Field Test

Detector-Pro Headhunter Wader

Reader's Field Test

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No matter what we perceive a metal detector to be, we all want value for money and the best that money can buy. These days a "mid-range" detector can cost anywhere from £250 to £500, which - in relative terms - would buy a second-hand car. Most detectors are brought on the basis of their reputation, or on the recommendation of a friend or fellow club member. Others are purchased as a result of advertising by the manufacturers, with claims of better depth, discrimination, sensitivity, ease of use, and battery life. Short of failing to dig the holes for you, this may seem the machine to buy. When you get the detector home and find that it does not perform as you expected, then you blame yourself for not knowing how to operate the controls. However, there comes a time when your patience finally runs out and common sense comes into play. You then decide that it is the detector that has been the problem all along, not the way you were using it.

I have been down this road myself, and owning a detector that you are not happy with can take all of the enjoyment out of the hobby. This is especially the case if you cannot afford to buy another, better detector straight away.

A product report will only tell you the basic functions of a detector, not how it will perform in the field. Perhaps the nearest you will get to experience of a detector before owning it, is in reading a field test report. This is where a practical assessment is made of the detector to help with the decision as to whether this is the machine for you.

I was recently looking for a new detector myself, the criteria being that it needed to be waterproof and a motion type. (I had decided against an underwater PI detector as this type was both out of my price range and non-discriminating).

I had only £500 to make the purchase (having just sold an unwanted second car) and the Detector-Pro Headhunter Wader fitted into my budget rather nicely (especially as it was originally advertised at £600). Peach Ideas, who are the sole importers of the Detector-Pro range, themselves thought that £600 retail was slightly overpriced for the UK market. However, after some negotiations with the American manufacturers, they reached a deal that allowed them to bring down the price by £100.

Although the detector is called the "Headhunter Wader" it is just as at home used on UK inland sites, as in shallow water conditions. There was just one problem. As this machine is fairly new to the UK, I knew of no other detectorist who owned one. The only thing I had to go on was the sales leaflets and in-air tests; both, as I am sure you are aware, can be very misleading. However, when I saw the Detector-Pro demonstrated (it matched favourably against a number of other well-respected detectors) I decided to take the gamble. Fortunately, the detector has proved to be a good investment.

Over the last few years I have put months of research into locating the sites of old demolished houses, barns, DMVs etc. Unfortunately, as these tend to be on arable farmland, there is normally only a few weeks (or days) available each year to search them. Even this short space of time is further restricted by the amount of time - taking into consideration work and family commitments - that I can devote to searching them. However, I am personally prepared to search in any weather conditions to maximise what little time is available, and I wanted a waterproof detector for this reason.

Field Trials

The first opportunity that came up to use the Detector-Pro was on a club site that had been detected on for more than 20 years. However, it had been left fallow for two years and had just been ploughed. The site has produced some good finds in that time, but due to intensive searching targets were now rather sparse.

It was ten minutes before the detector gave its first good signal, this being from an 18th century button at 4in. Finds over the next three hours, spent searching in wind and drizzle, included: a James I half-groat, a small buckle plate, a thimble, two Georgian coppers, and a Victorian silver sixpence. The iron was there in the ground, and I could hear it trying to break through in places, but none was dug in mistake for a good signal. The control settings I used, after some experimentation, were discrimination "4", and sensitivity "9".

The following day saw me on a set-aside field. This had produced little in the past, and I did not expect anything amazing to appear on this occasion. I was not to be disappointed in my expectations. Two hours of searching produced a couple of Roman "grots", a cartwheel penny, and lots of non-ferrous junk. The type of junk noticeable by its absence, however, was the coke and iron. As an experiment I did dig up one deep plough share, just to make sure that it was iron.

From this field I moved to another site that was a mile away at a "detecting walk". This is where I walk at normal pace, either keeping the search head in

The simple controls of the Headhunter Wader.

a fixed position or casually sweeping as the conditions allow. I do this in the hope of a good signal, or better still a concentrated area of good signals.

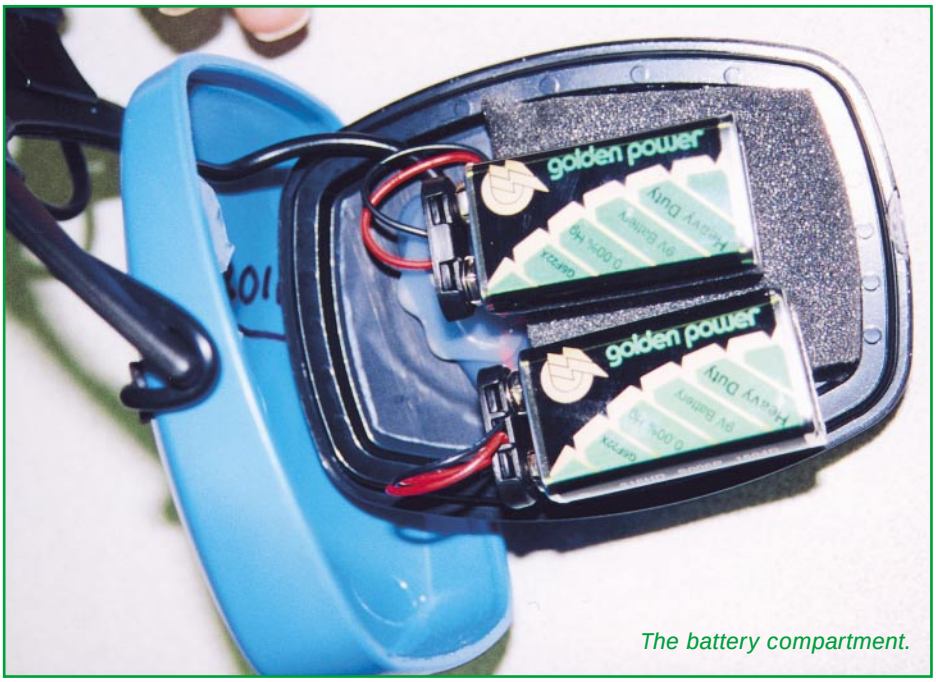
I had nearly reached the second site when the detector gave a strange signal. This was what I can only describe as "hollow" sounding. It took a few minutes to locate the target as it was quite deep in the ground and on its side. The buckle was of the "spectacle" type with a design of two roses.

Upon arriving at the second field I found a spot to shelter out of the wind, and took out my thermos. While sipping a cup of hot tea I took a few minutes to survey the site and decide where to start my search. Break over, it was once more into the fray.

This particular field has always been productive, with plenty of non-ferrous targets coming up from amongst the iron. In anticipation of all the iron signals I turned down the detector's volume control. However, after about 20 minutes I turned the volume up again as the iron was not quite such an irritation as I thought.

As I was still familiarising myself with the Detector-Pro I thought I would try something different. Rather than digging up non-ferrous signals (or anything that sounded like a good signal) I marked their position with twigs. After about an hour I then backtracked on the marked positions trying various settings until the signal was at its optimum strength. Only then did I dig up the target concerned. When I had finally cleared the site of markers I was fairly positive that the detector was on the best possible settings to cope with the site.

The high levels of iron contamination makes this a difficult site to work. I was pleased to note that the Headhunter could cope with it (some of the other detectors I had tried in the past had proved unusable). With the volume turned up higher the signals seemed to be clearer, and I turned down the sensitivity to "8". With the discrimination set at "4" there was little or no chatter from the iron, but turned down to "3" there were definitely more ferrous signals trying to break through with two or three registering with every sweep. However, for the added sensitivity I left discrimination on "3" and resigned myself to digging up some iron. This seemed to work, for I recovered quite a few non-ferrous targets nestled in amongst flakes of iron, nails etc. I found the Headhunter to be more than capable of performing in the way I expected of it.

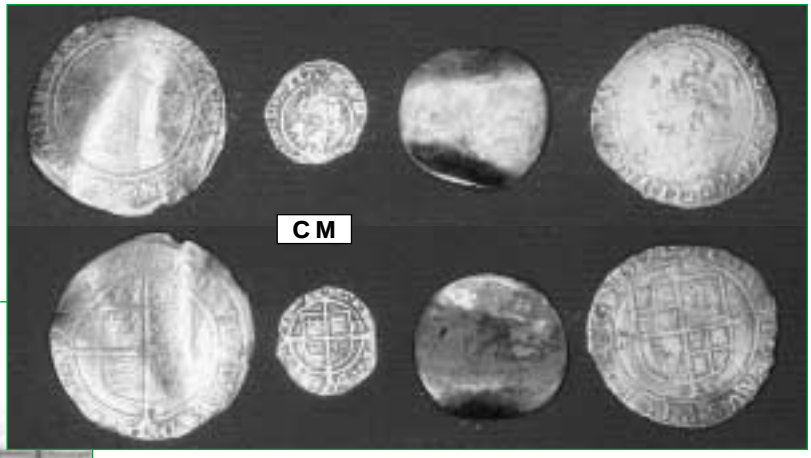


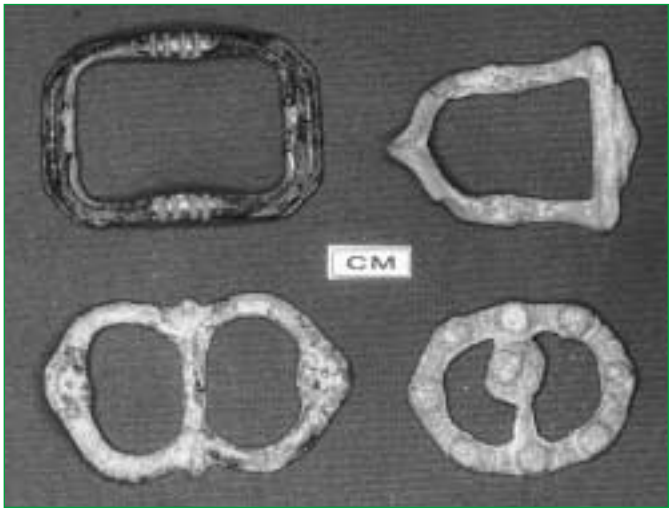
The battery compartment.

I stayed on the field for six hours, by which time daylight was just a distant memory. As I did not want to waste search opportunity by just walking back to my car, I took a different route detecting as I went. This resulted in a crotal bell, five buttons, a thimble, some cartridge ends, and other non-ferrous junk. By the time I reached the car it was so dark that I could not see my hand in front of my face. The wind had also increased and it was getting colder by the minute.

I had put in nine hours of detecting without any great physical strain. The Headhunter, having its circuitry built into the headphones, is extremely light and easy to use.

Some of the finds made during the field test.





My total finds for the outing comprised three buckles, two crotal bells, 12 buttons, a brass ring, a ring from a bull's nose (?), eight copper coins, two thimbles (one good, one squashed), a Henry VIII penny, an Elizabeth I groat, and a broken jetton. I had also found, eyes only, several pieces of clay pipe stem, and two nice pipe bowls.

All in all it was not a bad result considering that this is a very hard site to work, with all the ferrous contamination. In the worse areas I slowed my sweep right down in order to get the best possible results.

For the next day I had planned a search of some footpaths and amenity areas. I lingered over breakfast, waiting for the rain that was lashing against the kitchen window to abate. However, it showed no sign of easing off so I looked out my waterproofs and set forth regardless.

The first footpath I searched runs alongside a pub and then continues on to an old windmill site. For the first 200yd nothing much came to light apart from modern junk. Then it was as if somebody had suddenly turned on the "finds tap". I had searched the same footpath quite thoroughly three years ago, and now began to wonder if I had been asleep at the time. My finds comprised two sixpences, a shilling, ten pre-decimal pennies, a silver ring (modern but it cleaned up nice), a silver stud (hallmarked) and a Metro token. I had also unearthed quite a lot of junk between these finds such as silver paper and ring pulls. Just like any other detector, with the Headhunter if you discriminate out large pieces of silver paper and ring pulls then there is a chance that you will also ignore some good items. I prefer to put the time and effort into digging up the junk, rather than stand the chance of missing something choice.

My next place of call was a grass amenity area. The grass roots were very thick, but the Headhunter coped very well in registering targets beneath them. I found a few more pre-decimal coppers, but in the main was digging up tin cans and other junk. This was a bit of a disappointment after the good results from the footpath, so I did not stay very long on this site.

On my way home I stopped off at a mill pool that has a fast flowing stream running alongside. This I felt, should be the sort of condition that the Headhunter Wader could take in its stride. The site held the potential for some good finds, but I had already drowned and ruined one detector in it.

Streams tend to be overlooked by most detectorists. However, shallow water sites can prove very interesting, especially those near mills, DMVs, Roman villas, or homesteads. This one had proved a bit hit or miss regarding finds in the past, and when nothing of note had turned up in an hour's search I decided to call it a day. However, as soon as I started working in the water I did discover some good features about the Headhunter Wader. The most obvious us that as the controls and electronics are built into the headphones, you can lay the detector down in the water without worry of damaging the circuitry. The "spider web" coil is of the negative buoyancy type, and when you lay the detector down to retrieve a find, this helps to stop it floating away. (The coil cover is of the solid disc type, so this must be removed when you are searching in shallow water). As soon as you pick up the detector, any water remaining inside the non-corroding aluminium "S" shaped shaft simply runs out through a drain hole in the