

How do I?

An occasional series

This week: Desk Microphones for HF Transceivers

Unless your ham radio operation uses only CW or digital modes, you will need a microphone. While many radios come with a basic microphone as standard equipment, some do not. And some operators want to upgrade from the basic microphone.

This article was inspired by our friends on the Kenwood TS 590 groups.io. Thanks to them for pointing out brands I had never heard of.

The question asks – What is a good desk microphone for a Kenwood TS590/590S/590SG series HF radio? The 590SG is the current model and is one of the “Big 3” sold today. The main competitors are the Icom 7300 and the Yaesu FT-991A, although you could argue the Yaesu FT-10DX is really more equal to the 590SG than the FT-991A is.



The 590SG comes with a Kenwood hand microphone. I am sure many people are happy with that microphone. But many people want a desk mic. Why? The desk mic relieves you from having to hold the mic all the time. A desk mic may have better sound characteristics as well.

For myself, while I have used hand mics and desk mics with my desktop radios, I really prefer a headset as it provides better elimination of background noise.

The “winners” in the microphone preference straw poll are.

1.) Heil Sound

Bob Heil K9EID began his career producing sound equipment for rock ‘n roll musicians in the 1970s. He is also an active ham and began producing perhaps the best known line of amateur radio microphones upwards of 50 years ago. Ownership of the company recently transferred from Bob and Sarah Heil to President and CEO, Ash Levitt, and Director of Operations, Steve Warford.

When I was first licensed, the amateur radio catalogs carried OEM microphones, MFJ replacements and Heil. For the Kenwood 590, the PR-781 seems to be the most commonly recommended Heil desk mic.



Based on price, I would not call the 781 an entry level mic. It is more of a mid-range.

2.) Inrad (sold by Vibroplex).

Vibroplex is an old, well-known and well-respected name (more than 100 years) in morse code keys. The Inrad mics seem to live up to the reputation.

The Inrad brand has been around maybe 10 years or so. I have one, and while I do not have a Heil to compare it to, it certainly is equal to or better than an entry level Yaesu desk mic. The 628 seems to be a popular model, and it has been replaced by the 629 (shown nearby).



3.) Icom

Icom is one of the “Big 3” radio manufacturers and they sell their own line of desk microphones. The SM-30 is a good one, and works well with the Icom 7300 transceiver. By changing cables it can work with Kenwood.



4.) Kenwood

What I am about to describe is a shock as Kenwood is an old name in sound equipment and amateur radio gear. While many survey participants compared their favorite mic to the Kenwood MC-60 (shown here), none selected it as their mic of choice. It should really be last, but I wanted to put it here so you could see what it looks like.



Without having mics on hand to test, any sort of side-by-side style comparison is not possible.

5.) Electro-Voice

The most passionate replies came from the Electro-Voice adherents. If Electro-Voice was presented as a hotel or restaurant review, it would have \$\$\$\$ after the name. I think you can buy at least two “entry level mics” from the OEM, Heil or Inrad for the price of the lowest-cost Electro-Voice.

Electro-Voice is a professional broadcast and recording studio microphone. I thought Electro-Voice was once an RCA trademark, but much of their website seems to be in Portuguese, so I am not sure. The RE-27ND was specifically cited as working well with the Kenwood 590SG and the Yaesu FTDX-101D.



6.) Shure

I think of Shure as a relatively new brand primarily catering to the computer microphone and podcast creators. Apparently some are using it as an amateur radio mic.

Some users favorably compare it to the Kenwood MC-60. For the price. I am not sure why they do not use the Kenwood, but I suppose if you have it, and are willing to make cables, it is a reasonable solution. It just seems like a lot of work and added cost vs a MC60 or an Inrad mic.



7.) MXL

Another brand I had never heard of. The MXL BCD-1 seems to be a broadcast mic competing with Shure. It is around the price point of the cheaper Inrads and Kenwood MC60A, Icom SM-30 and Yaesu M-70 desk mics.

The users seem to like it because they own it. No one made a really compelling case as to why you should buy one if you do not already own one.



8.) Behringer

I almost left this one – the Behringer XM8500 -- on the cutting room floor.

Its selling points include:

- It sells for \$20 on Amazon. I found it for less elsewhere.
- Thomas Schmenger, call sign DF2BO - owner of Optibeam Antennas -- uses and recommends this microphone.
- It supposedly sounds as good as the “most expensive mics on the market”.

It takes a lot of work to adapt this mic for PTT or VOX and you need to find a boom and cable that works. So that \$20 XM8500 probably costs as much as a decent Heil or Inrad when done.



And now, a Few Words About Brand Loyalty

I have noticed the Amazon generation seems to think everything comes from Amazon. That formula may work for paper towels and books, but amateur radio gear is not really a consumer item.

When Marketing people talk about Brand Loyalty they have in mind traits such as

- Customer Perceived Value,
- Brand Trust,
- Customer Satisfaction,
- Repeat Purchase Behavior, and
- Commitment.

Brand loyalty helps build a strong customer base, which in turn serves as a tool to surpass competitors and attain a competitive advantage that is essential to success in the marketplace.

I wonder how many entry level hams have looked at the prices for radio equipment from the "Big 3", or priced coaxial cable and other essential items from main stream amateur radio retailers. and saw much cheaper prices for non-main stream brands on Amazon, purchased from Amazon, and then found themselves so frustrated with the lackluster results that they lost interest and abandoned the amateur radio hobby itself?

Catch 'ya on the air!