Detector Field Test

Fisher ID Excel

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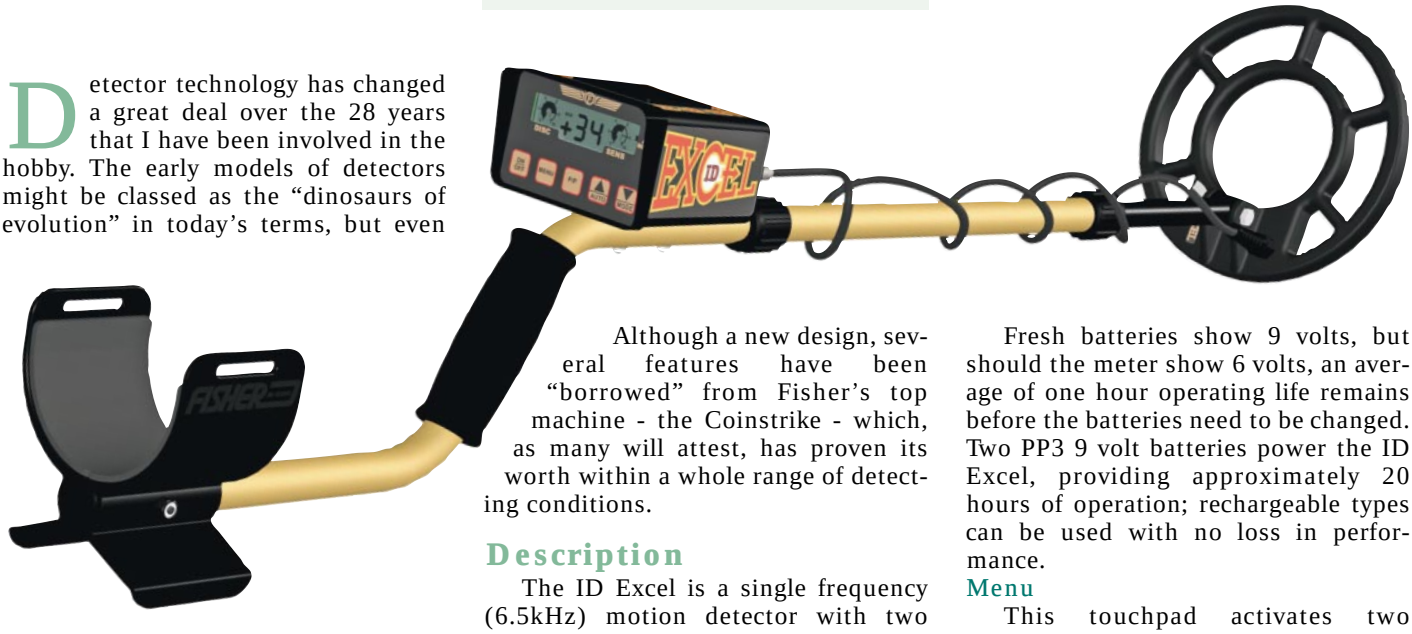

Detector technology has changed a great deal over the 28 years that I have been involved in the hobby. The early models of detectors might be classed as the "dinosaurs of evolution" in today's terms, but even so were still capable of making lots of finds and - in some cases - quite remarkable ones.

The problems of choosing the right detector for the user's needs, though, have never changed. The considerations involved still apply as much today, as they did in the past. Before buying a detector the potential purchaser needs to ask himself or herself a number of questions such as:-

Where and how will I be using the detector?

Is the weight of the machine going to be a problem?

Will it be able to cope with the mineralised conditions I might encounter?

With my level of knowledge and experience will I have any difficulties setting up the detector?

Is the detector produced by a company with a brand name that can be relied upon?

In answer to the last question, and to come back to the subject of this article, Fisher have been at the forefront of metal detector technology for a good 70 years, and arguably produced the first ever "hobby" machine capable of detecting metal objects.

The most recent addition to Fisher's successful stable is the ID Excel. This offers many features and performance capabilities above those usually to be seen in mid price range detectors.

Although a new design, several features have been "borrowed" from Fisher's top machine - the Coinstrike - which, as many will attest, has proven its worth within a whole range of detecting conditions.

Description

The ID Excel is a single frequency (6.5kHz) motion detector with two separate search modes: all metal non-motion and pinpoint; and audio and visual target ID on the digital display,

Colourful decals set this model apart from other detectors in the Fisher range; in fact, I didn't recognise it as a Fisher at first.

Putting the detector together from the shipping box is an easy task. It just involves inserting the lower stem holding the coil, into the upper one to which the control box is attached. After adjusting the stem length to your height you are ready to go.

Both battery compartment and headphone socket are situated at the base of the control box, helping to keep out any rain or moisture from the electronics. The batteries just drop into the compartments provided, requiring no "clip on" attachments.

My first impression was amazement at the lightness of this detector - the entire unit including batteries weighed in at a mere 2.75lb; it was one of the lightest detectors that I had ever used.

Controls

The ID Excel has five touchpad controls together with an LCD display, which provides continuous numerical readout during operation.

On/Off

Press this touchpad and the detector immediately springs into life indicating battery condition.

Fresh batteries show 9 volts, but should the meter show 6 volts, an average of one hour operating life remains before the batteries need to be changed. Two PP3 9 volt batteries power the ID Excel, providing approximately 20 hours of operation; rechargeable types can be used with no loss in performance.

Menu

This touchpad activates two schematics of standard knob controls; the left one "Disc" (Discrimination) and the right one "Sens" (Sensitivity). In the middle of these two is "FP" (Factory Preset) which I will explain later. Pressing the menu touchpad will highlight each control in turn by flashing on and off. At this point you are able to adjust the operating levels up and down with the arrow touch pads to suit your detecting preference and conditions.

Discrimination

Pressing the menu button will start the Disc schematic flashing, providing a range of -36 to +22. Pressing the arrow buttons will alter the Disc position up or down. The effects are as follows: -36 (no targets rejected), +22 (all targets except copper or silver rejected). Therefore, should you set your discrimination to maximum, copper and silver will not be eliminated.

Sensitivity

Pressing the menu touchpad again until the Sens schematic starts flashing enables adjustment with the up and down arrows from "1" to a maximum of "10". As with most detectors, setting the sensitivity to the higher point provides the greatest depth potential, but this is only possible as ground conditions allow. Any fluctuation in signal response will suggest high mineralisation, which can be reduced by lowering the sensitivity to a more stable position.

P/P (Pinpoint) Touchpad

To exit the menu mode at any time after making any adjustment to the controls, just press and release the P/P touchpad to continue searching.

Once a signal is received during detecting - and you are satisfied with the target ID information - the P/P (Precision Visual Pinpoint Mode) can be activated by pressing and holding the P/P touchpad to zero onto the target. Audio intensity increases the closer you get to your find and at the same time the two digit ("0" deepest, "99" closer) LCD will help by increasing in value as you approach the centre of the find. Unlike the usual depth gauge reading, this allows more understanding of the size, shape and location of the find.

FP Factory Option

A factory preset mode is available on the ID Excel. To activate it press the menu touchpad until "FP" starts flashing, and then press the P/P (pinpoint) touchpad for a few seconds until the factory preset setting is activated. This is Disc +5 to reject ferrous targets, and a Sens setting of 6. However, I am not sure how many detectorists would need this as normal adjustment is so effortless.

Mode

The mode touchpad switches between motion audio and visual Disc operation, to all-metal non motion detection (indicated by a small black square next to the words "ALL METAL").

A particular feature I liked about this detector was the all metal mode, as visual ID is constant throughout operation; in fact, the ID feature works in both search modes. This is by way of the numerical indication of all targets on the LCD meter - ferrous or non-ferrous - on a plus or minus scale. This is of great advantage on beach or relic sites where you want to understand every signal but not necessarily dig them all up.

Notch Reading

Bench testing a whole range of potential targets at home before going detecting will help improve your understanding of any find on the scale, (eg 0 to +7 for foil, right up to +22 to +32 for silver and copper).

Four Tone Audio Discrimination

The four tone audio system combined with the visual target ID provides lots of information to aid discrimination. While sweeping the coil over a target you will hear one of four tones:-

Low tone - iron objects (ferrous)

Low/mid tone - foil, nickel, or round ring pulls

Mid/high tone - square ring pulls, 2p coins, and pennies.

High tones - copper or silver coins. A bell tone, accompanied by an "OL" on the LCD screen, indicates a large shallow target, which in a lot of cases will be iron.

Ground Balance

Proper ground balance is the key to stable operation for any detector, and enables maximum depth. It is an area that causes a great deal of concern and confusion for many. Setting the ground balance on the ID Excel, though, couldn't be easier, and is very effective in maximising depth.

Fisher has made ground balancing a simple operation: lower the coil to the ground making sure that there is no metal object underneath; press and hold the AUTO touchpad for a few seconds and then raise the coil 3in to 6in off the ground before releasing the AUTO touchpad. If the operation is correctly performed a single tone will sound to announce that the unit is ground balanced. A multiple tone will suggest that either there was metal present in the ground or that the detector did not get a good "reading". Should this occur move your position and start again.

Should you need to check the ground balance at any stage during detecting – just going through the same process again is all that is required, (4 quick tones will indicate that the ID Excel is already balanced).

Field Trials

I decided that if I was testing a new detector, I might as well try it on a new site. I therefore set off to a farm location that I had recently acquired. My research had indicated that this location was part of a medieval village, but although a run-down manor house still remains on the site very few other indicators exist.

Most of my maps showed that an old shepherds' trail passed right through the field, so I made this my starting point. Modern farming methods take out many of the original boundaries and hedge rows, leaving vast fields that are difficult to read. I therefore always try to concentrate on small areas where results can be monitored and hot spots marked.

Limited rain had made the ground hard and recovery difficult. Luckily, two days before my test the weather had changed and heavy rain had fallen. This helped to soften the top 5in of an area that had not seen a plough for over a year.

The ID Excel was easy to set up and ground adjustment was simple, indicating little or no mineralisation. I raised the sensitivity until I could just start to hear the ground effect, and then backed off slightly to detect with a completely silent background.

Correctly ground adjusted or not, it was some time before the Excel started to register any positive signals. However, I soon came to realise that the visual ID was so accurate that I was able to lower the discrimination level considerably and rely for the most part on the audio and digital readout only. For example, I had Disc set at +2 and Sens set at 9, but a target would give a read out on the ID screen at anything within the plus or minus scale depending on its conductivity. On the scale most targets within the range -36 to -2 were likely to be iron, but anything above +7 was likely to be ferrous and worth digging.

The visual ID also works in the non-motion all-metal mode, which enabled me to slow right down in some areas and analyze every target on the ID screen. The four audio tones do not work in this mode, but you can always

flip back into Disc to confirm your reading.

Although a new site, the area eventually began to produce some interesting finds and this has prompted me to return since my initial visit.

There is no information provided regarding beach detecting in the instruction manual, but with plenty of such sites surrounding where I live, I did take the ID Excel onto Seaview beach one afternoon. I set the ground control in the normal manner between the high and low tide mark. At first little effect was experienced and various modern coins and other items were recovered that had been deposited in a fairly wide area. On approaching the very wet sand, however, the mineralisation started to affect the stability of the detector a little. I therefore reduced sensitivity and adjusted the ground control again, this improved operation.

Various finds made using the ID Excel.

Conclusion

I'm very enthusiastic about the ID Excel: not simply because of its mid price range but also from the fact that it was a pleasant machine to use. It's capable of good depth penetration even when turning down the sensitivity. The one-button ground balance eliminates the errors often experienced in properly adjusting a detector. The Excel is extremely light, easy to set up and operate, and once you are familiar with the unique target ID and pinpoint meter indication, provides a good recovery rate. TH