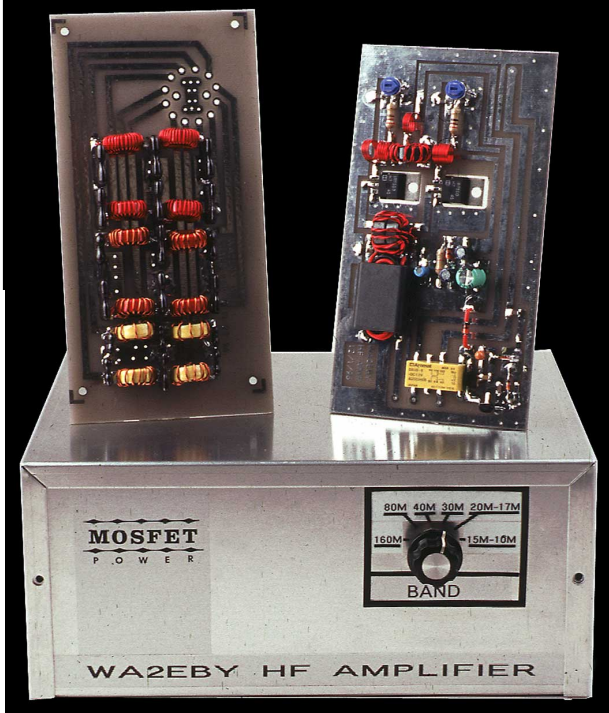


By Mike Kossor, WA2EBY



A Broadband HF Amplifier Using Low-Cost Power MOSFETs

Part 2—Let's put the finishing touches on this all-band HF amplifier!

Last month,¹¹ I covered the history and development of this 40 W (average) amplifier. I'm sure you're anxious to get your amplifier finished and on the air, so let's get going!

Amplifier Construction

The amplifier is constructed on a double-sided PC board with plated through holes to provide top-side ground connections. I used chip resistors and capacitors to simplify construction, but leaded capacitors may work if lead lengths are kept short. First, assemble all chip capacitors and resistors on the PC board. Tweezers help to handle

chip components. Work with only one component value at a time (chip caps and resistors are very difficult to identify!). Chip capacitor and resistor mounting is simplified by tinning one side of the PC board trace with solder before positioning the capacitor or resistor. Touch the soldering iron tip to the capacitor or resistor to tack it in place. Finish mounting by soldering the opposite side of the component. *Don't apply too much heat to chip capacitors.* The metalized contacts on the capacitor can be damaged or completely removed if too much heat is applied. Use a 15 to 20 W soldering iron and limit soldering time to five seconds.

Mount axial-leaded resistors, diodes and remaining capacitors next. To avoid

damaging them, mount inductors and transformers last. L1 and L2 are wound on a 0.25-inch drill-bit shaft. By wrapping the wire around the shaft 10 times, you'll get 9½ turns. The last turn arcs only a half-turn before entering the PC board. L3 is wound on a 0.190-inch diameter drill bit with 3½ turns wound the same way as L1 and L2. Mounting K1 is simplified by first bending all its leads 90° outward so it lies flat on the PC board. Use a wrist strap connected to ground through a 1 MΩ resistor to bleed off static body charge while handling MOSFETs, and do the work on an antistatic mat connected to ground via a 1 MΩ resistor. The gate input can be damaged by electrostatic discharge!

¹¹Notes appear on page 46.

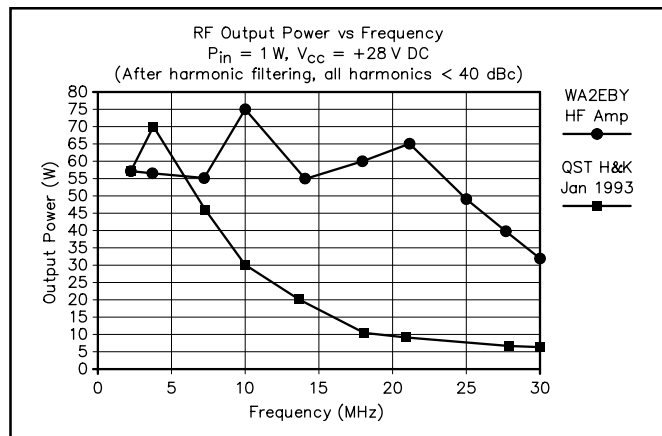


Figure 4—RF output power comparison of the Hint and Kink amplifier and this design.

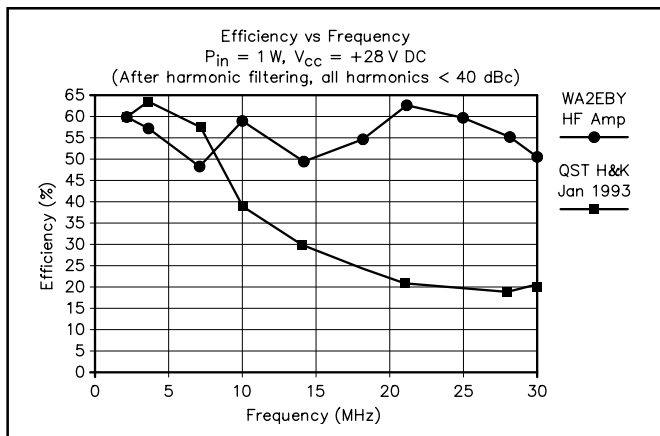


Figure 5—Efficiency comparison of the Hint and Kink amplifier and this one.

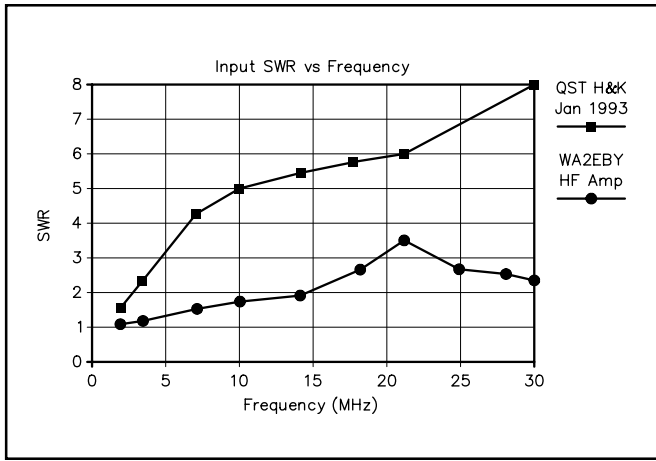


Figure 6—Input SWR comparison of the two amplifiers.

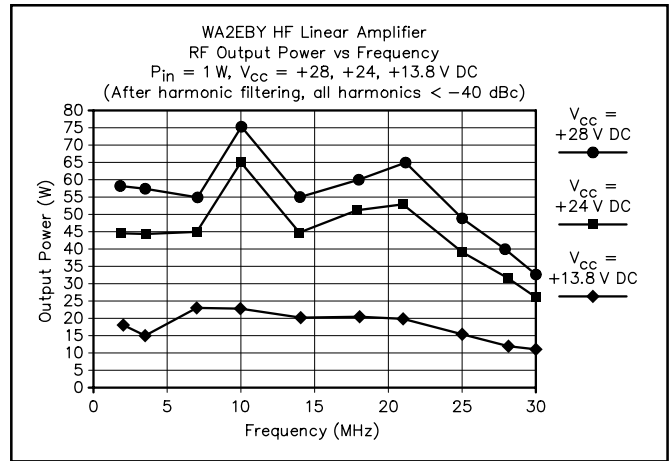


Figure 7—RF output power versus supply voltage of this amplifier.

When winding T3, wind the primary first and add the secondary winding over the primary. Be sure to use Teflon-insulated wire for T3's windings; the high operating temperatures encountered will likely melt standard hook-up wire insulation.

Heat Sinking

Together, Q1 and Q2 dissipate up to 59 W. A suitable heat sink is required to prevent the transistors from overheating and damage. I used an AAVID 244609B02 heat sink originally designed for dc-to-dc power converters. The amplifier PC board and heat sink are attached to an aluminum enclosure by two #4-40 screws drilled through the PC board, enclosure and heat sink at diagonally opposite corners. A rectangular cutout in the enclosure allows Q1 and Q2 direct access to the heat sink. This is essential because of the large thermal impedance associated with the TO-220 package (more on this topic later). Mark the locations of the transistor-tab mounting-hole location in the center of the heat sink in between the cool-

ing fins. Disassemble the heat sink to drill 0.115 inch holes for #4-40 mounting screws, or tap #4-40 mounting holes in the center of the heat-sink fins.

Use mica insulators and grommets when mounting Q1 and Q2 to prevent the #4-40 mounting screws from shorting the TO-220 package drain connections (tabs) to ground. Coat both sides of the mica insulator with a *thin* layer of thermal compound to improve the thermal conduction between the transistor tab and the heat sink. Be sure to install the mica insulator on the heat sink *before* assembling the amplifier PC board to the enclosure and heat sink. The mica insulators are larger than the cut outs in the PC board, making it impossible to install them after the PC board is mounted.

Low-Pass Filter Construction

Inductor winding information for the low-pass filters is provided in [Table 1](#).

Single Band

A PC-board trace is available on the

amplifier PC board next to amplifier output (J3) to allow the installation of a single-band low-pass filter between the terminals of J3 and K1's input, J4. This is handy if you intend to use the amplifier on one band only. The input inductor of the low-pass filter connects from J3 to the single PC trace adjacent to J3. The output inductor connects in series between the single PC trace to J4. The three filter capacitors connect from J3, J4 and the PC-board trace near J3 to ground. *This single trace is not used when multiple filters are required.* Remember to remove the single trace adjacent to J3 on the amplifier PC board before attaching the amplifier board between the RF connectors on the enclosure's rear panel.

Multiple-Band Filters

Using the amplifier on more than one band requires a different approach. A set of six low-pass filters is built on a double-sided PC board with plated through holes to provide top-side ground connections. A PC-board mount, two-pole, six-position

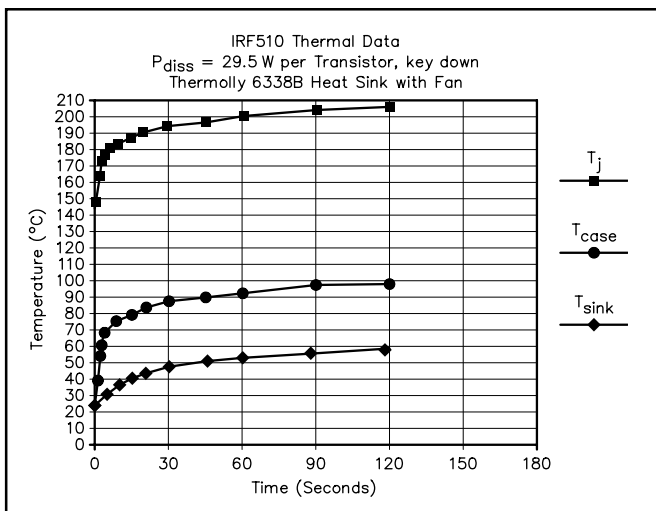


Figure 8—Thermal performance of the amplifier during key-down conditions.

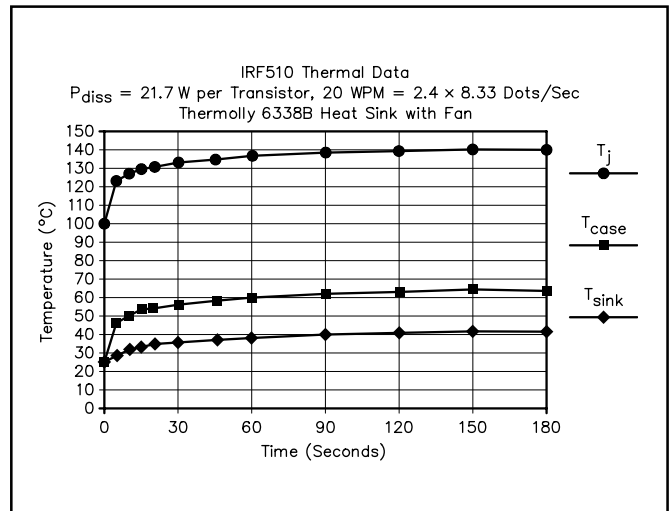


Figure 9—Thermal performance of the amplifier during simulated CW conditions.

rotary switch does all low-pass filter selection. Silver-mica, leaded capacitors are used in all the filters. On 160 through 30 meters, T-50-2 toroids are used in the inductors. T-50-6 toroids are used for inductors on 20 through 10 meters. The number of turns wound on a toroid core are counted on the toroid's OD as the wire passes through the core center (*The ARRL Handbook*¹² provides complete details for winding toroids). Assemble one filter section at a time starting with the 160, 80, 40-meter filter, then the 30-meter filter. With the switch mounting position at your upper left, the filter input (C1) is near the top edge of the board and the filter output (C3) is near the bottom edge. *The last two filters are out of sequence*; the 15-10 meter filter comes *before* the 20-17 meter filter) and the inputs/outputs are reversed to simplify the PC-board layout. The input capacitors, C13 and C16, are mounted on the board *bottom edge*, and output capacitors, C15 and C18, are on the *top edge*.

Use care when assembling the rotary switch. All 14 terminals must fit through the PC board without damaging or bending the pins. Make sure there are no bent pins before you attempt assembly. Insert the rotary switch into the PC board. Do *not* press the rotary switch all the way into the PC-board holes flush with the ground plane! If you do, the top flange of the signal pins may short to the ground plane.

Table 1
Low-Pass Filter Inductor Winding Information

(Refer to Figure 3 in Part 1)

Inductor Number	No. of Turns	Core
L1, L2	30 turns	T-50-2
L3, L4	22 turns	T-50-2
L5, L6	16 turns	T-50-2
L7, L8	14 turns	T-50-2
L9, L10	11 turns	T-50-6
L11, L12	8 turns	T-50-6

Note: All inductors are wound with #22 enameled wire except for L1–L4, which are wound with #24 enameled wire.

Bias Adjustment

The biasing procedure is straightforward and requires only a multimeter to complete. First, set R1 and R2 fully counterclockwise, (0 V on the gates of Q1 and Q2). Terminate the RF input and outputs with a 50 Ω load. Next, connect the 28 V supply to the amplifier in series with a multimeter set to the 0–200 mA current range. Measure and record the idling current drawn by the 5 V bias supply. The value should be approximately 9.5 mA (28 – 5.1 V) / 2.4 kΩ = 9.5 mA). Set Q1's drain current to 10 mA by adjusting R1 until the 28 V supply current increases by 10 mA above the idling current (9.5 + 10 = 19.5 mA). Next, adjust R2 for a Q2 drain current of 10 mA. This is accomplished by adjusting R2 until the 28 V supply current increases by an additional 10 mA (to 29.5 mA).

Amplifier Performance

With a 28 V power supply and 1 W of drive, the RF output power of this amplifier exceeds 40 W from 1.8 MHz through 28 MHz. Peak performance occurs at 10 MHz, providing about 75 W after filtering! A performance comparison between this amplifier and my modified version of the Hint and Kink amplifier mentioned earlier is shown in Figure 4.

As shown in Figure 5, this amplifier achieves an efficiency of better than 50% over its frequency range, except at 7 MHz where the efficiency drops to 48%. In contrast, the Hint and Kink amplifier delivers greater efficiency between 1.8 and 7 MHz, but it drops rapidly to only 20% as frequency is increased.

Figure 6 compares the input SWR of the two amplifiers. The Hint and Kink amplifier's SWR is acceptable (< 2:1) only at 1.8 MHz. This amplifier is better, however it, too, exceeds 2:1 above 14 MHz. The input SWR of this amplifier can be improved to better than 2:1 on all bands by adding a 3 dB pad (R8–R10 of Figure 2) at the input and supplying 2 W to the pad input. This keeps the amplifier drive at 1 W.

Figure 7 graphs this amplifier's RF output power as a function of drain supply voltage. During this test, the amplifier RF drive level was kept constant at 1 W. As you can see, even when using a 13.8 V dc supply, the amplifier provides over 10 W output (a gain of more than 10 dB) from 1.8 to 30 MHz.

Operation

The amplifier requires no tuning while operating on any HF amateur band. You must, however, *be sure to select the proper low-pass filter prior to transmitting*. If the wrong low-pass filter is selected, damage to the MOSFETs may result. Damage will likely result if you attempt to operate the amplifier on a band with the low-pass filter selected for a lower frequency. For example, driving the amplifier with a 21 MHz signal while the 1.8 MHz low-pass filter is selected will likely destroy Q1 and/or Q2.

The amplifier can also be damaged by overheating. This limitation is imposed by the TO-220 packages in which Q1 and Q2 are housed. The thermal resistance from junction to case is a whopping 3.5°C/W. This huge value makes it virtually impossible to keep the junction temperature from exceeding the +150°C target for good reliability. Consider the following conditions: key down, 1 W input, 53 W output on 7 MHz (worst-case band for efficiency). The amplifier consumes 28 V × 4 A = 112 W, of which 53 W are sent to the antenna, so 59 W (112 W – 53 W = 59 W) are dissipated in Q1 and Q2. Assuming equal current sharing between Q1 and Q2, each transistor dissipates 29.5 W. To keep the transistor junction temperature below +150°C requires preventing the transistor case temperature from exceeding 46.8°C

(150 – [3.5 × 29.5]) while dissipating 29.5 W. Also, there is a temperature rise across the mica insulator between the transistor case and heat sink of 0.5°C/W. That makes the maximum allowable heat-sink temperature limited to 46.8 – (0.5 × 29.5) = 32°C. In other words, the heat sink must dissipate 59 W (29.5 from each transistor) with only a 7°C rise above room temperature (25°C). Even if the junction temperatures were allowed to reach the absolute maximum of 175°C, the heat sink temperature must not exceed 57°C. Accomplishing this requires a heat sink with a thermal resistance of (57 – 25) / 59 = 0.54°C/W. This is far less than the 1.9°C/W rating of the AAVID 244609B02 heat sink I used. The situation may seem bleak, but all is not lost. These calculations make it clear that the amplifier should not be used for AM, FM or any other continuous-carrier operation. The amplifier should be used only for CW and SSB operation where the duty cycle is significantly reduced.

Thermal performance of the amplifier is illustrated in Figure 8. Data was taken under dc operating conditions with power-dissipation levels set equal to conditions under RF operation. A RadioShack brushless 12 V dc fan (RS 273-243A) blows air across the heat sink. Key down, the maximum rated junction temperature is reached in as little as five seconds as illustrated in Figure 8. Prolonged key-down transmissions should be avoided for this reason.

Under intermittent CW conditions, the situation is very different. Transistor-case temperatures reached 66°C after operating four minutes under simulated CW conditions at 20 WPM (60 ms on, 60 ms off). The corresponding junction temperature is +141°C (based on an equivalent RMS power dissipation of 21.7 W per transistor). This keeps the junction temperature under the 150°C target (see Figure 9). One simple way to reduce power dissipation is to reduce the power-supply voltage to 24 V. RF output power will decrease about 10 W from the maximum levels achieved with a 28 V supply.

From a thermal standpoint, the IRF510 power MOSFET is a poor choice for this RF amplifier application. Although I must say I am impressed with the robustness of these devices considering the times I spent testing them key down, five minutes at a time, without failure. Q1 and/or Q2 may need to be replaced after a year or so of operation because of the compromise in reliability. Considering their low cost, that is not a bad trade-off.

Stability

High gain, broad bandwidth and close input/output signal routing (within the TR relay) all work against stability. With a good load (< 2:1 SWR) the amplifier is stable from 1.8 MHz through 39 MHz. Oscillation was observed when the transmitter frequency was increased to 40 MHz. The

output load match also affects stability. Oscillation was observed on 27.5 MHz when the load SWR was 3:1. This should not be a problem since the frequency is outside the ham bands. I spent a great deal of time trying to make this design unconditionally stable even with loads exceeding 3:1 SWR without sacrificing output power (gain) at 28 MHz without success. I did identify some reasonable compromises.

One of the easiest ways to improve stability and the input SWR seen by the RF source is to add an RF attenuator (pad) at the amplifier input. An attenuator is absolutely required if the transmitter (driver) provides more than 1 W to the amplifier. R8, R9 and R10 form an RF attenuator that attenuates the transmitter drive level, but does not attenuate received signals because it is only in the circuit when K1 is energized. To drive this amplifier with a 2-W-output transmitter requires use of a 3-dB pad. The pad improves the amplifier input SWR and the isolation between the amplifier's input and output. The drawback is that 1 W is wasted in the pad. Likewise, a 5-W driver requires use of a 7-dB pad, but 4 W are wasted in the pad. (Values for R8, R9 and R10 to make a 3-dB pad and a 7-dB pad are given in the parts list.) Installing a pad requires cutting the PC-board trace under R9, otherwise R9 would be shorted out by the trace. Make a small cut (0.1 inch

wide) in the trace under R9 before soldering R9 in position. R8 and R10 have the same values, but may have different power ratings. Connect R10 between the RF input side of R9 and ground. Install R8 between the amplifier side of R9 and ground.

An impedance mismatch between the output of a 1-W-output driver and the amplifier input can be a source of instability. (Obviously, if the driving transmitter's output power is only 1 W, you can't use a pad as described earlier.) If you encounter stability problems, try these remedies: Place a resistor in parallel with L1 and L2 to decrease the Q of the amplifier matching network (try values between 50 and 220 Ω). Try reducing the value of L3 or eliminating L3 entirely. Both of these modifications improve stability, but reduce the amplifier's output power above 21 MHz.

Summary

This project demonstrates how inexpensive power MOSFETs can be used to build an all-band linear HF power amplifier. Frequency of operation is extended beyond the limits of previous designs using the IRF510 and improved input-impedance matching. Long-term reliability is recognized as a compromise because of the poor thermal performance of the low-cost TO-220 package.

If you have been thinking about adding an amplifier to your QRP station, this


project is a good way to experiment with amplifier design and is an excellent way to become familiar with surface-mount "chip" components. I made arrangements with Mouser Electronics and Amidon Inc to provide parts kits for this project at a discounted price (see the parts list in Part 1). These parts kits make it very easy to get started and more economical to "homebrew" this project.

Acknowledgments

I want to thank the following individuals associated with this project: Harry Randel, WD2AID, for his untiring support in capturing the schematic diagram and parts layout of this project; Al Roehm, W2OBJ, for his continued support and encouragement in developing, testing, editing and publishing this project; Larry Guttadore, WB2SPF, for building, testing and photographing the project; Dick Jansson, WD4FAB, for thermal-design suggestions; Adam O'Donnell, N3RCS, for his assistance building prototypes; and my wife, Laura, N2TDL, for her encouragement and support throughout this project.

Notes

¹¹Mike Kossor, "A Broadband HF Amplifier Using Low-Cost Power MOSFETs—Part 1," *QST*, Mar 1999, pp 40-43.

¹²R. Dean Straw, N6BV, *The 1999 ARRL Handbook for Radio Amateurs*, (Newington: ARRL), 76th ed, pp 25-23ff. 

Strays

I would like to get in touch with...

◇...hams who have lived and worked on Kwajalein Atoll, Marshall Islands. I'd like to set up a meeting at the Hawaii Kwaj Reunion in 2000 and build a database of Kwaj hams. Contact Bernard Fineberg, AB7HB (ex-KX6AG, V73I) at fineberg@oregontrail.net or PO Box 208, Irrigon, OR 97844-0208.

◇... the ham who worked with me to build the radio-controlled Comet sailplane model that was flown in the 1940 and 1941 AMA National contests in Chicago. Bob Reder, 2104 Valley Lo Lane, Glenview, IL 60025.

◇...anyone who has an operating manual for a TRACOR rubidium frequency standard Model 600A (preferred), or for model 304B, C, or D. Tom Barton, thbarton@worldnet.att.net; tel 212-292-4444.

◇...other radio amateurs of the Seventh-Day Adventist faith. Contact me at kw8t@cwix.com, or write to 58 Byron Dr, Smithsburg, MD 21783-1565. Jim Hoffer, KW8T.

◇...anyone who has specifications for the ADI/Pryme AT-600HP dual-band radio so that I can make my own programming interface. Please e-mail W6NCT at w6nct@hotmail.com.

◇...anyone who has QSLs from my father, William (Bill) Prater, W5BLT. He became a Silent Key in April 1978. I've been able to obtain my father's call sign thanks to the vanity call program and I am trying to find his old QSLs or any other materials in order to establish my (our) call heritage. Please contact me via e-mail at w5blt@ix.netcom.com. Bob Prater, W5BLT.

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mation and a list of Texas counties, send an SASE to: Worked All Texas Award, c/o Temple Amateur Radio Club, PO Box 616, Temple, TX 76703, or visit their Web site at <http://www.tarc.org>.

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