



SHORTWAVE BROADCAST CENTER



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If the masthead above looks a little "dated", there's a good reason--it's from the January 1968 edition of "Shortwave Broadcast Center", the forerunner to our present-day column. Its editor was considered to be one of the most influential DXers of the time. Yet, impossible logs and impressive veries aside, it was his insistence on accuracy and quality that made him a respected hobby figure. Some 16 years later, he's still "on top" and guru to countless serious, dedicated DXers....he's DON JENSEN.

Don became a DXer at the age of 11, back in 1947, and over the years he's explored virtually all forms of the listening hobby. His favorite is, of course, still shortwave broadcast DX. In those years Don served in a number of official posts for several clubs, including NASWA, which Don joined in 1963 (then known as NASA). It was Don who founded the Association of North American Radio Clubs (ANARC) in 1964, serving as its first executive secretary.

A writer by profession, Don works for a daily newspaper in his hometown of Kenosha, Wisconsin. His freelanced articles have appeared in a variety of radio-related publications since 1967, most recently in "Popular Communications", and he's currently involved with the "Radio Database International" publication compiled and edited by Larry Magne. In the past, Don has also worked in the broadcasting industry, both in radio and television. He is married with three children.

Don kindly agreed to answer a few of my questions....

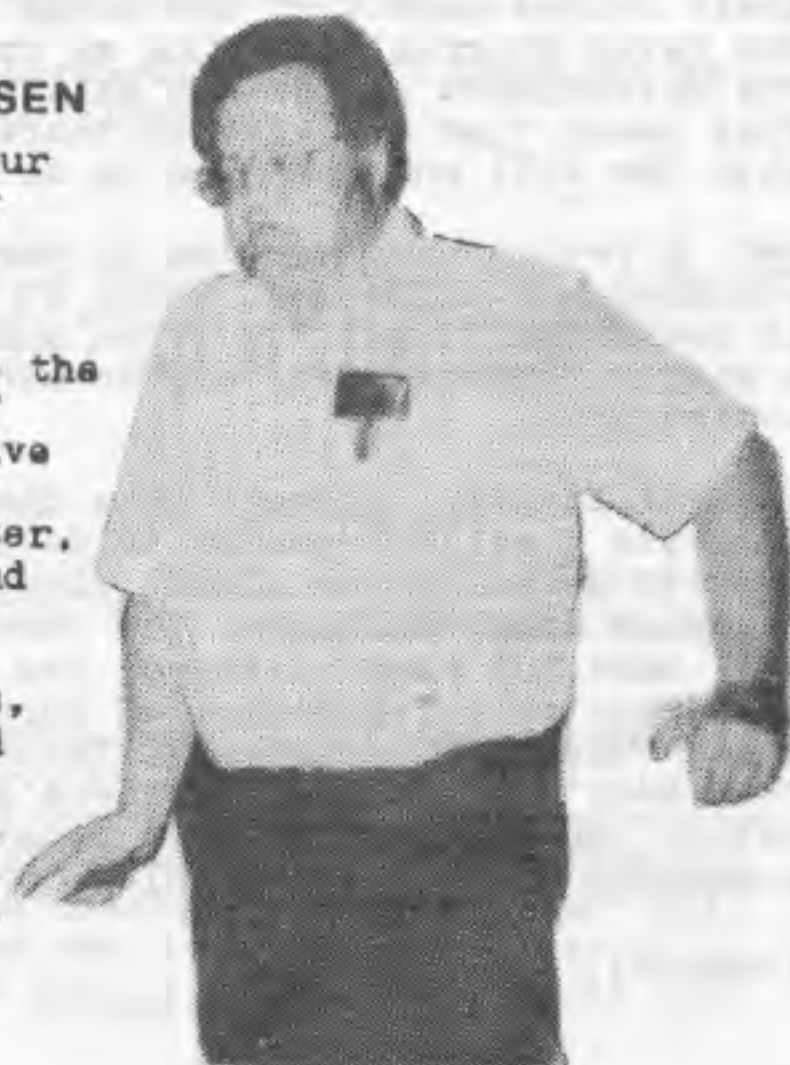
INTERVIEW

THE SHORTWAVE CENTER INTERVIEW: DON JENSEN

SWC: Turn-around has always been common in our hobby. People aspire to the top of the hobby ranks then suddenly disappear. How have you managed to stay active for 30-plus years?

Jensen: I began DXing in 1947, introduced to the hobby by my father and an initial logging of HCJB. I was thrilled that shortwave radio gave me the opportunity to "see" all sorts of distant and exotic places. Now, 36 years later, that still thrills me. I am a DXer and I find the quest for the far away and far-out DX stations fascinating. That may not be the choice of others; it is mine. Over the years, a number of special interests have sustained my activities. I've concentrated on certain areas of the world--the Indian subcontinent, later, Indonesia and then Latin America in general and the Andean region in particular. As my friends know, my last frontier--someday--will be to seriously pursue the Brazilian stations. But not yet!

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INTERVIEW (cont'd)

SWC: Since 1969 you've been involved with your own bulletin, "Numero Uno". Why did you feel a need to start your own newsletter?

Jensen: Unlike today, in 1969 there was no hobby source for quickly exchanging hot DX tips. Club bulletins were monthly; DX programs were taped in advance, or for other reasons, had mostly outdated information. My own DXing needs were not being met. So I invited some DXing friends and acquaintances to exchange their top DX tips via a weekly newsletter I proposed to publish. Some 700-plus weekly issues later, NU is still operating.

SWC: NU's invitation-only status has left it open to rather heated charges as a "secret society"--a closed group of upper echelon DXers who hoard information rather than pass it on. Can you respond?

Jensen: Any so-called controversy about NU is much ado about nothing, and probably concerns only a relative few persons. I suspect most NASWA members have little interest in it. But since you asked, let me observe that there isn't anything sinister about a small group of DXers who choose to "put and take", sharing their DX loggings with each other via a weekly mailing. Its membership was limited to 30 members when it was organized in 1969. The number was arbitrarily selected, but it represents about the maximum that can be handled by the two co-editors without creating an impossible workload. Surely there are far more than 30 top, experienced DXers in the world today, so why should there be a big deal about membership and a supposed elite. Any complainers would do better to gather together other active, top DXers and exchange their own tips via a weekly newsletter. NU has no monopoly on DX news nor on the means for exchanging it among a group of members. NU members are individuals and make their own decisions about whether they want to support other clubs or bulletins. Many do, and several, in fact, are FRENEX editors. Hoard information? You can't hoard information! NU members, through their interchange, may have a time advantage, with a weekly publication, in getting tips from fellow members, but none at all in learning what non-members are hearing. DX news is published in hobby bulletins or broadcast on DX programs sooner or later... and usually it is sooner.

SWC: Your series, "On To The Top", has appeared twice in FRENEX, first in 1972. Can anyone with ambition be a serious DXer or are there certain intellectual skills one must possess?

Jensen: The "On To The Top" series was specifically directed to those who, by their own definition, are DXers who want to do their best in pursuing their chosen aspect of the hobby. It will be, simply, irrelevant to those who favor program listening as opposed to DXing. Being a top DXer requires the development of certain skills and the gaining of required knowledge. That takes time and effort; there's no shortcut. Yes, I think that anyone with the will and ambition to do that can become the serious DXer you mention.

SWC: A reoccurring problem in our hobby is fraudulent reports, both to stations and bulletins. While it may be easy to dismiss as inexperience, it seems the culprit is often someone who is eager to climb the ranks in a shortcut manner. Why are so many in our hobby obsessed with "being somebody"?

Jensen: Frankly, I don't like the term fraudulent reports, since that suggests a willful desire to deceive. I think this rarely occurs. Incorrect reports in bulletins almost always are the result of mistakes, not fraud. Everyone makes mistakes. The careless listener, the inexperienced listener will make too many mistakes. Too many, over a period of time, will earn the reporter a reputation as unreliable. His logging reports cannot be relied upon for accuracy. I think we are all interested in being considered "somebody". I don't think there's anything wrong with that...it's human nature. But it's best to be considered the "somebody" who is careful, accurate, solid and reliable.

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INTERVIEW (cont'd)

SWC: Verifications have long been a hobby staple, especially to the serious DXer. In recent years, economic factors have caused both station and listener to reconsider. Would your hobby involvement be incomplete without veries or is the pure joy of listening enough?

Jensen: It is purely a personal choice, but I enjoy collecting veries. It isn't important whether they actually are proof of reception, since I don't send a report until I am personally convinced that I have, in fact, heard the station. QSLs are part of the hobby tradition I grew up with. They are a tangible part of an otherwise relatively intangible hobby. In a choice between having a verie and not having one, I opt for the former. I recognize that many fine DXers choose not to collect QSLs. That is their choice and I respect it.

SWC: The pursuit of veries, especially to smaller stations, is perceived as rather one-sided. How can we improve our rapport with small, poor operations when we literally "take our veries and run"?

Jensen: I don't consider correspondence with Third World stations to be one-sided, a case of taking the verie and running. The fact that these stations reply, when there is no real reason why they should, suggests that something in a listener's report triggered a desire to return the contact, making it a genuine person-to-person reaching out. I think there is considerably more interaction in a report to a DX station that draws a reply than in the usually impersonal QSL card from a faceless station functionary at a major international broadcaster.

SWC: Program listeners contend that we are missing the point by ignoring the programming directed to us by international broadcasters in favor of chasing weak, rarely heard stations. Do you really think that shortwave is a successful information and entertainment medium?

Jensen: While we may be missing THEIR point, there are a number of valid points in our listening hobby. There is nothing inherently better about tuning in English language programs from an international broadcaster than, say, really enjoying a particularly haunting huayno from a backcountry Peruvian station at 1030 GMT. While I think the major international broadcasters do a generally good job in the area of news and information, I don't consider their entertainment broadcasts particularly good.

SWC: Many years ago you were instrumental in NASWA's switch to all-shortwave broadcast in content. As a former editor, and currently chairman of the Countries List Committee, how do you feel about NASWA today?

Jensen: As one of NASWA's most veteran members--20 years--I consider it to be consistently the best of the shortwave clubs.

SWC: What improvements can we make?

Jensen: Editors and members should continually strive to make the contents of FRENEX more accurate, useful, informative, educational. That sounds like a vague generalization...and it is. And it may be trite...but it's still true.

SWC: Where are we going as a hobby?

Jensen: I don't know. And I've reached the point where I'm not looking for any cosmic truths. I'd be satisfied just to be able to continue to enjoy DXing as I enjoy it, for years to come.

SWC: Don, thanks for the "sage" advice on behalf of all of us. You're a class gentleman, as anyone who's met you can attest.

Those of us who regularly listen to "SWL Digest" over RCI were pleasantly surprised to learn that Larry Magne's "Radio Database International" will become a regular feature on the program. And who's going to fill us in on the Tropical Band scene? Don, again. Now that's going to be good! (JH)