

Field Test **Minelab Vanquish**

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Vanquish 540 unboxed.

Is the New Entry Level the Next Level?

From knights on horseback to Hollywood style movie intros, Minelab announced the new Vanquish range in style at last year's Detectival. The Vanquish is styled as a beginner's machine with next level features. The new Vanquish range comes with a choice of three models: 340, 440, and 540 (which is the machine tested here). The range is aimed primarily at the beginner level detectorist who may wish to start with the 340 model and over time progress to the top of the range Vanquish 540. A similar strategy has been adopted by other manufacturers over the years, but this is a new and exciting market for Minelab.



Vanquish 540 headphones.

Features

- Multi-IQ frequency.
- Splash proof control box and waterproof coil to 3ft.
- Powered by 4 x AA NiMH rechargeable batteries.
- Low Latency Bluetooth headphones.
- Bluetooth audio (540 only).
- Vibration mode.
- Collapsible shaft (25-52 inches).
- Compact and lightweight – 2.8lbs (1.3kg).
- V12 12"x9" Double-D – V8 8"x5" Double-D coils.
- Updateable software online.
- Backlit screen + LED flashlight.
- 4 search modes.
- Target ID from -9 to 40.
- Minelab wired headphones with 3.5mm/1/8-inch jack.

A Machine for the Beginner?

Minelab, as we well know, have developed some very good machines over the years, recently highlighted with the very successful introduction of the Equinox series aimed at the intermediate / pro detectorist. So why bring out a lower-end machine?

Firstly, I will not be comparing this machine against its big brother, the Equinox 600/800, as this would be like comparing the ORX to the Deus or the Simplex to the Anfibio and not a fair comparison. The Vanquish is

aimed at someone new taking up the hobby, someone who has never held a detector before and just wants to switch it on and start finding out about the wonderful world of detecting. Or you may simply want to upgrade from your existing model and benefit from a lighter machine and its well-designed compactness.

Although this test focuses on the 540 model, the 340 and 440 models are very similar, but without some of the options such as more discrimination segments, bluetooth, more volume levels and target tones, a back-lit display or pinpointer function (not available on the 340). But the key feature of all three models is that they come with the Multi-IQ technology.

At first, the vibrant red plastic



Battery compartment.

Field Test Minelab Vanquish



The Vanquish 540 fully assembled and in compact mode.



The very comfortable grip.

moulded components of the vanquish jump out at you and the traditional control box design may not be liked by some users as it is bulky compared to similar priced machines. I am not a fashion victim, but my children commented on how it looked 'more funky' compared to recent machines that I have tested. Its performance is what matters to me.

Assembly and First Impressions

Out of the box, the 540 comes with Minelab wired headphones (Bluetooth wireless on the Pro Pack), control box cover, 12-inch V12 coil (with coil cover), 4 x Minelab AA batteries and a compact USB charger. Assembly was a doddle, just slotting in the shafts and arm rest and locking with the new quick release cam mechanism. The machine felt extremely sturdy with no wobble whatsoever from the shaft or coil – it may look a bit 'plasticky', but the 540 sure does feel strong and yet remarkably lightweight.

One thing I did especially like is the arm cup which is slightly wider than other machines in the same league and the plastic is very flexible and

possibly made of polypropylene which should not crack or break over time like polycarbonate. With the arm cup being bigger though, I did find that you really do need the Velcro strap supplied to keep your arm secure. Also, the unique rubber moulded handle really does work well especially when wet and is easy to clean as opposed to the traditional sponge type used on some machines.

The machine does have a Bluetooth option for headphones but I did not have these on the test – you can sync your own headphones which is a great feature. As for the foldable headphones supplied, they were similar to those that come with the Minelab Gold Monster 1000 and felt very comfortable and of an extremely good quality.

First Time Out

After eight hours charge from the supplied USB charger and Nickel Metal Hydride batteries, the 540 was ready for its first time out. Having undone the quick release cam lock and slid out the arm rest and shaft (metal and not plastic), I turned on the 540. Minelab quote "Turn on, wait 5 seconds, go detecting" – so once I heard the pleasant Minelab tones of the machine establishing its automatic noise cancel, I was ready to go.

I am fortunate to have acquired a very large permission in recent months with my detecting buddy James, which comprises 32 fields with a mixture of forest, pasture and currently ploughed and drilled land, with plenty of foot-paths. This was an ideal test for the



Supplied USB charger.



Starting the field test.



Crotonal bell.



Hammered up.

Vanquish, even though the ground was sodden from heavy rain in the past few days. We had been over the chosen section of field three times already, but I was keen to see how the Vanquish performed.

James and I entered the field and I selected Coin Mode and set off without changing any of the settings. With the Sensitivity turned to the maximum, the machine did not chirp or produce any false signals whilst detecting across the wet, deep ploughed field. I was delighted to note that the over-head power lines did not affect the machine one bit. Within ten minutes I had a clear signal reading 16-19, so I used the rubber pinpointer button (easily accessible on the control box) to locate my target.

Digging down through what seemed like cold, melted chocolate, I spotted a small button smack bang in the centre of the hole. James, who by now was on the other side of the field, suddenly looked up, spotted the distinctive red Vanquish and that I had already found something and headed over. He skidded across the muddy field like a pensioner walking on ice in the winter and came over to see the new machine and what I had found. After a short chat and a chance for James to have a few minutes swinging the Vanquish and playing with the controls, he headed off with his machine and I carried on into the centre of the field.

Throughout the day, the Vanquish 540 was a pleasure to use in many ways: the lovely tones, the sturdiness of the machine, the balance and ergonomics which might not shout at you visibly but I am sure are the result of many, many hours of testing from Minelab as

my arm did not ache once for the eight hours of use that day. The pinpointing function is excellent for a machine of this price and the depth indicator wasn't bad in determining the depth, but not totally accurate – this is nothing new as I have yet to use a machine that gets this right consistently. In all my excitement to try out the new machine, I had left my pinpointer in the car, so not having to dig excessive plugs was a real bonus.

As the day continued I found a wide range of items using the different modes on the Vanquish and imagined how a beginner would feel as I was quite happy with its performance so far.

Late in the afternoon I sat down at one end of the field on a broken branch from an ash tree next to a stream that

was flowing fast after the heavy rain from the past few days. Looking at the forest next to me, I decided that would be my next challenge with the Vanquish. Unfortunately, I hadn't realised that the branch wasn't as strong as it looked and it suddenly snapped and I slipped five feet into the stream with the detector breaking my fall on the bottom of the bank! In horror and shock I thought, "That's it! I have broken it before the first day is even out." Lifting up the now mud-covered Vanquish I checked the shaft and coil whilst turning the machine on – fortunately all was fine. I am not the heaviest of people but was impressed on how the machine took my fall.

I continued into the forest that was laden with broken bottles and shot gun



Immersing the coil in water.



Control box display and underside.



Vanquish 540 field test finds.

shells from previous shoots and possibly a break for beaters over the years. Still on full Sensitivity, the machine performed well whilst knocking the odd twig and piece of bark on the ground without any chatter or chirping. It also produced regular signals from spent and buried shotgun cartridges that I dug quite a few of whilst learning the machine.

I then headed into a widened and shallower part of the stream to test the coil in water. Again, this performed well with the sensitivity turned down just one notch, and produced a very worn disc (possibly a coin) from a signal reading 18-21 some three inches down in the shingle and sandy bed.

In Coin Mode and back to the standard settings, I then headed back onto the field and met up with James. He was impressed to see how much the Vanquish had found in such a short time and asked me, with a smile on his face, when I thought I might get a hammered. We both turned our machines back on and headed together back along the side of the field until I had a very faint signal, initially reading 13-15. Having removed the top few centimetres of soil with my muddy boot, this increased to 18-20. I pinpointed and dug another muddy



The worn coin.

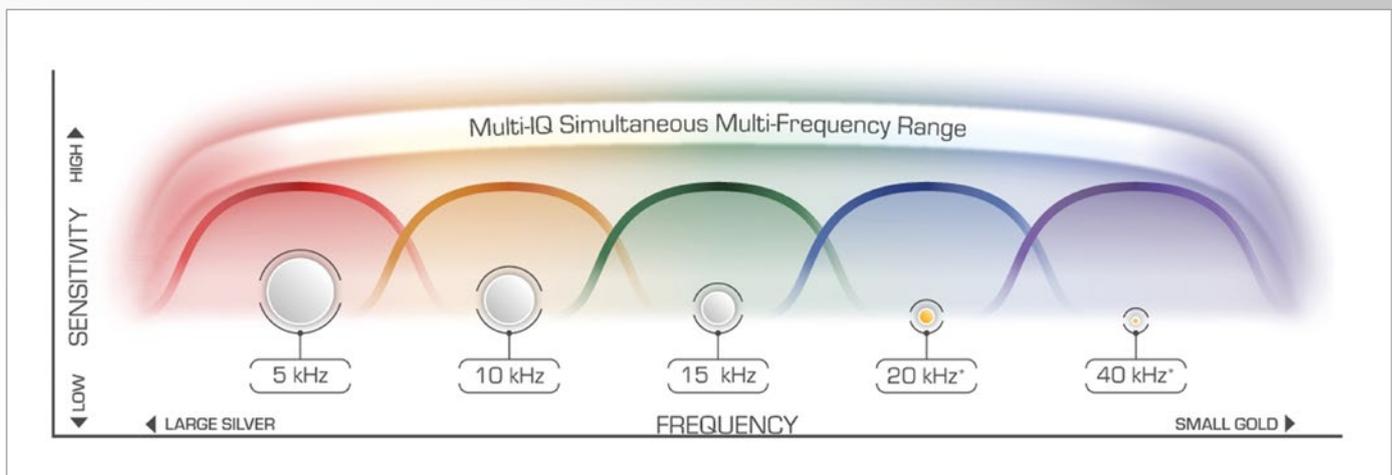
plug six-inches down. Smack bang at the bottom of the plug was a hammered coin! I quickly reached for my phone and took a photo, knowing James would see something of interest had come up. The coin wasn't in the greatest of condition, but it was a hammered nonetheless and the Vanquish had done well considering the soil conditions. I shouted over to James that I had found a hammered, but he clearly thought I was joking – good job I took the photo as I don't think he would have believed me otherwise!

Search Modes and Settings

Throughout the first day I switched between the different pre-set search modes on the 540: Coin, Relic and

Jewellery, and notched the discrimination down to zero from the standard settings. Each search profile has a different Recovery mode: 5 on coin, 6 on relic and 7 on jewellery with a total of 5 Tones and 10 levels of Volume and Sensitivity. This is where lower end models of the 340 and 440 differ to the 540 as they have fewer options. For example, the 340 has 4 levels of Sensitivity and 3 levels of Volume and 3 Tones (Low, Mid, High). The 540 also has the option to switch the Iron Bias from high (default) to low by pressing the horseshoe button (similar to that on the Equinox) for two seconds, which then displays a small screw icon on the bottom left of the screen. I found this great for easily and quickly checking my signals without having to go into too many settings prior to digging my target and found this worked well during the test. Like the Equinox, if you press the horseshoe, you immediately put the machine into all metal mode, removing any discrimination.

The Vanquish settings were very easy to change and the display is clear and concise so as not to confuse a beginner and the LED backlit screen is a nice touch too and ideal for those early mornings or late evenings as it really does illuminate the screen just



Minelab Multi-IQ frequency.

enough and not blind you. I like also the way you can save a custom setting on the Vanquish – this saves your favourite search mode and your own discrimination pattern in this mode without losing your changes when the detector is powered off.

Multi-IQ Technology

One of the real features of the Vanquish series is the Multi-IQ technology which really sets it apart from other entry-level machines. So how does Multi-IQ work for those new to detecting? Without complicating things, low frequencies typically give more depth on large targets than high frequencies, which are usually more sensitive to small targets. With the Multi-IQ technology, you can operate across the full spectrum of frequencies simultaneously for maximum results.

As you can no doubt imagine, Multi-IQ provides quite an advantage over other single frequency detectors, but it is not as straightforward as that and there are a few single frequency machines that manage quite well on highly mineralised ground. However, in my own experience Multi-IQ is a very good feature to have.

As for the battery power, after eight hours on the field with headphones, the Vanquish had only used one of the three bars which was very pleasing. I plugged the batteries and charger into my car's USB port on the way home and it brought it back to full charge for my next outing...perfect!

Conclusion

This is my first initial field test on the 540 which I intend to follow up with a

more in-depth review in time as I have only had the chance to use the machine for about 20 hours so far and have not yet tested it on the beach nor tested its full capabilities on different types of soil. I would also like to see how the 340 and 440 models perform.

With so many machines having come onto the market in the past 12 months and all the associated online videos, chat rooms, online reviews and club discussions, it must be daunting for a beginner or someone wishing to upgrade their machine to make a choice. Minelab are renowned for producing good machines in recent times and their entry into this 'beginner' end of the market has come as a bit of a surprise to some people, including me. I only have a couple of small criticisms,



A close-up of my hammered find with the Vanquish 540.



Vanquish 540 coil.

one being the lack of water-proofing. The machine is only shower proof if the supplied control box cover is used and the coil only up to a depth of one metre. Not a big issue necessarily, unless you fall in a ditch like I did or accidentally dropped the machine in the sea when beach detecting or leave it out in the rain for prolonged periods – then you may have a problem. Secondly, I am not a lover of the small 3.5mm jack, as in the past I have snapped a couple of these when getting wired headphones caught and putting force on the socket. Plus you have to turn the machine upside down to insert the plug underneath the control box, although this can be avoided by using Bluetooth headphones.

If you are looking for a strong and ever-so-easy to use machine, with good tones, good construction, good recovery speed and not forgetting the unique Multi-IQ technology, this is an excellent detector for a beginner without doubt! Choosing the 540 as your first machine I feel is viable if budget allows. However, if you have had very little time detecting or are of a younger age, I would not discount the 340 or 440 as I am sure they will offer the same benefits, with less potentially confusing features and give you a route to upgrade over time.

One thing I did spot whilst giving the Vanquish 540 a very close inspection is that if you take the battery cover off and remove the batteries, there is a mini USB port at the top underside of the compartment. Is this for future upgrades or just diagnostics for servicing / repair? Only time will tell, but very interesting.