

Winning the World from Europe —An Interview with N5TJ

For the 2010 CQ World Wide DX SSB, the gang at Radio Arcala, OH8X, invited Jeff Steinman, N5TJ, to drive their latest contest machine in the Azores as CR2X. It's been more than 50 years (1958) since the top score in the world was attained from European soil under the current scoring formula that allows European stations one point for contacts with other stations on the continent.

Operating from "three-point territory" in Africa at EA8BH in 1999, Jeff set CQ WW CW and SSB world records that still stand. Now, he's added a new 15.8 million point European record and another world win to his contesting resume, which includes three consecutive WRTC gold medals, won with team member Dan Street, K1TO.

Doing the math on Jeff's new 15.8 million point European record, we can see that it's the equivalent of 19.2 million points from the Caribbean and nearly 23 million points from South America or Africa.

In the wake of this remarkable achievement, I had the opportunity to interview Jeff on behalf of *NCJ*, just as he crossed the finish line last fall.

NCJ: What was the hardest part in deciding to come back and put in a 48 hour single operator, all band — SOAB — effort from CR2X?

N5TJ: Deciding to come back and operate was not a difficult decision. Coordinating the schedule with my job was more of a concern. The last SOAB I did was KP3Z CQ WW CW in 2003. Since that time I have operated CQ WW SSB most years as part of a multiop.

NCJ: How much time did you spend preparing for the 48 hour run?

N5TJ: Perhaps 20 to 30 hours, much of it on airplanes during business travel, and most spent looking at Toni's (OH2UA) log from 2009 and *WinTest* documentation. It would only be my second time using that software and my first SOAB.

NCJ: You must have been worried about your European competition.

N5TJ: To be honest I was more focused on how to operate from the Azores and how to maximize my score. Since this would be my first time there, I felt it was the best use of my prep time, during which I exchanged many e-mails with the Arcala team.

NCJ: Which preparatory initiatives were key to your past and current successes?

N5TJ: In the past I have put together fairly detailed goals. This time I did not. Although propagation and location were different than



Figure 1 — Cycling is another one of N5TJ's passions. Jeff logged more than 9000 miles last year.

other contests I have operated, it still comes down to logging the most points and multipliers to get the highest score. Operating from Europe and one point QSOs was a new experience for me to think about.

NCJ: What was your greatest positive — or negative — surprise in working from Europe?

N5TJ: Almost all positive. The station and location are superb. Although VK/ZL are very far away, they came through very well, even on the low bands. Forty meters was open almost all 24 hours to somewhere, and the path to Japan was as difficult as I was told to expect.

NCJ: You had traveled from the US to Lisbon and then halfway back toward the west. Did you calculate the jet lag and the time needed to get back on your feet? How much time should one have from arrival to the actual 48 hour run?

N5TJ: Arriving on Wednesday would be enough time to get prepared to operate 48 hours. But Toni was in the Azores doing some last-minute station preparation, and the only

World Win from Europe — Cycling, Skiing and Contesting

It involved everything in Amateur Radio contesting and then some. It involved the best people in town with the desire, proven skill set and sound support from their team. It also included exercising for best physical shape to do 48 hours nonstop without noticing the change of day and night — the ticking of time.

Jeff, N5TJ, top of the SSB class, took to road bicycle racing, making 9000 miles in a single year. He saw the ups and downs of varied landscapes but kept running to the horizon with energy and commitment. He was ready to contest.

Toni, OH2UA, of the CW class, chose free ride skiing and traveled to many world destinations from the deep slopes of the Swiss Alps to the bottomless surfaces of powder snow in Japan to increase his speed and ability for quick turns with no errors, just as in radiosport.

They both cut across the finish line first in the CQ WW, with a world win of 15+ million points on SSB (9616 QSOs) and passing the 10+ million point mark on CW (6890 QSOs), respectively for the first time ever, setting new EU records for others to beat.

Radio Arcala's strategy jelled from the Azores in Europe at their remote CR2X Atlantic outpost. This impressive station consists of:

Equipment: Two Yaesu FTDX5000 transceivers and OM2500 amps

Station automation: microHAM and Hamation, K7MI

Antenna system: Three towers and RAC-X controllers by 4O3A and YT3M, plus customized antennas by OH1JT and K6MYC, and M2 Antennas.

• **NA tower:** Stacked 10 element interlaced 10/15/20 meter Yagis

• **EU tower:** Stacked 10 element interlaced 10/15/20 meter Yagis plus 2 elements on 40

• **Rotating tower:** 10 element interlaced 10/15/20 meter Yagis plus 2 elements on 40 and 80 meters.

• **160 meters:** Inverted L and DX Engineering four-direction Beverage

Visit Radio Arcala, www.radioarcala.com, and Azores, www.cu2a.com, for more information. — Adapted from the CR2X QSL card



Figure 2 — This CR2X QSL commemorates the N5TJ/OH2UA European wins.



Figure 3 — N5TJ's world records from EA8BH still stand and were among the reasons for Jeff's Radio Arcala membership and the invitation to operate from CR2X.

way for our time to overlap for a day was for me to arrive Tuesday. This meant I had to fly from Texas to New York to Lisbon and to the Azores. Without a doubt it was worth the extra flight time for me to be able to sit with Toni and have him show me the station and locale.

NCJ: What did you do to get well tuned for the run? Were there some things you specifically chose *not* to do?

N5TJ: Toni met me at the airport and took me to town. After some time at the apartment we went to the station for most of the day. We also met up with locals CU2CE and CU2DX. After Toni left on Wednesday I tried to settle into a routine of waking early (about 0400) and going to the station to operate. I would leave the station before sunset around 1800 and then

have dinner and get to sleep early. My goal was to be able to sleep from about 1900 to 2300 on Friday before the contest, which I was able to do. Without that I could not have operated the entire 48 hours.

NCJ: How was the CR2X station? How did it suit your operating habits and style?

N5TJ: The station was designed with a specific purpose, and it shows in the implementation. I had no problems during the contest. The only thing I would change in hindsight was the chair and the PTT. The footswitch caused my legs to get sore after 48 hours.

NCJ: Was your idea to run for a full 48 hours? Have you always done what you have decided in advance regarding operating hours and breaks?

N5TJ: My goal was to operate all 48 hours, and I arranged my schedule ahead of the contest to make this possible. It was only the fourth time I have done all 48 hours.

NCJ: What delicacies did you have on hand to eat and drink during those 48 hours?

N5TJ: I ate very little. Some soup, sandwiches, crackers, water, coffee.

NCJ: When did the hours of struggle come in? Were you able to anticipate these, and did you run into them on more than one occasion?

N5TJ: Each time I operate 48 hours there is always some period of struggle. This contest it was Sunday about 1400, when I first had problems concentrating. That feeling returned on numerous occasions during the rest of the contest.

NCJ: How do you handle those hard times? Do you ever feel that you may not make it?

N5TJ: I try anything! Standing and operating. Taking short breaks. When a friend calls in, I take an extra moment to chat. There were times when I wanted to stop, was ready for the contest to be over, but I never thought of stopping early.

NCJ: When did you first feel that you might break the European record? Was 15 million ever in your sights? Did you ever dream of winning the world from Europe?

N5TJ: Before the contest I did some quick calculations and thought 13 million might be possible, but never 15 million — and I never thought that I could win.

NCJ: How much time did you take out of the chair? Did you do anything out of the ordinary, such as reading the day's newspaper?

N5TJ: It was probably about 30 minutes. Nothing extraordinary, just WC breaks and quick breaks to get some fresh air.

NCJ: When you stood up after 48 hours, what did you do first?

N5TJ: Stretched. My legs were very sore.

NCJ: Did you find it strange to basically jump out of the sack and win with flying colors, just like that? What would you tell those who challenged you, but did not succeed?

N5TJ: Being able to put in a good effort after so many years away was gratifying. And much of the success was due to the multi-year efforts of a lot of people to build and maintain the station. The Azores is one of the best places in Europe to operate. My part was easy, flying in for a week and operating.

NCJ: You have won most everything in contesting, and your WRTC career was astounding. Why is it exactly that you are able to keep capturing these victories? Tell us about the N5TJ magic.

N5TJ: I grew up in WØ and spent five years operating every contest I could from K4VX, single op and multiop. Once I moved to Texas I had the opportunity to do five years of SO from WM5G. Without those experiences, I don't believe I'd be here today. But exactly how those experiences got me here, well, that's a great question, and the answer eludes me. N5KO claims I once said, "With experience



Figure 4 — (L-R) Martti, OH2BH/CU2KG, and Juha, OH8NC/CU2KH, maintain the CR2X site and hosted Jeff, N5TJ, and Toni, OH2UA, to take the honors for the CQ WW 2010.

comes knowledge and cunning. I can't stand here and tell you the secrets, as many of them are second nature to me now."

NCJ: What ultimate scores do you think can be done in the world and Europe categories in SOAB if — or when — the sunspots come back? Is your CQ WW SSB world record at EA8BH reachable?

N5TJ: Good question. Scores seem to increase each cycle. Participation also looks to be increasing, as more people submit logs now than ever before. With groups like Radio Arcala building world class stations on high hilltop locations I've done my best to put those scores as high as possible. I think they can be broken, but it will take a lot of determination to do so and the right mix of operator, propagation and contest station and location.

NCJ: You have been associated with hams from Finland on some of your efforts. How do you find them as people and contesters?

N5TJ: My experience has been good. Of course I spent some time with you in Seattle after the first WRTC, and you and Ville, OH2MM, came to Texas after Dayton 20 years ago to see the WM5G station. And WRTC 2002 was a great event that I enjoyed. The Finns are a determined group who think outside the box, try new things and build bigger antennas in harsh locations than most would ever consider.

NCJ: What is your message to those who cheat, to those who compete against the cheaters and the contest organizers who do not seem to care enough?

N5TJ: I've been away from the game for a

few years, but I do know that there have been more high profile DQs recently than ever before. It's good to see the contest committees taking harder stances.

NCJ: What would you say about assisted operating in general? You were once assisted at VE3EJ. Was it a positive experience?

N5TJ: When I did SOA from VE3EJ we were using packet over VHF/UHF. Times have changed now with Internet DX spotting. And now *CW Skimmer* and the Reverse Beacon Network. If you want to use that technology, then go ahead and do it, but, please, within the proper category.

NCJ: What do say to contest organizers who want to delete SOAB and consider everyone assisted?

N5TJ: There is room for both categories. Let's keep the pure, single operator unassisted category in place.

NCJ: With the SSB contest now behind you, would you return for the CW? Perhaps take up a challenge to compete against Russian team from EF8M? What would be the key to your success?

N5TJ: It would be great to operate the CQ WW SOAB CW from CR2X some time. The SSB contest gave me a view to what's possible from CR2X. Whether a one-point area can beat a three-point area on CW is hard to say, but it's worth a try. And both stations would need to agree to WRTC-style on site with full-time referees to make the challenge meaningful.

NCJ