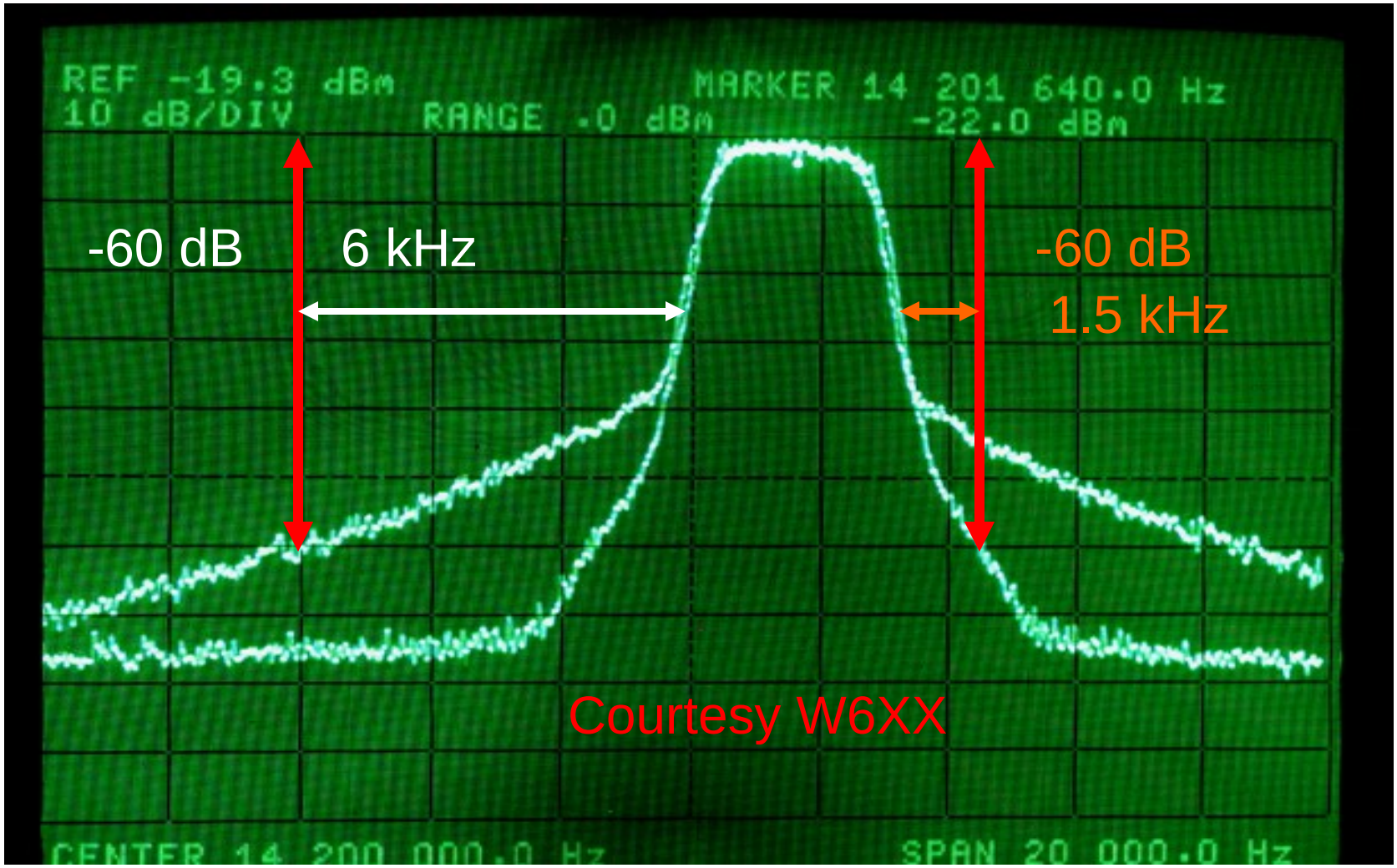
Close-in Signal and Splatter

Typical radio = 70 dB, Typical splatter = 60 dB down



IF Filter vs. Adjacent Signal and IMD Splatter

White Noise Mk V Class A vs. K3 Class B @ 75 Watts



Back to CW signals

We have seen how width of an SSB signal & its IMD products affects how close you can operate to another station.

How does CW compare?

How close can we work to a strong adjacent CW signal?

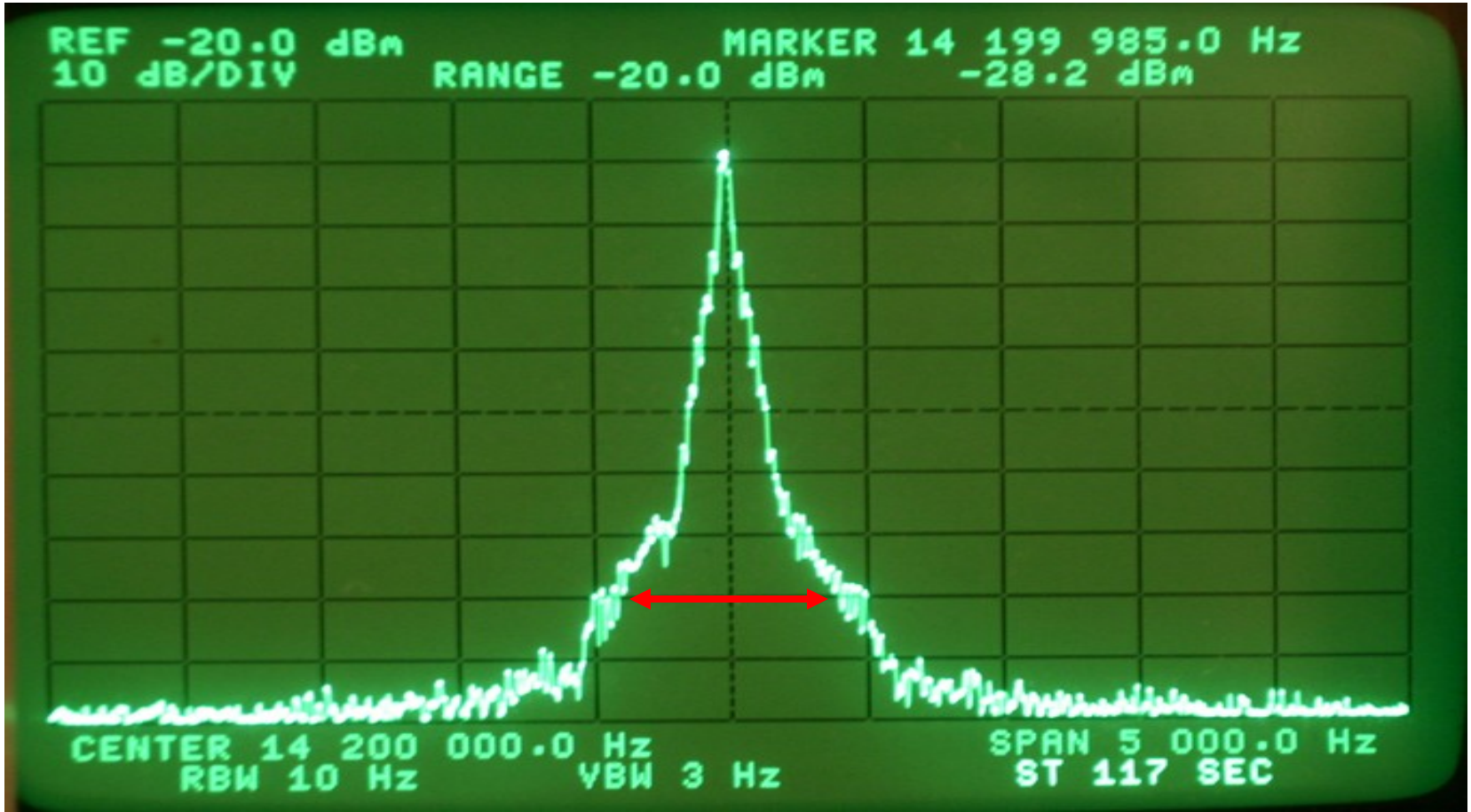
What is the Bandwidth of CW Signal?

On channel signal = S9 + 40 dB (-33 dBm)
Receiver = K3, 400 Hz 8-pole roofing + 400 Hz DSP Filter
Transmitter = Omni-VII with adjustable rise time
Undesired signal 700 Hz away, continuous “dits” at 30 wpm

Rise time of Omni-VII	Strength of CW sidebands		
Signal	S9 + 40	-33 dBm	Ref
3 msec	S7	-83 dBm	-50 dB
4 msec	S6	-88 dBm	
5 msec	S6	-88 dBm	
6 msec	S5	-93 dBm	22 dB !
7 msec	S4	-99 dBm	
8 msec	S4	-99 dBm	
9 msec	S4	-99 dBm	
10 msec	S3	-105 dBm	-72 dB

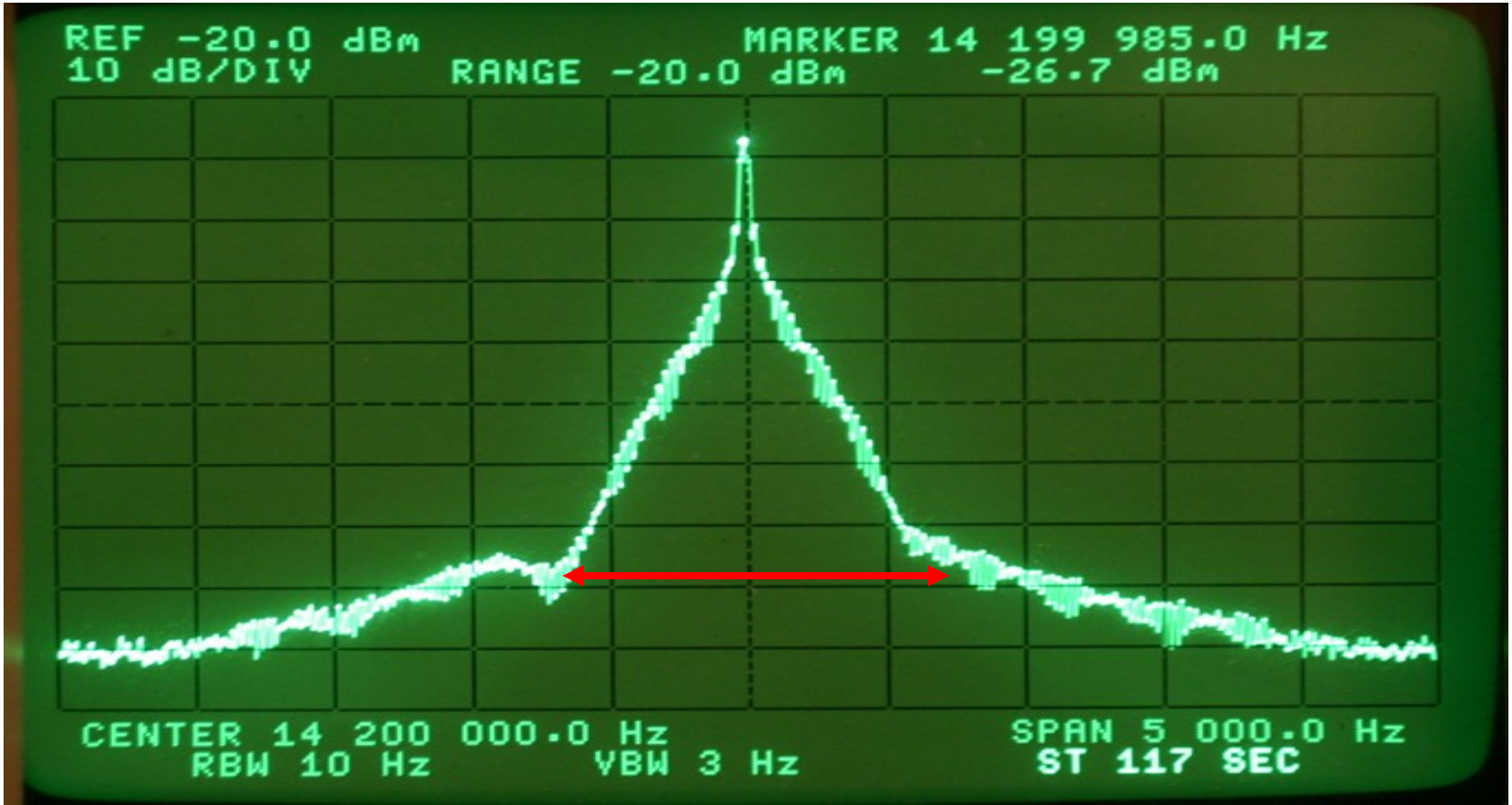
Spectrum of CW Signal on HP 3585A Analyzer

Rise Time 10 msec, “dits” at 30 WPM,
Bandwidth -70 dB = +/- 450 Hz = 900 Hz



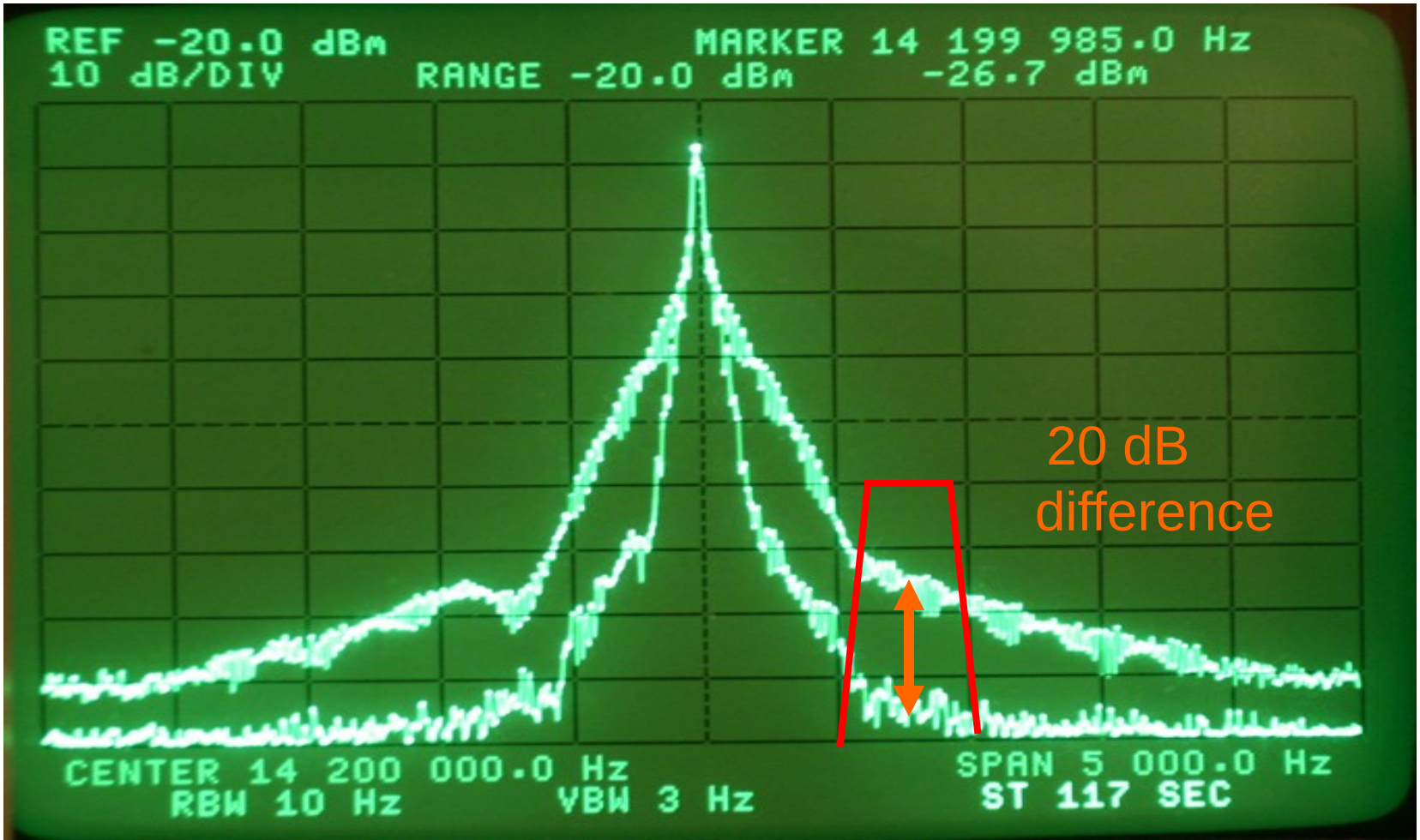
Spectrum of CW Signal on HP 3585A Analyzer

Rise Time 3 msec, “dits” at 30 WPM,
Bandwidth -70 dB = +/- 750 Hz = 1500 Hz

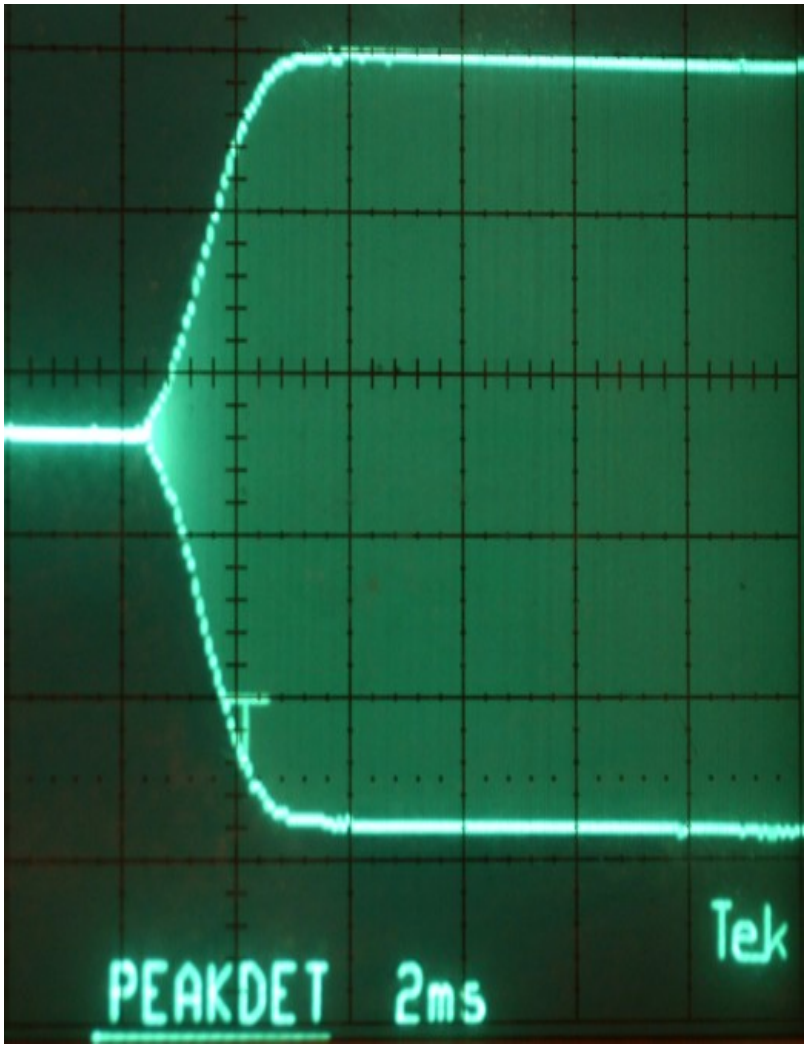


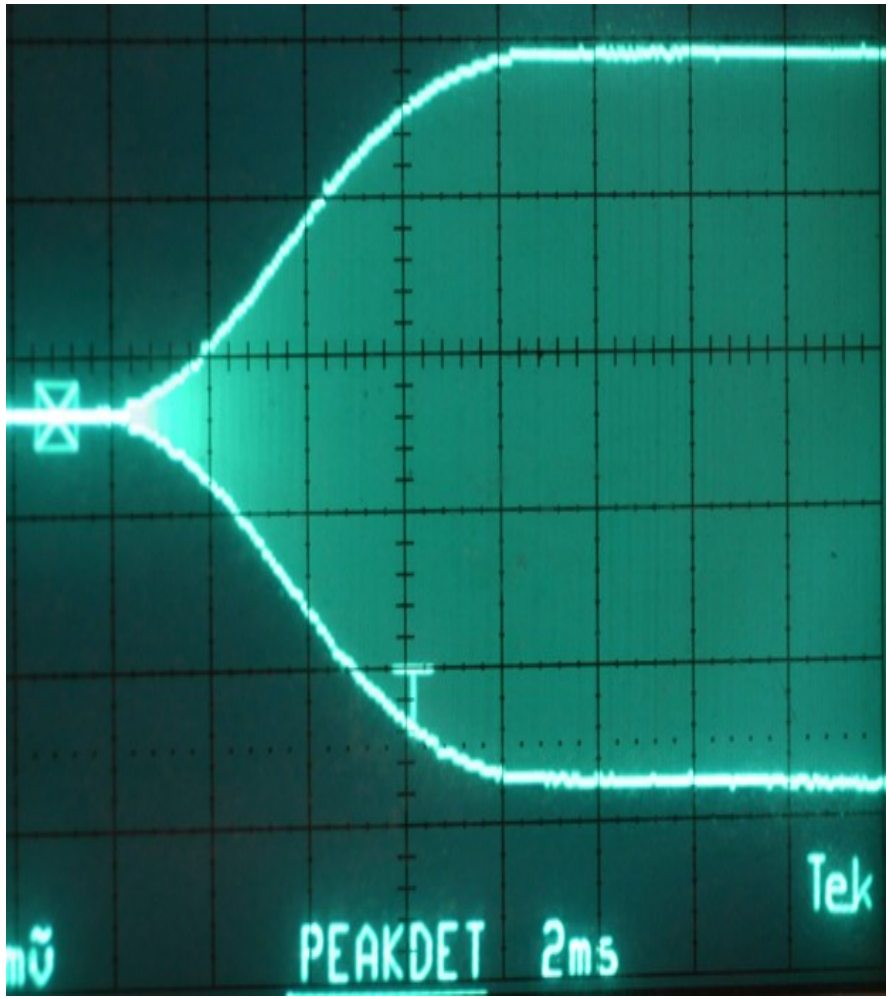
Spectrum of CW Signal on HP 3585A Analyzer

Comparison of 3 msec vs 10 msec rise time



Leading edge of “dit” 3 & 10 msec





Just the Facts

On SSB you want DR3 = 70 dB, or more.

On CW you want DR3 = 80 dB, or more.

This is most economically accomplished with low IF (5 to 9 MHz) selectable crystal roofing filters.

It is much more difficult to deliver 80 dB or higher DR3 with the more common Up-Conversion design.

Transmitted bandwidth of the interfering signal is often the limit, not the receiver.

What dynamic range is possible and needed for CW?

80 dB or better @ 2 kHz.

1976 Sherwood / Drake R-4C: 84 dB

2001 Ten-Tec Omni-VI+: 80 dB

2003 Icom IC-7800: 80 dB

2003 Ten-Tec Orion I: 93 dB

2005 Ten-Tec Orion II: 95 dB

2007 Flex 5000A: 96 dB

2007 Ten-Tec Omni-VII: 80 dB

2008 Perseus (receiver): 99 dB

2008 Elecraft K3: 95 to101 dB (roofing filter dependent)

Other radios for comparison, 2 kHz dynamic range data

Elecraft K2:	**80 dB**	
Collins R-390A:	**79 dB**	
Kenwood TS-850S:	**77 dB**	
Icom Pro II / Pro III	**75 dB**	
Collins 75S-3B/C:	**72 dB**	
Kenwood TS-870S:	**69 dB**	
Yaesu FT-2000:	**63 dB**	**This is shockingly bad**
Icom IC-7000:	**63 dB**	
Yaesu FT-One:	**63 dB**	
Yaesu FT-101E:	**59 dB**	
Drake R-4C Stock:	**58 dB**	
Yaesu FT-757:	**56 dB**	
Yaesu VR-5000:	**49 dB**	**Worst radio I have ever tested !**

Contest Fatigue & Audio Quality - The Forgotten Spec

I find many radios tiring in a long contest.

The audio is harsh on SSB and CW.

All meet OEM Specs.

OEM spec = 2 watts @ 10% distortion = clipping

What makes audio harsh and fatiguing?

High Odd-Order Harmonics and / or IM Distortion

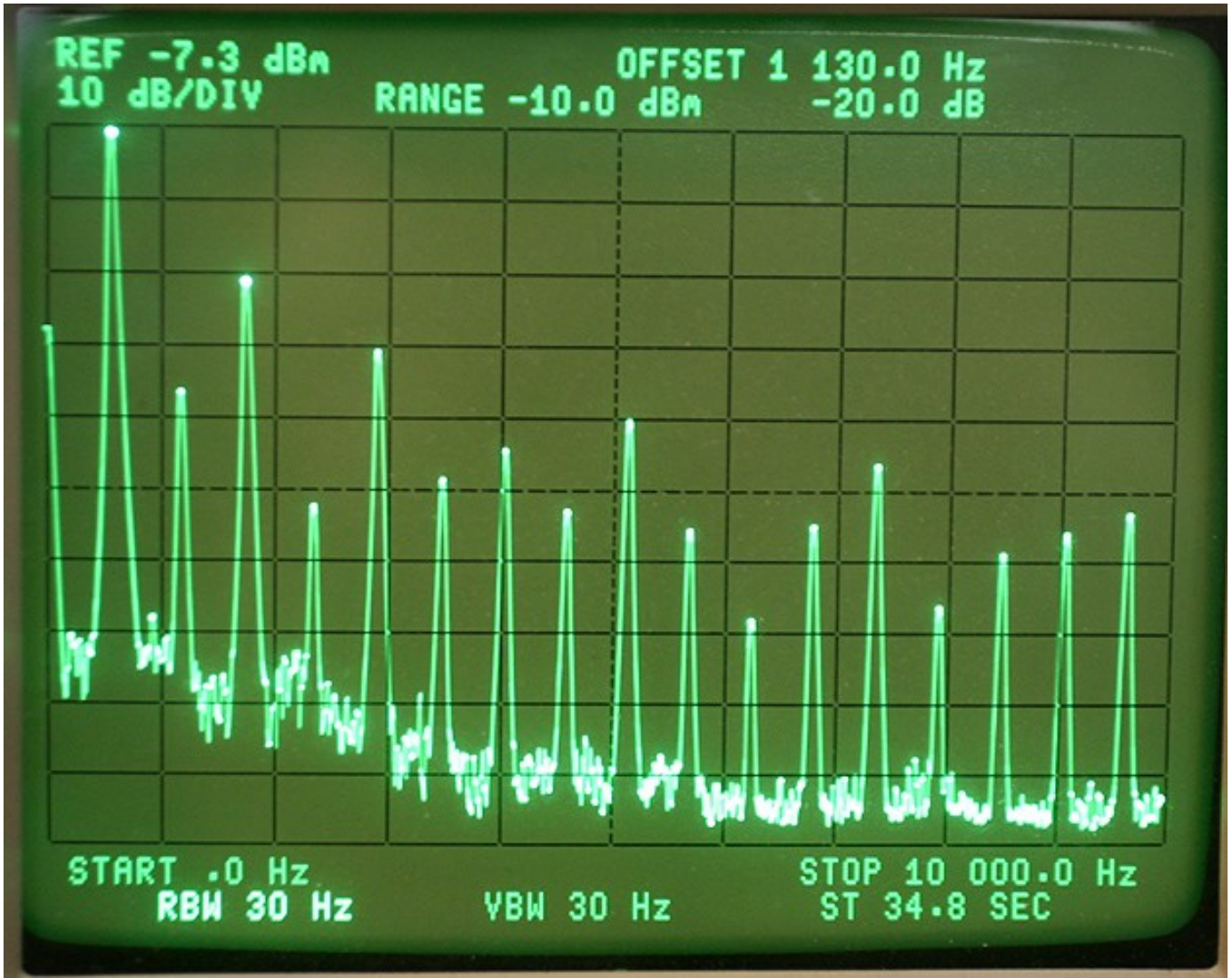
Any radio will meet a 10% spec

Thus the spec is meaningless.

The Amazing Ear / Brain “Detector”

- We can easily detect distortion 60 dB down.
- 10% distortion is only 20 dB down !
- 1% distortion is 40 dB down.
- It may take guidance to learn to interpret what you are hearing, and why a radio is causing fatigue.

10% Distortion on Spectrum Analyzer



Pro III driven into clipping to meet the 2 W. into 8 ohm spec.

Contest Fatigue & New Technologies

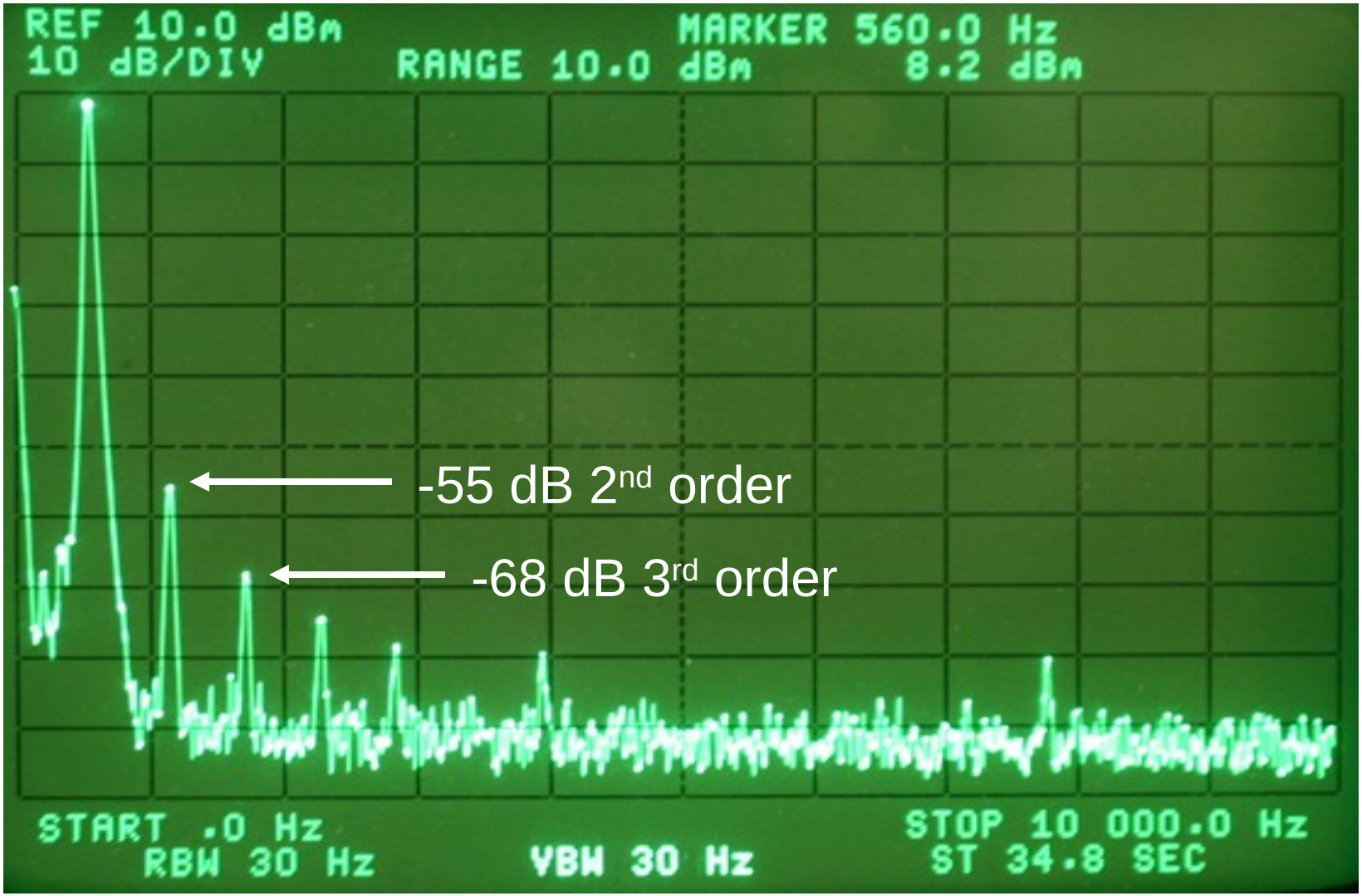
Laboratory tests are important, but radios also need to be evaluated in a contest environment.

I use two operating positions to compare a “reference radio” to a “test” or “evaluation” radio, going back and forth between station A and B during a contest.

Interesting problems have come to light in on-air A/B comparisons.

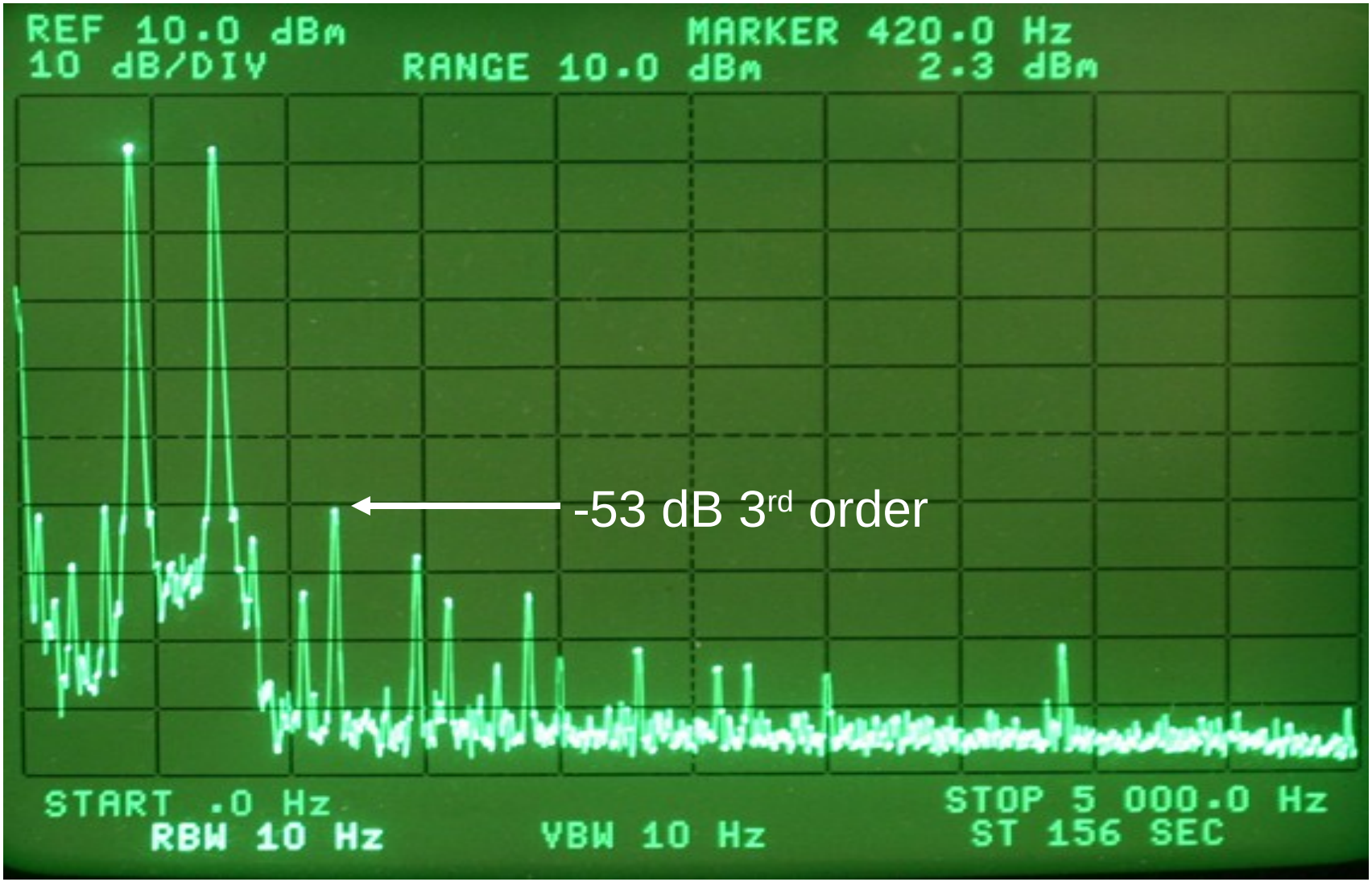
Distortion < 0.3 % & sounds fine

Harmonic Distortion – Good Receiver



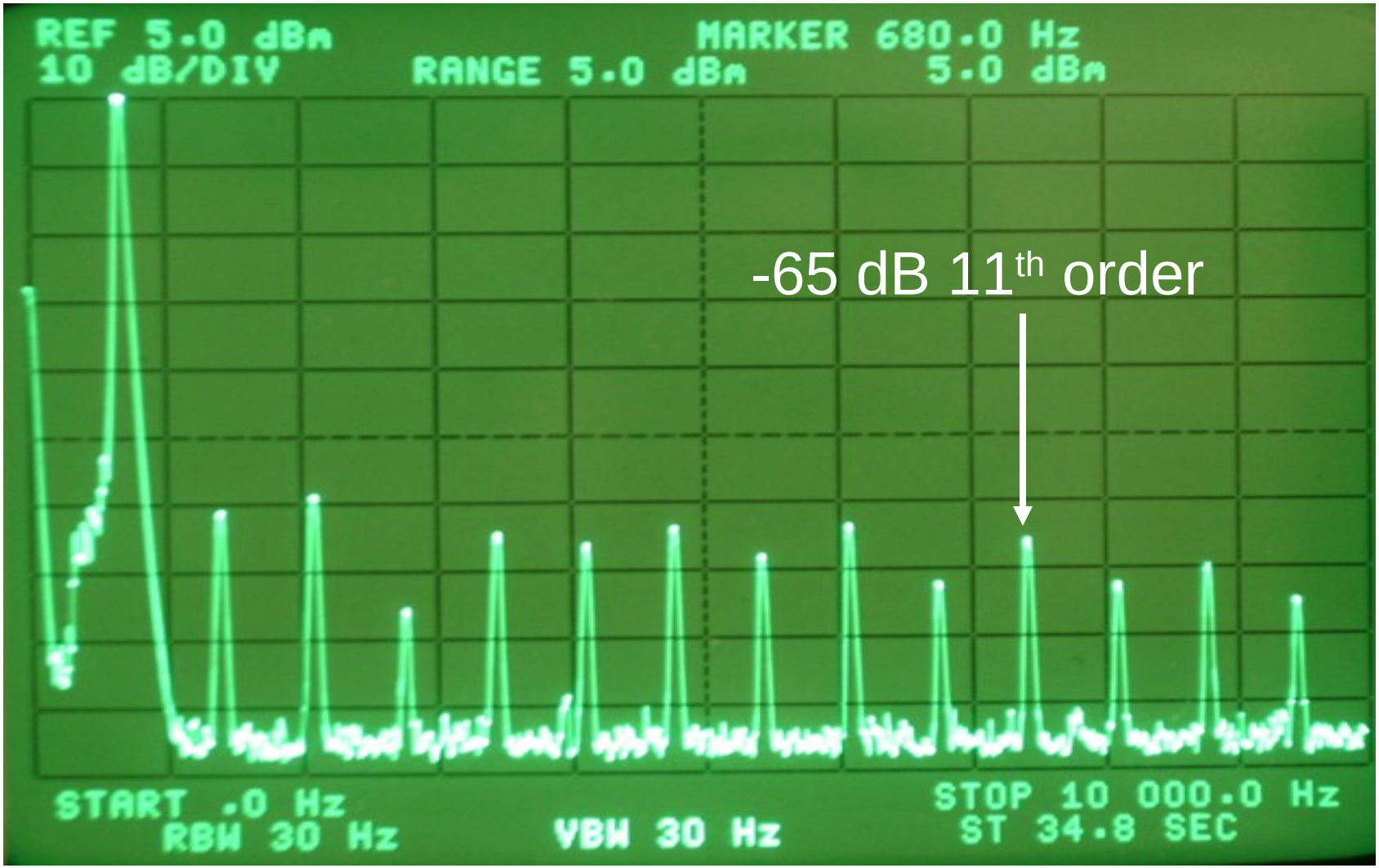
Distortion = 0.3 % & sounds fine

IM distortion - Good Receiver



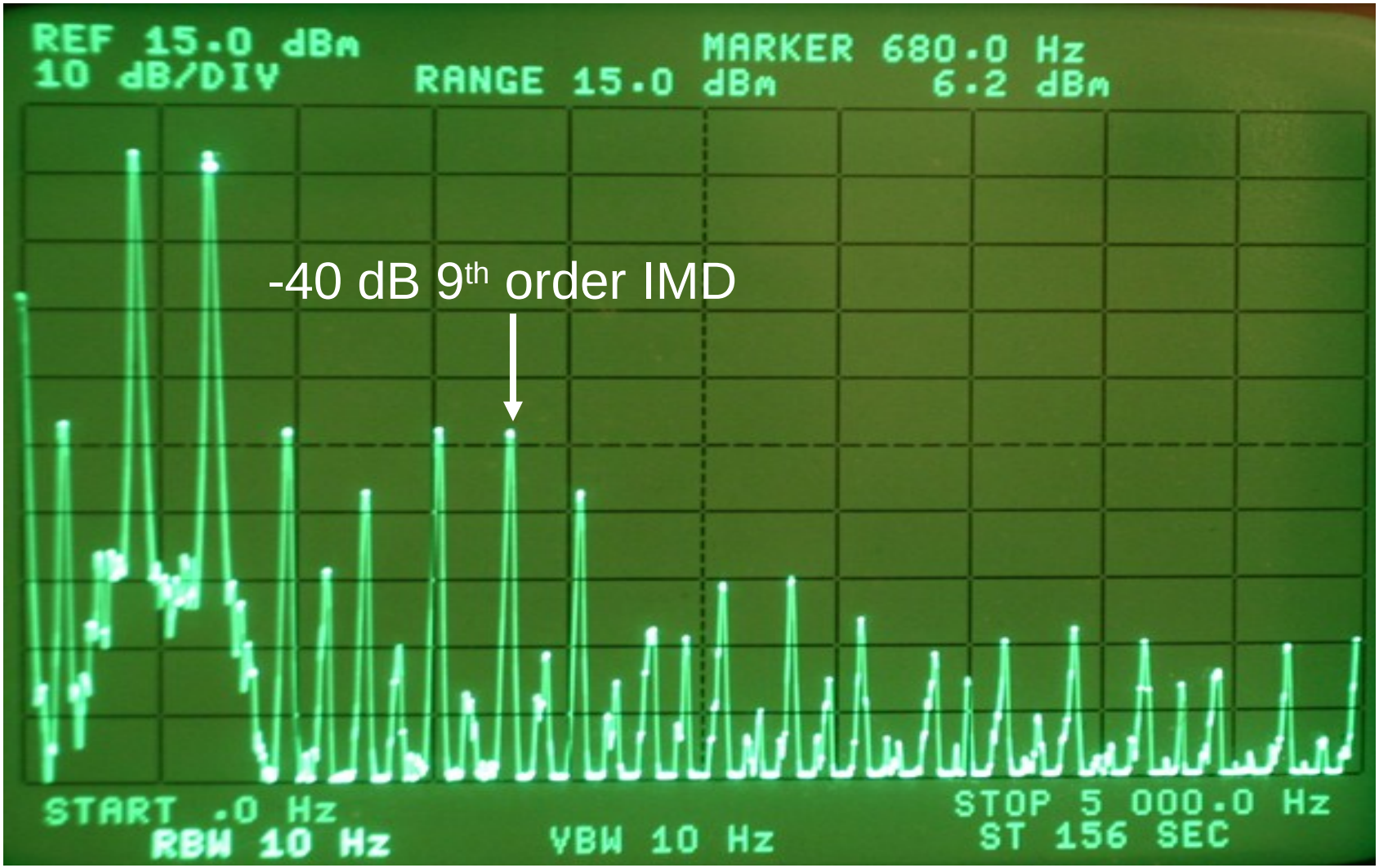
Distortion < 0.3 % but sounds bad

K3 with Odd Order > Even Order

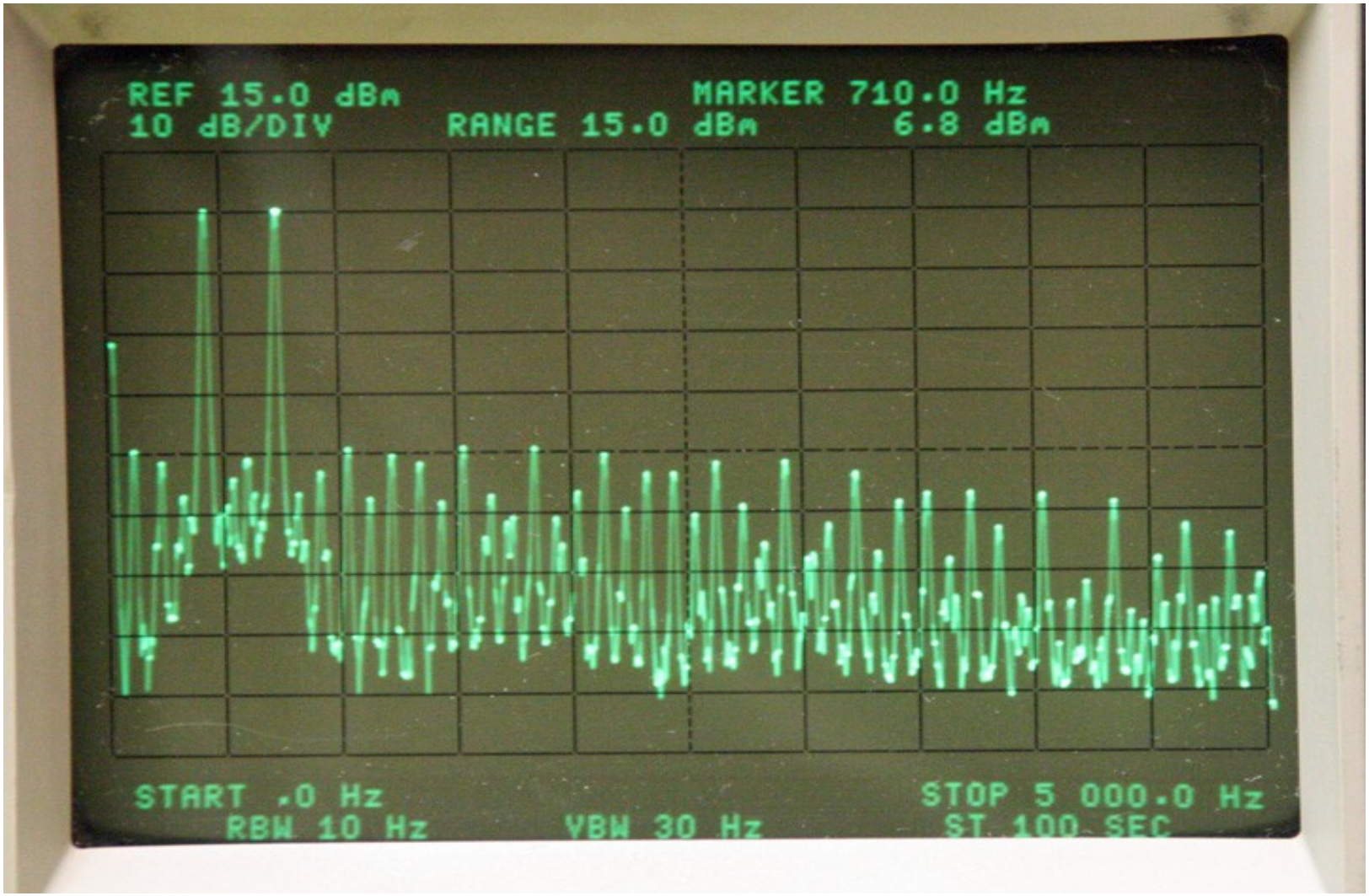


3% distortion but sounds tiring !

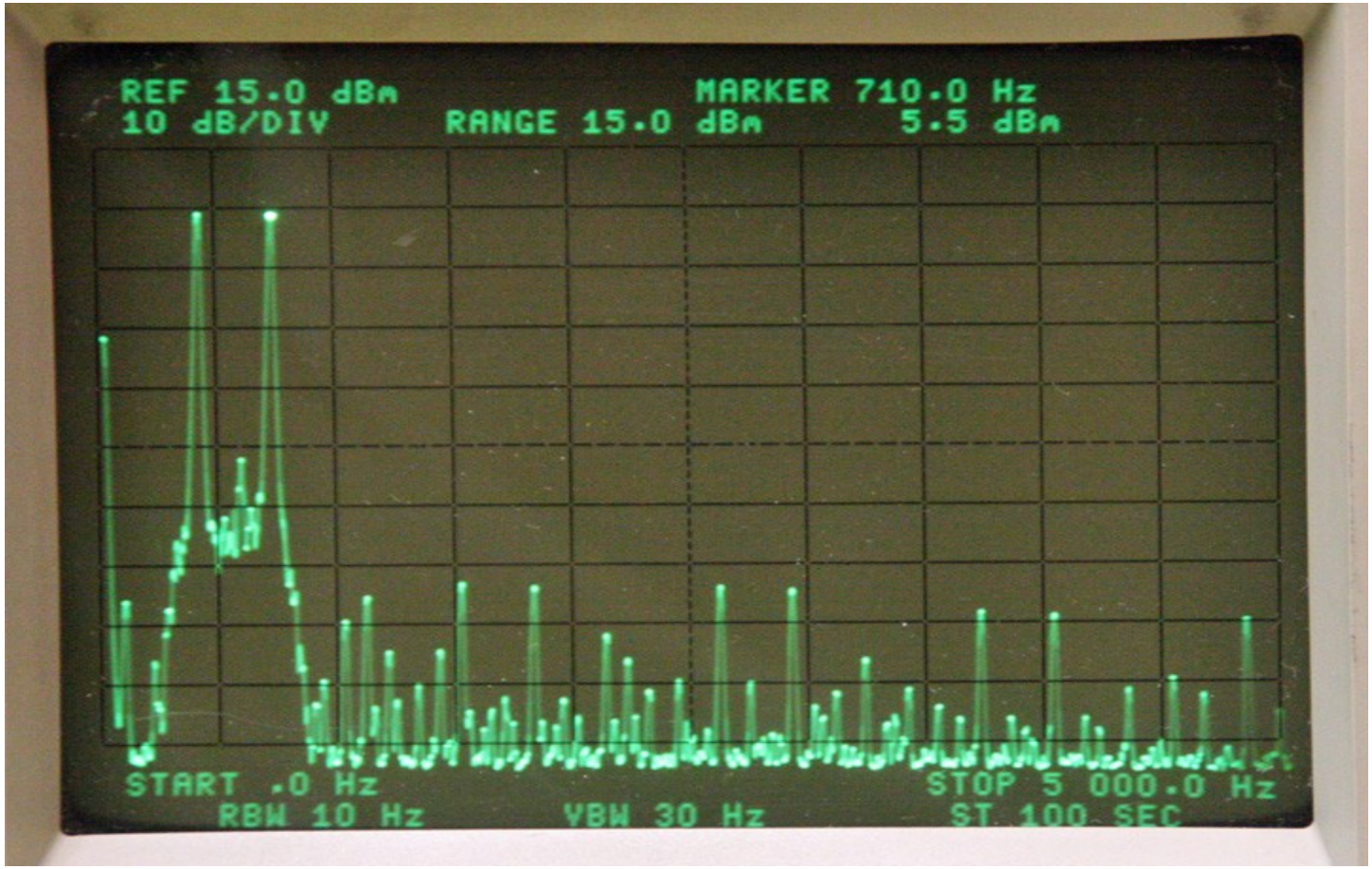
Way too much IM Distortion in K3 Audio



Screen shot from Elecraft Lab

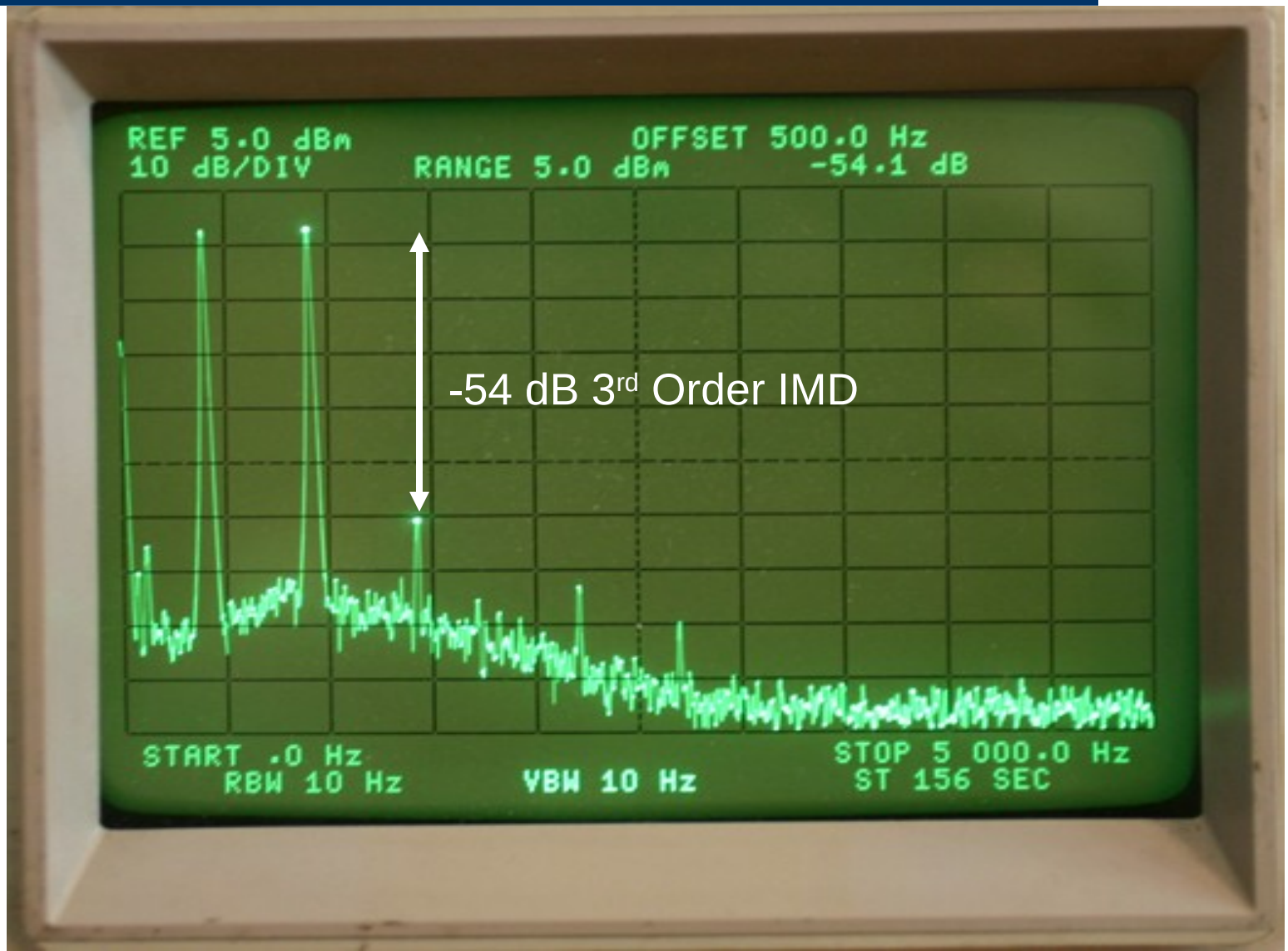


K3 After New Choke Installed

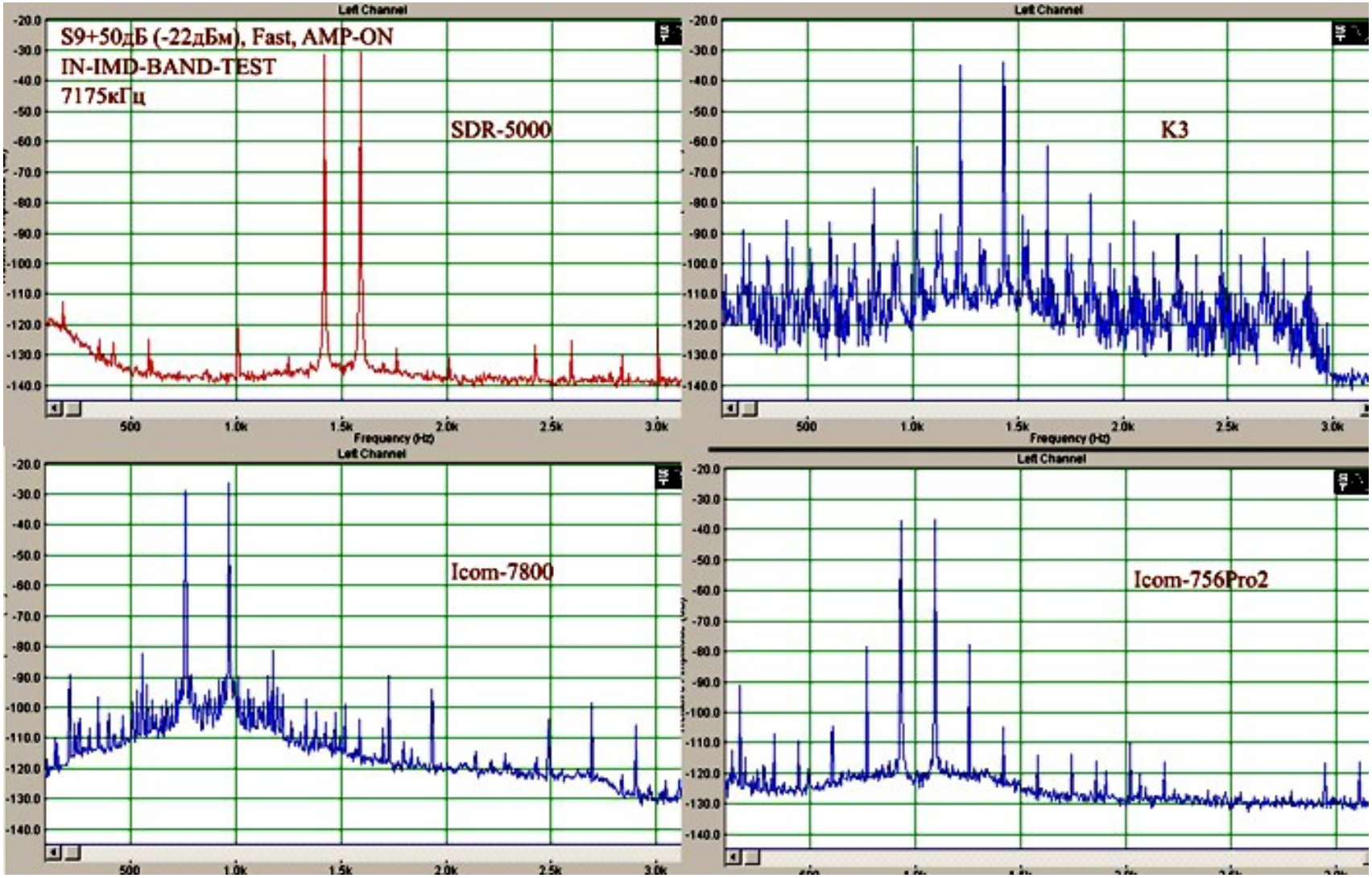


< 0.3 % distortion

Icom 756 Pro III in-band IMD Distortion



Data from UR5LAM on 4 Transceivers

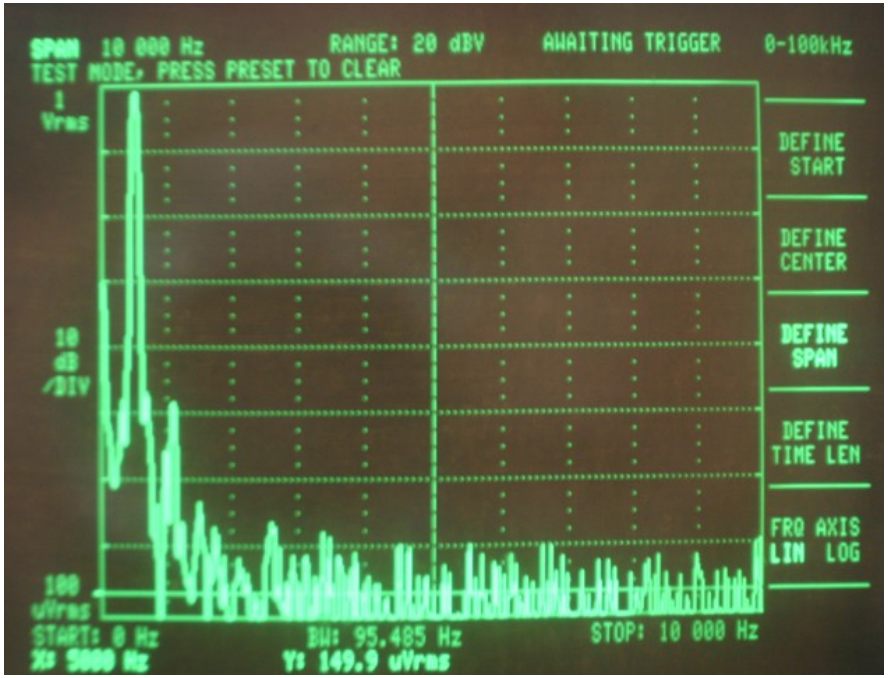


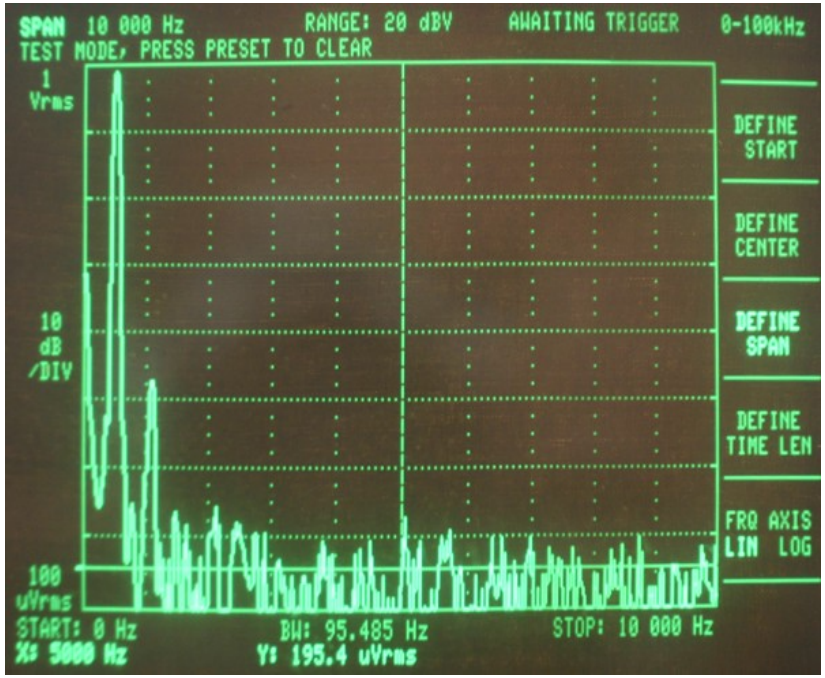
HP 3561A FFT Analyzer

Another Dynamic Fatigue Problem

- In January CQ 160 meter CW contest, I went back and forth between an analog radio (20 years old) and a DSP radio (1 year old).
- Both radios were from the same OEM. (Icom)
- I could only listen to the DSP radio for less than an hour before my ears were complaining.

FFT of the Analog Radio (IC-781)



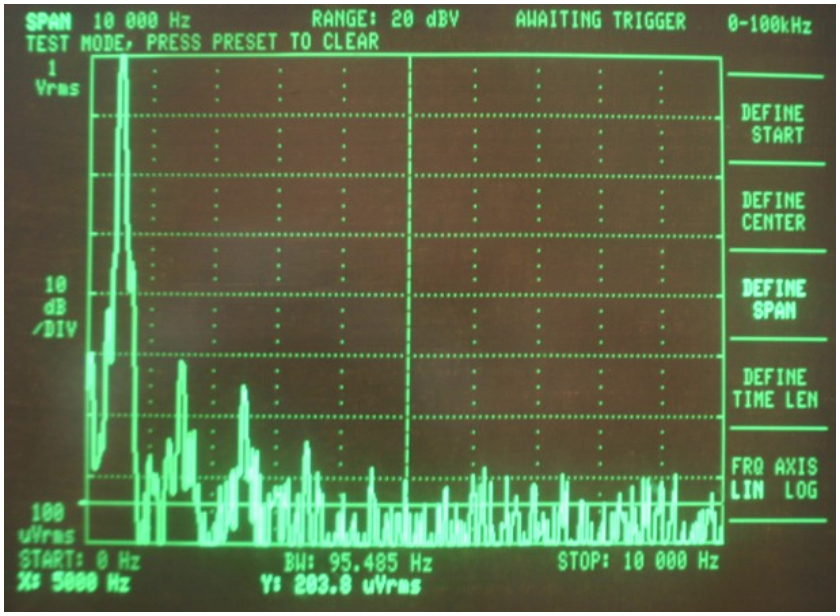


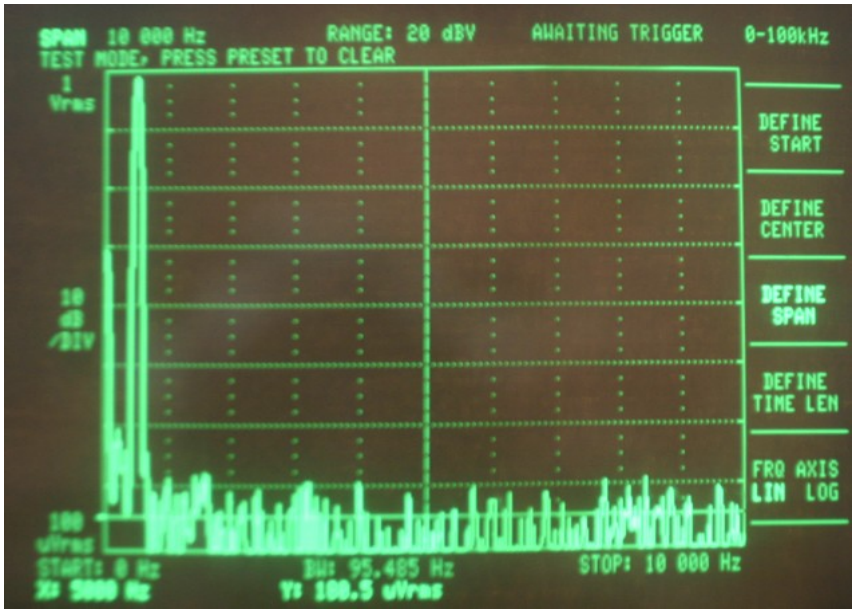
A single 500 Hz “dit”
Second harmonic only

Steady tone
Second harmonic only

The two are virtually identical.

FFT of DSP Radio (IC-756 Pro III)





A single 500 Hz “dit” with 3rd, 5th, 7th & 9th harmonics to 4.5 kHz.

Steady tone
Very clean

Now another problem !

AGC Impulse Noise Anomaly

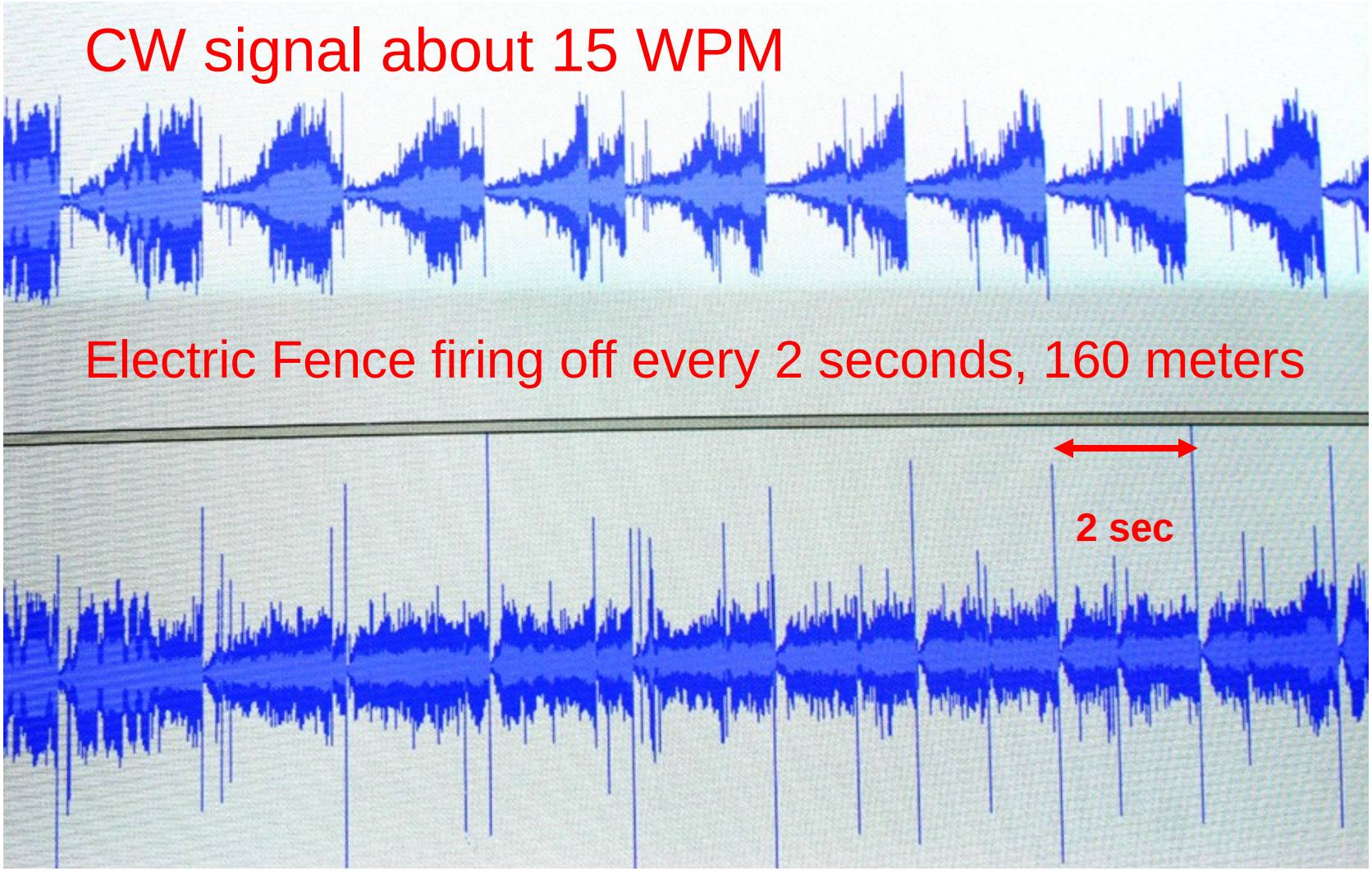
Most new radios since 2003 exaggerate impulse noise.

The exceptions: Elecraft K3, Flex 5000 & Perseus

Programmed DSP to ignore a tick, click or pop.

Elecraft calls it the Sherwood Test.

Omni-7 on Top - Pro III on Bottom



Listen to 30 second audio clip

- Audio Icom 756 Pro III
- 160 meters, 4 PM, Dec 13, 2008
- Electric fence & CW signals
- KV4FZ calling DX station
- Note volume level relatively constant

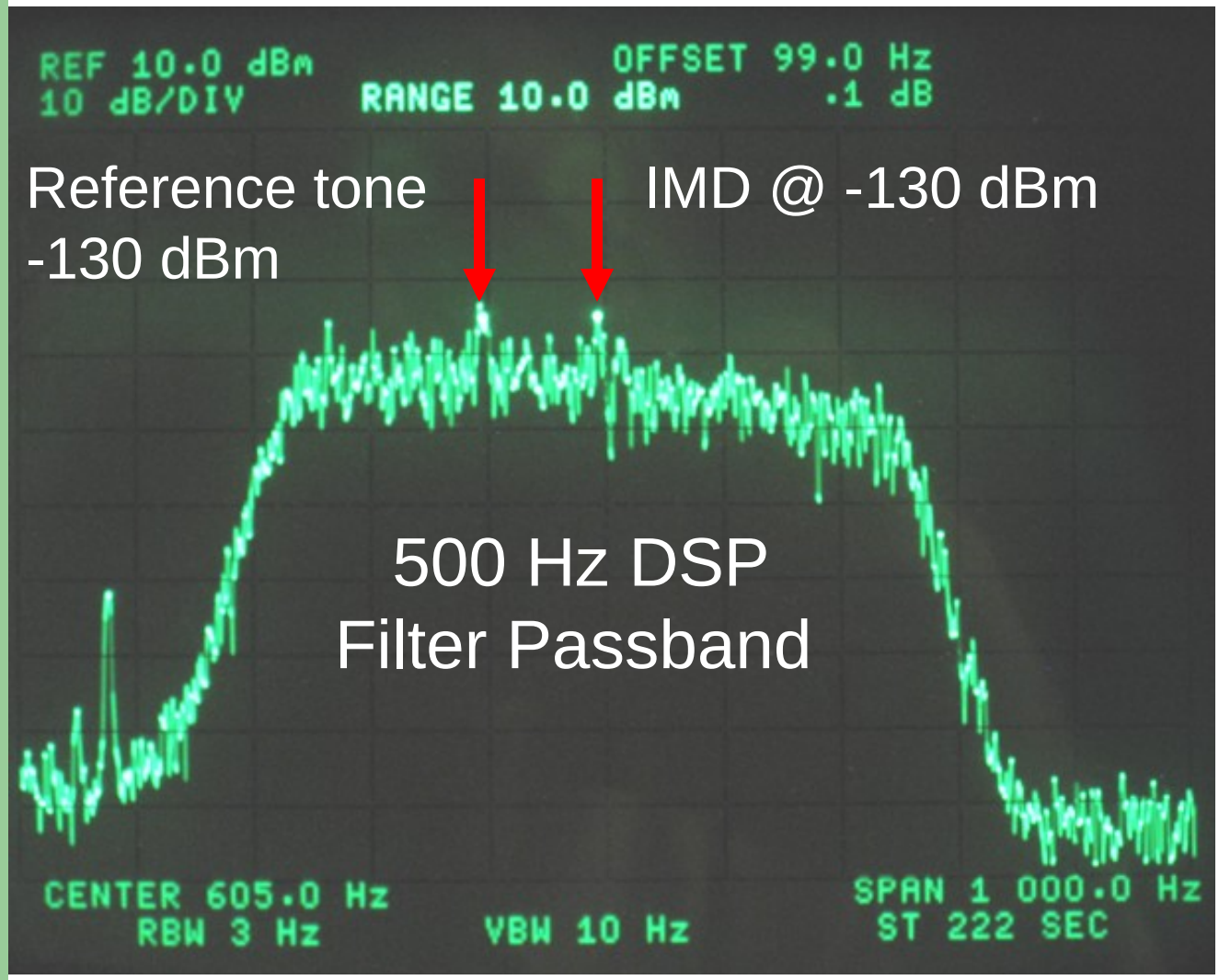
Audio clip with DSP AGC problem

- Audio Ten-Tec Omni-VII
- 160 meters, 4 PM, Dec 13, 2008
- Electric Fence & CW signals
- Exact same signals as with Pro III
- Note AGC being hammered by impulses
- Other rigs with the same AGC problem:
- IC-7800, IC-7700, IC-7600, IC-7000
- FTdx-9000, FT-2000, FT-2000D
- Orion I & II

Bogus ARRL Dynamic Range Numbers

- Many modern transceivers are phase noise limited, particularly close-in at 2 kHz. The League wanted be able to measure the IMD buried in the phase noise, and came up with a new method a few years ago using a spectrum analyzer with a 3-Hz filter.

IC-7600 with 3-Hz Spectrum Analyzer



Phase noise limited dynamic range is 78 dB at 2 kHz.

Measured with a 3-Hz filter on the analyzer, the dynamic range is 87 dB at 2 kHz!

What the New ARRL DR3 Method Means

- Old method, IMD or noise increased 3 dB.
- IMD tone at noise floor = 
- This was DR3, either IMD or noise limited.
- With the new method, noise increased 10 dB, and by ear you hear nothing but noise.
- How is this the same? 
- Unless you work a contest using a 3-Hz CW filter, the new League dynamic range measurements are meaningless. If the radio is phase noise limited.

IC-7800 ARRL Old vs. New Method

- 4/18/2006 IC-7800 test data, old method
- 2 kHz, Phase Noise Limited @ 80 dB
- 1 kHz, Phase Noise Limited @ 67 dB

- 2/6/2007 IC-7800 test data, new method
- 2 kHz, dynamic range = 86 dB
- No measurement reported at 1 kHz.

Flex 3000 Old Method vs. 3 Hz Filter

- Flex 3000 with Old Method: DR3 = 90 and is 10 dB better than my recommended 80 dB minimum.
- Flex 3000 with 3 Hz Spectrum Analyzer method measures a dynamic range between 95 and 99 dB, depending on the spacing.
- The real Flex 5000, Orion II, and the K3 DR3 values around 95 dB are better, but now you cannot tell that by the QST numbers.

Phase noise should not be ignored !

- The problem is the League is now measuring dynamic range in such a way to eliminate phase noise from the equation. Phase noise (reciprocal mixing in a QST review) gets lost in a single line of data.

- Newer reviews of equipment are exaggerated by as much as 10 dB, yet you would never know that by reading QST.

Question: How good is good enough?

High Dynamic Range Receiver (DR3).

Minimum 70 dB for SSB & 80 dB for CW

If the “real” DR3 > 90 dB, your receiver is fine.

Differences of a few dB are NOT significant.

Sensitivity 15 meters and below, preamp ON: 0.2 uV

Noise floor 15 meters and below, preamp ON: -135 dBm

AGC issues with impulse noise needs attention.

Receiver testing needs to approximate the real world.

Sherwood Engineering

http://www.sherwood-engineering.com

http://www.NC0B.com