

How do I?

An occasional series

This week: The Icom 718 Your entry to the world of HF?



Amateur radio has a wealth of options to choose from for high frequency (HF) transceivers. A transceiver combines the radio receiver and transmitter in one unit. Some of our readers probably began with a Drake or Collins receiver and transmitter. Today the most common systems use transceivers. Alinco, ICOM, Kenwood and Yaesu all make some very common, popular and affordable transceivers.

Transceiver features are generally defined as %Entry Level+at one end of the scale and %Contester Level+at the upper end of the scale. There is a much larger middle group that doesn't really have a name. Many hams, probably most of us, own radio transceivers from the Entry and Middle levels.

Typically %Entry Level+designation defines lower cost models with basic features. %Contester Level+are the generally very expensive, %starship+radios found primarily in advertising. Yes, some are sold, but for every top-of-the-line ICOM 7851 or ICOM 7700 sold, there are probably thousands of ICOM 7300\$ sold.

Printed copies of the Ham Radio Outlet <https://www.hamradio.com> and DX Engineering <https://www.dxengineering.com> 2020 catalogs recently arrived in the mail. I like catalogs. I am an old fashioned guy, but send me a catalog and I will look at it. I will never get up in the morning and go to the website and see what you have. The major radio manufacturers have been updating their product line ups. Some old favorites, like the Yaesu 857D and FT8900, seem to be gone, as well as the Kenwood TS480 and TS2000 series rigs and the ICOM 7200. All good radios, each with their own adherents.

Two radios remain that were in the first catalogs I received in 2007! The ICOM 718 and the Yaesu 450D. Both have received upgrades over the years. The major difference is the Yaesu 450D includes 6 meters and may be slightly more advanced. The ICOM 718 remains a HF only (160m-10m) radio.

In a world of software defined radios (SDRs) and hybrids like the ICOM 7300 which combines a SDR with the hardware and knobs of a classic transceiver, why would a prospective buyer look at an ICOM 718?

Ease of use. The ICOM 718 is simple, straight forward and has buttons and knobs, not menu options for commonly used functions.

It is reasonably bullet proof. It can be a portable radio, a shack bound unit, or both. It certainly is not as small as a Yaesu 891, and a Yaesu 991A adds 6m, 2m and 70cm (at a much higher cost), but for someone getting started, who may not know yet if amateur radio is a passing thing or a lifetime interest, the ICOM 718 can be a very affordable, widely used option and if/when you decide to upgrade, is good enough to keep as a spare, or seems to have decent resale value.

The 718 comes with everything you need to get started except a power supply and antenna. It does not have a built-in antenna tuner. It is a full 100 watt radio yet can be turned down to 5 watts if operating off batteries.

The receiver is pretty good as well. The Digital Signal Processing (DSP) is acceptable but newer radios are probably noticeably better. The supplied hand microphone can easily be replaced with a desk mic or headset of your choice.

If there was a weakness it would be CAT control. The ICOM 718 readily does digital modes with a Signalink USB <https://www.tigertronics.com> sound card (as well as others) but the rig needs some help if you plan to use Computer Assisted Transceiver (CAT) software (FLRIG, Ham Radio Deluxe, or others) to control the radio from a personal computer. Keep in mind the basic radio is about 15 years old and software and operating systems have come a long way since it was introduced. You seem to need an ICOM CT-17 data cable and a third party USB to CT17 adapter cable. That adds maybe \$50 to the initial cost but is still cheaper than buying an ICOM 7300. And CAT control is an optional feature for most amateurs. The WSJT-X modes such as FT8 essentially require it, but you can operate happily on the FLDIGI (Fast Light Digital Modem) modes [PSK31, Olivia, THOR, Domino, as examples] and other modes [CW, RTTY, SSB] without CAT, so do not let a perceived difficulty in setting up CAT control turn you away from an otherwise great radio. And yes, people use the ICOM 718 for FT8.

(Please see other articles in this **How Do I...** series for information on FLDIGI and WSJT-X)

How do we know the ICOM 718 is a classic? The earliest references I can readily find are dated from 2003. This ham radio transceiver is still in production 17 years later! The website eHam.net <https://www.eham.net/reviews> lists 418 reviews with a lifetime rating of 4.6 out of 5 stars. Very impressive. Most of the reviews end with some variation of "this is a keeper".



Portable on the porch!

Catch -ya on the air!