Detector Field Test

Tesoro Cibola

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Whenever I field test a detector, or indeed any other related product, I always bear in mind my responsibility to other detector users. After all, it is these people who may be parting with their hard-earned cash based on my recommendations.

I have been involved in this hobby since its infancy in Britain, and over the years have seen vast changes in the equipment available. These, I have to say, have mainly been for the better. When the hobby first became popular if you had a machine that could find a coin 2in or 3in under the surface you thought you were on to a winner. I made plenty of good finds with such machines, although digging up junk such as iron and silver paper was accepted as the norm.

By way of contrast, the detectors available today are a pleasure to use providing much better depth and effective junk rejection. However, out of all the different models of detectors available my first choice would always be for a lightweight detector that is simple to set up and use. This I feel, makes searching a joy rather than a headache.

Although I have been fortunate enough to have owned and used numerous detectors over the years, I still keep an open mind to the new models that come onto the market. If there is anything out there that has the edge on others and will go a few centimetres if not millimetres deeper, then I will buy one knowing that it could make not just one search but the whole season memorable in terms of finds.

Before I take a new detector out on test I spend some time making sure that I am conversant with the controls. This particularly applies to discrimination for if set incorrectly in one way you will lose wanted targets, but if set too low then a lot of time can be spent in unnecessary digging.

The detector I have recently been testing is the Tesoro Cibola. This has a small "Micromax" style control box and is powered by just a single PP3 giving 10 to 20 hours operating life. In terms of weight it comes in at just 2.2lb and is therefore not much heavier than the average walking stick. Compared to the other Tesoros that I own it has two additional controls, one being Pinpoint the other a three-position frequency change switch. The latter is useful when you are out detecting with friends or at a rally and are experiencing "cross talk". The choice of frequencies available are: 14.3kHz, 14.5kHz, and 14.7kHz. The Cibola comes fitted with a 9in x 8in open web search coil (a number of other optional coils are available), it has an inbuilt speaker, and a quarter inch headphone socket.

The more I experimented with the Cibola the more I came to realise that it possessed an accumulation of all the best features of my favourite detectors from the past. It appears that somebody at Tesoro has been listening to what experienced customers want in a machine rather than marketing the dream of a "back room boffin" who has never been out to use one.

After some experimentation at home I decided to set the discrimination at a mid point between "Min" and "Iron". This took out most iron nails etc while still giving good sensitivity on hammered coins and other small items. However, it should be remembered that conditions can change from site to site and even from one area of a field to another. You therefore need to be constantly assessing the situation and be prepared to make adjustments where necessary.

Some experts state sensitivity should be kept fairly low where ground

conditions are bad, but on the site I was searching - and after carrying out a number of experiments on buried targets - I found that it was possible to use the Cibola with the sensitivity set just into the red area. But once again, mineralisation and iron contamination can change from site to site and sometimes better performance is gained by lowering sensitivity rather than winding it up.

To set the threshold tone push and hold in the Pinpoint button and then turn the Threshold knob clockwise until you hear a slight but steady tone. After this release the Pinpoint button and you will be back into the standard Discriminate operating mode. The purpose of the threshold tone is to give a reference to judge targets for pinpointing and to super tune the Cibola. In the field, some targets may be so small or deep that they will not be able to generate an audio signal by themselves. By setting a threshold you already have an audio tone so changes are easier to hear.

Where conditions allow, the Cibola can be set to achieve even better depth and sensitivity by "super tuning" while in the discriminate mode. After normal set up simply turn the Threshold knob to its highest setting. This will give more depth but will mean that the threshold is set too high for accurate All Metal or Pinpoint operation.

Despite the above description of settings, the Cibola is still basically a "switch on and go" machine and is very easy to operate.

Field Trials

My field test of the Cibola was carried out in May of this year, which meant that most of my usual sites were under crop. The only search area available was a small field that had produced the odd good find some years ago, but had been quite intensively searched and was now virtually "barren". I had previously tested my favourite and other top range detectors on this site, and given the choice I would have preferred to test the Cibola on a fresh area.

Fortunately, my first search had been preceded by a few days of rain that had helped to soften up the clay soil that can become rock-hard in summer. I set the controls as mentioned above and began my search, although I was not expecting to find very much. My first signal came as something of a shock as it was from what I thought to be a "clean" patch, which I normally use to set up my detectors. The target was a small lead ball of the type used in the early muzzle-loading shotguns. I was not only surprised to have located such a tiny target, but also from the fact that it came up from a depth of 3in.

I thought that this must have been just a fluke and carried on searching. Before long I recovered another target in the form of a small tombac button, soon to be followed by a fragment of another one. Although my finds were only three so far in number, and in themselves nothing to write home about, they were centuries old losses and had been found on a site that I had already searched with what I regarded as the best equipment available. News had already reached me on the "grapevine" of how good this detector was, and I was now starting to wonder if these rumours were indeed true.

At this point I started to jot down the size and depth of each item I recovered. Quite a few detectors can find large items at depth, or small targets at near-surface ranges; but this detector seemed to be doing both which I regarded as a combination long overdue.

I had made a few finds on a site that I regarded as "worked out", but I felt that this could just have been down to luck or coincidence. I therefore set myself to conduct a careful and methodical search of the rest of the small field. Plenty of targets came to light although in the main consisting of pieces of lead, bits of button, and worn coppers. Although nothing of great interest had come to light, all of these potential finds had been previously overlooked and on another site at another time the game may have been totally different.

As every experienced detectorist knows, luck plays a vital part in our hobby. If you are fortunate enough to find a good hammered coin or a nice ring, it is normally in the middle of a run of mundane small fragments of non-ferrous bits and pieces. But if your detector can locate small items of scrap then you can be assured that it is doing a good job.

One of the deepest targets I recovered was a squashed soft drink can. I hate to think how deep I had to dig and how much time it took to recover it, but the blade of my digger is 8in long and the can was buried at least twice this depth.

My next find was down just over the length of the blade but being a fairly small target (a lead token) I was quite impressed.

As in any search it was not all detect for a few minutes and dig; there were some quiet spells but fortunately these did not last for long.

At this point I took a break for a rest and a cup of tea from my flask. I also took a count of the non-ferrous targets (whether scrap or not) compared to the area searched; the ratio was very impressive. My thoughts centred on how I had missed so much in my earlier searches. Some previously non-recovered targets could be blamed on human error - but not all.

Before long my search time was up and I was expecting visitors at home. I broke off a dead twig from a nearby

Fig.1. Small lead shot-gun pellet - a difficult target for any detector.

Fig.2. Some of the small tombac and copper buttons.

Fig.3. One of the better condition copper coins.

Artefacts found during the Field Test.

Fig.4. Lead token.

Fig.5. A small 15th-16th century buckle.

Fig.7. Harness buckles.

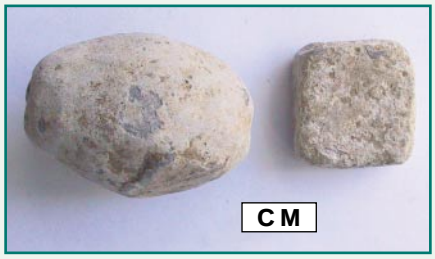

Fig.6. Two lead weights.

Fig.8. Small Roman bronze coin.

Fig.9. Silver love token made from a William III sixpence.

Fig.10. Part of a rumbler bell and escutcheon plate.

Fig.11. Edward I penny.

hedge to mark where I had stopped searching and made a decision to return on the following day.

Having become reasonably familiar with the detector, and having made a number of finds with it, I now decided to concentrate my attention on exactly what it was telling me. On the previous day a few targets had come through with what can only be described as a "mellow" tone. I knew that it could not be anything to do with my headphones as I use top quality "Predator" models. This was quite different from my previous favourite Tesoro detectors. I also found, and perhaps this explains the occasional mellow tone, that the Cibola's response to a target did not differ: there were no "iffy" signals - the non-ferrous targets always gave a positive response.

On the second day of the field test I did not find anything spectacular, but I did recover 40 more non-ferrous targets and did not need to resort to the pinpoint facility even once. The latter I put down to the web coil that I know - from past experience when I have used a similar search head fitted to another Tesoro model - does as excellent job.

As I kept searching I couldn't help thinking that if I had been lucky enough to have had access to the Cibola when my other sites were open then I would have returned home a very happy man.

At long last a hammered coin did fall to the Cibola, this being a penny of Edward I, London mint. It was the first and only hammered to have come from this particular site. Normally, I would have thought to myself "nice" and placed the coin in my secure and padded tin. But on this occasion I said to myself "gotcha!" for I knew there had to be a hammered hiding somewhere on the field, even though it had escaped me in the past.

It is not possible at this point to provide a full evaluation of the Cibola as from the time of year I only had limited ground available to search. However, I have been sufficiently convinced by my test to know that I will be updating to this detector myself, and hope to provide readers with a fuller report once more land becomes available. TH