

Detector Field Test

Black Knight Magpie

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Just before the end of 2003, I field-tested one of the amazingly cheap metal detectors in the Black Knight range, the Black Knight 1. For those detectorists who are not aware of these machines, I would like to provide a quick recap.

These detectors provide good performance at really budget prices in relation to current trends, and will have especial appeal to those who are taking up the hobby for the first time but cannot afford a great deal of expense. Detectors in the Black Knight range start at just £49.99 and extend up to a - still modest - £179 for the top range model.

Black Knight detectors were launched in the UK last year having been imported from China by Detecnicks Ltd. Besides this main importer they can also be purchased from other detector suppliers such as Coinshooter Detectors, Maz Detector Supplies, Lockdales, Leisure Promotions, Treasure Land, and Spin A Disc.

When I tested the Black Knight 1 I found it difficult to criticise its performance. Its sensitivity and discrimination abilities surpassed all my expectations for such a low price of £69.99. At the time I stated that I would write a follow up of the cheapest detector in the range, the Magpie, as so far it was the only one that had not yet been tested.

Although the Magpie had been mentioned briefly in a product report, there were fears that supplies wouldn't arrive in the UK in time for Christmas

due to the great demand elsewhere. Luckily, a number of these models did arrive in December and no doubt many were purchased as presents.

Assembly

On opening the shipping box I found the Magpie disassembled into four parts, as had been the case with the Black Knight 1 model.

Once again, assembling the detector was very easy and straightforward. The open-ended search coil is first attached

to the lower stem using the plastic bolt and thumbnut provided. The control box is then slid into the bracket holder on the upper stem and locked into place by a fixing screw. All that remains now is to attach the lower stem to the upper, wind the coil cable around the stems, and plug the coil into the control box. With just enough cable slack left to prevent strain, the two stems can be secured together by the locking collar. Care should be taken not to over-tighten this collar, as is the case with



Bracket holder for control box and the underneath of the control box showing battery covers.



the locking ring on the coil cable to control box plug.

The Magpie is powered by two PP3 9 volt batteries. The individual battery compartments are located on the underside of the control box and access is gained by means of two slide covers. As always, alkaline batteries are the best for the job.

All of the above is well covered in the 10-page instruction manual, which is easy to follow and serves as an informative guide.

The colour scheme of the detector is mainly black and natural aluminium other than the pinpoint-targeting button on the control panel, which is red.

When fully assembled the Magpie assumes the classic "S" shape, with the upper stem ending in a padded arm cup combined with a detector stand. The whole detector is very light in weight and well balanced.

Controls

The control panel of the Magpie is well laid out and comprises just three rotary controls - two of which also act as switches - and a push button. On the



This is marked "VOLUME" and works simply as described. It allows audio to be set at a level that is comfortable to the user's hearing. Next to the volume control is a red push button that is labelled "TARGET". This helps to pinpoint in on a specific metal find.

Besides the adjustable controls there is also an LED positioned in the middle of the "DISC" and "SENS" controls. This is marked out in two ways.

Above in blue are the words "TARGET INDICATING" and below in red underneath "LOW BAT". This LED will light up in a green colour every time the search head passed over a metal object (regardless of whether it is ferrous or non-ferrous), and will start to emit a red colour if the batteries are low or near to exhaustion.

Finally, on the lower right hand corner next to the red push button is a headphone jackplug socket marked "PHONE". Unfortunately, this is only of the one-eighth inch size so if, like me, you have a favourite headset with the standard quarter inch plug you will have to track down an adapter.



Above and below: finds from the dry sand.

top left hand side is one marked "DISC" that allows you to set the desired level of rejection for unwanted items and is marked "0" to "10". However, it also has another function. If you click the switch to zero it will place the detector in its all metal, non-motion mode where metals of all types within range will register.

On the top right of the panel is a rotary control marked "SENS" (sensitivity), which also acts as an on/off switch. This, too, is marked from "0" to "10" to allow the desired level to be set.

At lower left, and directly under the "DISC" control, is the third rotary control in this case with no in-built switch.



Beach & Field Appraisal

I took the Magpie to a local beach for my first outing. During the morning's search I found that - just like the Black Knight 1 - the Magpie gave good performance for its low price. However, on the particular test model I needed to reassess the settings. On most motion detectors you set sensitivity as high as possible to achieve the best results, but with the Magpie I found that the situation was slightly different.

I had started my search in dry sand and found that with the sensitivity control turned up to three-quarters the detector was unstable and I had to reduce the setting to "5".

The Magpie worked fine at this setting and I noted none of the usual loss of depth by reducing sensitivity. My first set of targets came from a patch of sand roughly three feet square. Not having my digger near to hand and thinking that all the signals coming from the Magpie should be fairly shallow, I started to scrape away the sand with my foot. After scraping away 6in of sand, I regretted not having my digger. I started to find and locate each signal using the pinpoint button and in total located 10 coins. Two of these were £1 coins, seven were 20p pieces, and finally a small 5p piece came to light.

I also found that when I turned down the discrimination just a shade from "4" to "3" I was also able to find the post 1982 1ps and 2ps that were normally giving a "spluttery" signal as a result of their iron core.



Musket ball and threepenny piece.

In the dry sand conditions, after making changes to the settings as described above, the Magpie worked superbly, and I ended up with 21 spendable coins amounting to over £3. The machine's sensitivity also seemed good on the smaller targets and the depths being achieved were far better than I could have hoped for. Among the smaller targets that came up were a tiny zip fastener, a very small copper alloy stud, and a junk metal finger ring.

One of the larger targets took the form of a gold-appearing bell that probably came from a cat or dog collar. When this was first recovered, and still partially hidden by sand, I thought that it was a gold ring.

Of course, with such a low discrimination setting I did have to put up with a load of rubbish, the junk targets including ring pulls, silver paper, and the odd beer or soft drinks can.

The surprise came when I took the Magpie down to an area of wet sand where the winds had stripped the surface back to reveal a shingle bed. The detector not only worked well here but also revealed signal after signal, and I was kicking myself for having left my digger back at the car.

In these adverse circumstances I did

manage to recover two targets, the holes immediately filling with water as I removed the sand.

The first of these I took to be another £1 coin from its shine and thickness, but on closer examination it proved to be a brass threepenny piece. The second signal recovered was a musket ball. Both of these targets were quite deep.

The next site I visited was with a number of friends with whom I hadn't been out detecting for a number of years. The chosen site was a field that had been in potatoes and then left for quite some time before being ploughed again. It had already been searched over once, but I felt it was a good starting point to see how the Magpie performed on inland sites.

I initially tried using the Magpie with its sensitivity turned up as high as possible, but once again the detector became unstable. I therefore reset it to just over the "5" mark, with discrimination at three and a half.

Throughout the day's search the Magpie performed extremely well both in terms of its discrimination and the depths being achieved. My finds included coins, buttons, a pistol ball, a keyhole cover with the design of a star or a comet, a 1oz brass weight, and a silver coated button. The latter carried an armorial design showing a large cat-like beast holding an axe. The Magpie also found its first piece of silver in the form of a tear-shaped object with some type of decoration on it. The identity of

Potato field finds including a livery button and 1oz brass weight.



this item, however, remains a mystery.

When we compared finds at the end of the day, the Magpie was on par with the results achieved by my friends even though their detectors had cost hundreds of pounds more.

The next site to be chosen was a field that had been left in stubble. This had been "done to death" in the months leading up to Christmas and I was expecting few, if any, signals. However, the Magpie managed to find a silver threepence, a shilling, a farthing, two buttons, and well over a dozen other small non-ferrous targets all of which had been missed on my previous searches.

Summary

The Magpie may not win the day for you on every occasion or on every site that you visit. However, I feel that when the conditions are right it won't let you down and it could easily give some other more expensive detectors a good run for their money!

On one of the sites I visited with the Magpie I was with a group of friends, and kept a mental note of what they were finding. One of these detectorists had accumulated half a dozen



*Potato field finds:
Key hole cover
and mystery tear
shaped silver
object.*

coins and three or four buttons as well as some musket balls. In comparison the Magpie had managed to find three coins, three buttons, a solitary musket ball, and the piece of silver already mentioned.

When I took the Magpie down to the beach I was surprised to find that not only did it work well in dry sand, but curiously enough it also worked down in the wet sand. So it appears that the Magpie is a cheap all-rounder as well. To sum up, I think the Magpie with its £49.99 price tag is quite a remarkable find.

Specifications

Model: Black Knight Magpie

Type: Motion Silent Search Discriminator

Sole UK Importers: Detecnicks Ltd, 3 Orchard Crescent, Arundel Road, Fontwell, West Sussex, BN18 OSD. (Tel: 01243 545060)

Recommended Retail Price (inc VAT): £49.99

Search Coil: 8in waterproof type as standard (plug in)

Batteries: 2 x PP3 (alkalines recommended)

Battery Life: 10-20 hours.

Guarantee: one-year parts and labour.