

## Mobile Contesting on Steroids: The K4OJ FQP Multi/Multi Adventure

Well, we thought we couldn't top the fun we had in last year's Florida QSO Party, but that's exactly what happened for the K4OJ "Suburbanites Team," as NO5W has dubbed us. Once again we built a multi-multi station into my trusty Suburban — like an overstuffed calzone of people, equipment, antennas, spares of just about anything imaginable, and, of course, plenty of teamwork!

This year our team opted for a slightly different strategy to try to really amp up our score. It worked beautifully, but more on that later. Our MM station was once again my 2002 Chevrolet Suburban, 2-wheel drive, with 345,000 miles on the odometer. Once again it performed flawlessly. We ran three stations full time — one on 20, one of 15, and one switching between 40 and 10.

A Honda EU-2000i 2 kW generator drove individual switching power supplies for each station. The generator was mounted with an external fuel tank and a K5YAA-inspired "plumbers delight" rain

cover with vent on a hitch-mount cargo carrier. We used ethanol-free premium fuel, and over the 24 hours of actual run time, it consumed 6 gallons.

Inter-station Interference was the biggest challenge, and it required our perseverance, patience, and just plain old dumb luck. Our score speaks for itself — nearly 5000 QSOs from a mobile in 20 hours of contesting. You do the math. Our three operators — Kevin, N4KM; Red, KØLUZ, and Bob, N4BP — were ably supported by crack team:

- ◆ Driver, spare parts supplier, station engineer, cheerleader, host, and team lead: Chris, NX4N

- ◆ Co-host, restaurant and hotel owner, sandwich/snack/drink provider: Lili (NX4N's wife)

- ◆ Back-up op and dry-run driver: Larry, KR4X

### Get Ready, Get Set...

Things were looking up, and the team

was optimistic. We had the RFI optimized as much as possible — none to 40 and 20, no 15 meter RFI during the day, and at manageable levels on 10. During the weeks leading up to FQP I started preparing the Suburban; it takes roughly 40 hours of work to install the stations. Jim, K5AUP, loaned us his two K3s, so we had a total of four — one each for the three stations, plus a spare. There were wires everywhere and radio, mechanical, and electrical function checks to perform. More than a dozen sandwiches, snack bags, and innumerable drinks that Lili had made were packed and/or organized.

But Murphy had many tricks up his sleeve for us this year.

### Gotta Love Those Blue Little Guys

Bob, N4BP, came by on Friday afternoon, and we finished installing his K3 for 15 meters — the last station ready. Operator ergonomics were reasonable but nothing great (think airline seats). RFI checks were good. Friday night brings the restless sleep of all FQP mobile ops. They know two hugely long days of much excitement, pileups, and surprises await.

Saturday morning Bob, Lili, and I share a nervous breakfast of Cheerios, bagels, cheese, and coffee, but it's hard to enjoy the chow with the butterflies. We leave at 8 AM for our 2-hour trip to Seminole County to meet Kevin and Red.

But, as we get on I-4 we see a foreboding sign flashing overhead: "EASTBOUND ACCIDENT AHEAD 10 MILES - ALL LANES CLOSED." No way!

I called Lili in a panic. We only have three more exits to go before we reach the closed lanes. Lili was walking our dog, however, nowhere near a computer, but she promised to walk home quickly and check out our options online.

The GPS told us to get off at the next exit; I silently and completely obey its every command, turning north and heading directly onto a narrow, bumpy country road to...what's this?...the Tampa Bay Blueberry Festival. There's a lot of traffic, and I silently curse this electronic contraption. Perhaps I should have just stayed on I-4 and waited for the accident to clear.

We turn east and get behind a *slowwww* tractor-pulled festival shuttle bus. Sorry, no little blue guys for us today. We have a



Figure 1 — The K4OJ multi-multi mobile is off!

contest! The shuttle turns into a parking lot, and we're on our way. Then, *bump... bump...bump...*the GPS now has us on another country road with 12 foot overhanging oak branches that subject my poor antennas to several miles of torture with no place to pull over. I slow to 20 MPH in a 40 MPH zone, with folks behind me on my tail, passing with dirty looks. Bob and I keep going. Finally, the GPS tells us to turn south and head back to I-4. We enter the on-ramp curve and see a *huge* line of totally stopped cars with drivers outside their vehicles. *Stupid @\$%^&!!! GPS!* But wait! It turned out that the accident was *just* before our on-ramp, so we sailed right past it onto an empty I-4!

To be fair, the GPS saved our bacon several times during the FQP when the overconfident driver got lost. I now sleep with a GPS under my pillow.

### Go! And We're Off!

We meet Kevin and Red and start loading gear and re-familiarizing operators with their stations. We share a picnic lunch then head for our starting location, LAK.

*CQ FQP!* The bell tolls and the QSOs are coming faster than usual on all bands. Stations are playing like a symphony, and operators are pressing their best skills into action. As we head north, I can tell that Red, Bob and Kevin are having fun, the county-change signaling system is working well — Lake, Seminole, Volusia, Flagler — and onward. I have timing runs for every leg of our trip, so I know whether we're hitting our marks. Traffic on I-4 is a pain, but I-95 is much more open. Looks like smooth sailing...

### Murphy Sneak Attacks

Later, as we head north in Clay County, the clouds ahead look ominous. The sky is getting darker, and the rain begins and very quickly gets very heavy. A lot of wind is whipping around, but thankfully there's little lightning.

Red shouts, "Uh-oh! My SWR is high!" My heart sinks. Twenty meters, why? Typically we run the K3 with tuners bypassed, so if the SWR goes bad, the rig will cut back and save the band-pass filters from overheating until the op notices the issue. There was no way any of us were going outside in the torrent to fix anything, though; the ops and radios would be soaked the instant we open a door.

We made a quick decision to engage the K3's tuner and keep operating. In fact, that was our mantra all weekend — just keep operating. We drove through some nasty weather and got lost a bit in Nassau County. Emergency lights alerted us to a pick-up truck no less than 30 feet into a retention ditch and into the wet mucky

woods beyond. The 20 meter SWR got better as we passed through the rain, but it was just not quite the same the rest of the weekend, sitting at 2:1. But, that was usable, and Red was making contacts, so we just kept going.

Several hours later Murphy struck again. Kevin made a planned switch from 10 to 40, where he encountered S-9+ RFI spikes on 40 coming from the 20 meter station! We'd never run into this before. Something had changed in our setup during the storm, and now it was looking like a *loong* night on 40, where we needed the rate badly. Kevin put up with the interference through several counties, but we just had to stop and try to

fix the problem, before it got too dark to do so. We stopped at a shopping plaza, where I put together a complete 20 meter replacement antenna and checked all connections. Turned out the original 20 meter antenna resonator was loose — likely a result of too many tree limb hits at the blueberry festival. We put up the new antenna, and no more 40 meter RFI. This is, of course, until we hit 45 MPH, and the problem returns. *Rats!* Adding injury to insult, I got a nasty gash on my leg where I'd run into a sharp-edged spare antenna mount.

But Kevin just put on his man face and made the best of it, making even a higher peak rate on 40 meters than last year. I



Figure 2 — The dc power rack, parts, and tools storage.



Figure 3 — Ops in action, as viewed from the rear seat.



**Table 1 — After the dust settled: The claimed score from K4OJ/m.**

Band	QSOs	Mults	Operator	Equipment
40	369	35	N4KM	K3, Hustler
20	2941	69	KØLUZ	K3, Hustler 20 inches from 40 meter vertical
15	1328	69	N4BP	K3, Hustler 30 inches from 20 meter vertical
10	320	31	N4KM	K3, quarter-wave vertical, 48 inches from 40 meter vertical

can hear the interference crackling from Kevin's headphones.

### **Mmmmmm! Yummy!**

The remainder of the trip on Saturday went smoothly; the logs showed a first day with significant upticks from last year's operation. Forty meters was a tad behind, but we knew that was part of our strategy. We finished the last 8 minutes of the FQP at home in the driveway.

As our reward, we were treated to a feast of Sonny's Barbecue with all the fixins. A short time later, John, K4BAI, and Jeff, KU8E, and his two boys joined us for dinner. We had a great time together. Before they left for their hotel, we snapped a group photo and then traded tours of each other's mobile setups. Jeff had come up with quite a nice mount on his wife's minivan, with John sitting in the middle row operating, Randy in the back row, and Andy helping Dad up front with navigation. Cool station setup too. Jeff told me how well his DX Engineering top hat worked. We parted with team W4AN/m and then racked out. Morning would be coming soon!

### **Yet Another Murphy Attack**

A sleepy K4OJ team left 5 minutes late, but we had time to get to Pinellas County before the contest started. As we fired up the stations, we noticed the 40 meter RFI from the previous day was still there, but we only needed that band for about an hour before the switch to 10. But we had to stop because 40 meters now was getting into 15. We found a loose 40 meter resonator (blueberry attack), tightened it, and resumed our chase. Kevin kept running 40, while Bob put up with the interference on a modestly open 15 meter band.

One hour in, Kevin switched to 10 as planned, only to run into huge RFI from the 20 meter station. We stopped again to look things over and found that the base coil on the 10 antenna had broken. Fortunately, I had made up a spare coil, so in less than 5 minutes we were on the road again. We had finally shown Murphy the door, and he did not reappear for the remainder of the highway. Once we hit Monroe County,



**Figure 4 — N4KM, the 40/10 meter op, looks like he's having fun.**

all heck broke loose, the QSO rates on all bands soared, and we never looked back.

### **In Summary**

Incredible. Simply incredible.

I can hardly believe we came very, very close to logging nearly 5000 QSOs in 20 hours from three mobile stations. We all were nearly speechless.

I had challenged our team to make 4700 contacts, and they'd done that and then some. We started the contest in better shape than usual, with good, but not super, conditions. Between the rain and all of Murphy's shenanigans I thought that perhaps it was just not our year. But we pressed on from Saturday morning onward.

By mid-morning Sunday we settled into our saddles and just let the horses run. I was very fortunate to have three talented operators on our team. Red, Bob, and Kevin just tore up the bands, the antennas worked, and our out-of-state friends made our entire trip special — tracking us down on all the bands over and over again as we switched counties. While I was driving, I could hear *huge* pileups leaking out from the three sets of headphones.

I have to say that conditions were the best in many years for the FQP. Saturday was good, but Sunday was exceptional. Worked a JA on 15 at 2 PM local time, EU and JA on 40. Ten meters was alive with nice replies from EU, SA, and KH6. The hard-mounted Hustlers on the roof gave us a big signal feeling on all bands. Each op remarked that we had terrific signals on their respective bands.

We would like to thank the leaders of the Florida Contest Group who make the FQP the very best QSO party around. Sincere thanks and 88 go to my fun-loving wife, Lili, who cooked dinners and breakfasts, packed our lunch/snack bags/drinks, and was a full team member in every respect! No ham could have a more supportive spouse.

Thanks as well to Bob, KØRC, for his amazing tracking sheets; they were revamped this year with super cool "find my counties" search macros that made chasing the mobile mults even easier. Appreciation also goes to Chuck, NO5W, for his CQ/x contest software and county tracking tools.

To our fellow road warriors: Well done! Our greatest appreciation is reserved for our many, many friends — both in and out of state — who tracked and worked us (or tried) repeatedly, put up with our QRX, QSY, QRQ, QRS, QRDeaf and QLF. Finally, thanks to my teammates Kevin, Red, Bob, and Larry. Let's see if we can do this again next year!

Jim, K4OJ (SK) — dear FQP friend — we hope this little escapade of insanity made you smile yet again.