

Field Test Fisher F19

Fisher has always been a strong and memorable presence during my 37 years as a detectorist, covering all aspects of my treasure hunting career. My familiarity with the make started with a second hand purchase of an old metal-boxed Fisher 553VLF for my first foray to a river foreshore. It continued with an absolute revolution in 1982 when the Fisher 1260-X was introduced and turned the hobby on its head overnight (at least that's what it did for me!).

I couldn't believe it after seeing such a wonderfully sculpted thing of beauty in the glossy adverts in this very magazine. I just had to have one! This "lazy S rod" design with a small control box just in front of the hand was really extraordinary. It was the first of the new breed of motion detectors and it discriminated and ground excluded at the same time – hence the depths previously unachieved by other detectors. Today, both innovations are standard.

So without going further, it's quite obvious that my soft spot for Fisher is quite sincere.

Today, Fisher Research Labs are still doing the business. Partnered with another fantastic old brand, Teknetics, the operation today is known as First Texas Products based in El Paso Texas. This partnership has brought us some really fabulous and innovative detectors that have quickly earned their stripes and are well renowned and respected within the hobby. On test this month is the new 19kHz "relic and gold detector", the Fisher F19.

Description

Shipped in a small colourful carton, everything was well packed and protected inside. The use of a screwdriver is required for two small screws to hold the control box to the upper handle of the three-piece shaft system. The elliptical 10 inch x 5 inch coil is a solid build (coil cover an accessory) and is decorated in what's called "Realtree" camouflage as is the small compact control box. It's really neat and innovative looking if you are into that kind of thing. Rather bizarrely, it's also offered in pink camo!

A quarter inch headphone jack plug

is fitted on the left side of the control box and has a rubber stopper to prevent dirt and moisture getting in.

Two Velcro strips securely bind the coil cable to the shafts.

Once assembled it is a really tight build and naturally lithe, but again I would suggest getting an arm strap (optional extra). It's perhaps the finest arm-to-weight ratio detector I have ever used.

Operating on just one 9 volt PP3 battery, giving some 20 hours operation (less if the backlight is on) it is really quite a powerful son-of-a-gun!

At 38 pages, the Instruction Manual is very comprehensive and is quite a lot to absorb on a first read, so study it carefully. In fairness to it, it does not assume prior knowledge of detectors is required to use it.

The F19 is what I'd call a "specialist machine" and operating at 19kHz could be regarded as a "professional" offering and to be fair to all, it is.

The features and functions of the F19 offer the more experienced operator several advanced and critical-to-understand "pro" functions.

They are operated by two rotary controls, and four push button touch pad controls that are very easy to reach and use.

Left rotary switch: ON/OFF/GAIN

Right rotary switch: DISC/ALL

METAL/THRESHOLD

Centre push button: MENU/GG: + and -

Middle bottom: Pinpoint



F19 "Realtree" camo coil.



Arm cup and stand.



Front and back of the control box.



Field Test Fisher F19

Features

- FeTone, Adjustable Iron Audio
- Enhanced V-Break, Tone Discrimination System
- Notch Window with Adjustable Notch Width
- Computerised Ground Grab, One Touch Ground Balance with Manual Override
- Continuous Ground Condition Read-out Fe304 graphic indicates type of mineralisation
- Ground Balances all the way to salt
- Static All Metal Pinpoint with Depth Indicator
- Weight 2.5lbs
- Backlight

So now let's take a look at some of these "power features".

FeTone Adjustable Iron Audio

From 1-9 volume settings for ferrous and non ferrous. A level of 10 and small iron targets will be silent but non ferrous targets are at their maximum volume level.

A volume level from 11-20 only increases the volume of iron: there is no increase for non ferrous – such targets sound the same as Volume 10

During testing I varied Volume between 11 and 13 and never set it to 10 because I always wanted to hear the response from iron items.

If V-Break is on, it may alter iron sounds and cause VCO tones but with the same reduced volume. Volume control applies only to motion target detection. Volume changes do not affect Pinpoint volume.

V-Break

This is a feature that allows the operator to change the audio response of certain targets in the ID range of 0-80 to induce a low tone. It can be set on targets that haven't been rejected by either discrimination or by notch.

For example, set to a V-Break setting of say 42. If you do this every target with an ID of less than or equal to 42 will induce a low tone. However, targets with an ID range of 43 and beyond are not changed.

During testing I set the F19 to between 27 and 34 and I was confident that I could identify both small nails and other ferrous items without causing a desirable item to signal with a low tone.

Notch Window & Notch

This really is a fiddly business...two hands required on the + and - buttons, but I had it down fairly quickly. What you do first is to set (establish) the "window" or width of the notching area required by Notch Window. It can be used to notch in or notch out. Then, once a "window" is set, you can narrow it and, best of all, move it around with Notch.

Notching, is important in American coinshooting where desirable silver coins and rings lie alongside oodles of pull tabs. It can help with Civil War targets, too, especially ferrous items and the Notch Window can help in this regard to target the collectible Civil War items (for example, bayonets, swords, or knives). A US based relic hunter might actually choose *not* to dig coins! (The important word here is "choose").

In the UK you might choose to notch out the dreaded "shottie" or bits of lead in scrap form. However, it is important to remember that all metallic targets can have similar properties and/or conductivities, and by notching out some stuff you can lose other desirable targets such as low conductive hammered silver coins and other objects. It is a case of swings and roundabouts really, and you use it at your peril.

Ground Grab

This is ground balancing in a heartbeat! It is a useful feature that helps avoid

mistakes and endless countermoves. The Instruction Manual dedicates much ink to ground balancing (ground cancelling). Essentially, you should do a Ground Grab (GG) at the start of every hunt, during the hunt and if you move locations.

The whole point of carrying out a ground balance is to let the detector "see" any minerals (naturally occurring) in the soil and to allow the detector's computer to acknowledge the level of minerals, do a quick sum, and then ignore them. (But also not to ignore anything else it will see, for example metallic finds).

So, set the F19 to All Metal, press and hold the GG button while "pumping" the coil up and down a few times to normalise the audio response from the minerals. Once that happens release the GG button. You can watch all of this happening "live" on screen with the ground display numbers.

A good ground balance should show the GND PHASE and GND BAL to be the same. GND PHASE are the large numbers centre screen and GND BAL are the smaller numbers bottom right. It might be off a tad, especially on bad soils and you can manually (rebalance) to your liking by using the + and - buttons on the dial.

Salt GB

The F19 handles wet sand beaches



The Fisher F19 in an ideal relic hunting location.

to a very thorough and efficient level. I didn't find anywhere at all on the several beaches I visited where I couldn't GB the F19. It did this operation very easily and quickly, and remained extra sensitive to the tiniest things even at water's edge.

You don't have to do anything differently to GB over salt and land. The F19 does it automatically.

If you take that then, to searching difficult sites (Roman occupation areas for example), it stands to reason that you should always find a suitable ground balance compromise. If you have the patience to search in all metal then you would certainly not miss too much. You might even be shocked and surprised by the amount of tiny items unearthed that were previously missed by you and others. I was. It certainly does find the tiny bits.

Fe304 Bar Graph

The Fe304, 7 (seven) segment bar graph indicates the amount of ground mineralisation independent of type, expressed as an equivalent volume concentration of magnetite Fe304. It updates every second. It is sensitive to motion and will give the most accurate readings if you pump the search coil up and down several times over the ground. When you stop pumping it stops as well.

This feature coupled with the ability to see both Ground Phase and Ground Balance readouts leaves you in no doubt

as to what kind of soils are under your coil at anytime, anywhere.

My soils typically showed between 2 and 3 segments of the 7 segment bar graph indicating low or moderate iron mineralisation levels. It was, then, not a problem to go deep in those soils.

This is really a "pro" feature because most other machines cannot show this valuable information.

The 7 segment graph also doubles as a signal strength indicator. (More on this later.)

How Does It Perform?

As stated, when I first got the F19 to field test I was staying by the seaside. This allowed me to become accustomed to it before trying it on land (that came sooner than I expected due to barley cutting.).

It whizzed along and found all manner of things, Euro coinage being the most prolific. Target IDs were always spot on.

I soon noticed the small Target ID differences between the coins, and that it would change if a pocket spill was discovered, with the numbers jumping around from 77 to 79, 82 etc.

Single coins always produced a solid ID with little fluctuation. If angled there might be a difference of just one number but the Target ID capability of the Fisher F19 is very trustworthy. Even more consistent are the three segments that move

freely atop the entire length of the arc-shaped Target Scale. These stay static for three seconds and then disappear. The segments can be more dependable than the Target IDs. Observing both makes for quick identification of targets.

Essentially, the F19 produces two types of sounds. You could argue there are really three sounds but the VCO splits into two separate sounds – a low tone for discriminated out targets and a rising audio pitch for accepted ones. The accepted audio can split from a medium "zip zip" sound to a high tone and is dependent on both target depth and mass.

In other words, a good signal can first alert with a low mid sound "zip" and as you dig and get closer it can change to a high tone.

As I was on the beach quite a lot, I was occasionally tasked with the job of finding lost car keys and jewellery. The F19 accomplished all tasks with ease.

I didn't find too many rings but what I did find were many small earrings and the backs to them. Some were incredibly tiny and I had a bit of a job to photograph their small mass for this article! Some stud backs came from the wet sand with clear signals.

Farmland opened up suddenly. Permission was granted for a few fields near to where I was staying and I was in as soon as the combines rolled their massive cutting wheels in adjacent fields.

Ground balancing was a breeze: two bars on the bar graph, typically 57 GND PHASE and 57.7 GND BAL readouts. The very first signal showed ID 74 and excavating down into the easy-to-dig light brown sandy soil brought up my first target. This came from around 8 inches and was a large buckle, possibly of Tudor origins.

It was soon followed by a conical button with a two digit ID of 66 and "zip zip" signal. Next up, with a loud high tone, came a large musket ball. The ID did change its mind a bit, but not by too much (72, 73, and 74). I guess the perfectly round shape didn't assist in a rapid lock-on, but soon after that I was able to recognise other lead shot for that exact reason. However, small pistol balls showed target IDs in the high 50s and low 60s with the same zip sounds as they were several inches down.

I believe the F19 is the very first detector that I have witnessed to consistently show Target IDs in the ground,



The author using the F19.

to be the same when out of the ground. The F19 is a different detector to other mainstream models when it comes to producing sound. Contained in the two sounds it produces the “varied sounds” that come from the F19 are too many to describe accurately. This is especially the case as to how it sounds while dealing with ferrous bits and hot rocks with the Iron Audio at a low setting: quite simply, you will hear a lot!

You will hear sudden “explosions” of sound and then nothing. You will also hear rapid “scrape” sounds as if you scratched a long playing record!

You will hear loud signals that instantly drop down to a low sound, which is the Iron Volume working efficiently. You will hear rapid-fire staccato sounds when a good target is next to a nail. In addition, the sensitivity of the F19 is more enhanced to signal better on low to mid range conductivities. Slightly lower sensitivity can be displayed on some highly conductive coins with surprisingly “vague” signals when as deep as 8 inches.

So, a target can produce the classic “zip” signal and show mid range Target IDs (55 for example). When scanned with other detectors the same target can behave and sound like foil (i.e. low audio sounds with corresponding low target IDs). So be prepared for this because it can catch you off guard! The F19 is not your normal detector!

All was going well when a good signal sounded and showed a Target ID of 47. However, the audio was a bit unusual and so was the signal strength indicator. It was jumping from all seven bars to three or four. I listened to it in all metal and scanning back and forth across it noticed a slight dip in threshold but not always. The signal faded quickly and I couldn't coax a good hit from it. The F19 is such a rapid signal processor it isn't easy to discern these subtle differences, at least not at the start of use. There was just one way to figure this out, I thought, so I dug the target that proved to be a brownish piece of coke. Drat!

Normal business resumed as a few more conical buttons and musket balls turned up. “What happened here?” I thought to myself.

A skirmish was an obvious answer because I was close to where a series of battles had taken place. A number of these turned into retreats as the losing side fought valiantly to survive. I'm

almost daring to believe the buttons I found came from the tunic of a soldier who had been mortally wounded close to where I had been detecting. This was because I didn't cover a huge area, instead choosing to search a small area well. This really was “relic hunting” at its best.

Moments later I had another unusual signal. Showing a Target ID of 54/55 I knew it wasn't another hot rock. Sadly, it was. My find was sized similarly to the fleshy area of the thumb and was pitch black. However, remembering back, the signal did have a flaw: it hadn't been repeatable on every pass! I therefore doggedly set out to “suss out” how to identify coke and hot rocks and actually wanted to find more of them!

It was the only way to do it. I did find more and noticed a few clues you could watch out for to help avoid digging them. Two types are described in the Instruction Manual and my ones were behaving a bit differently – due perhaps to being over different soil make-up than where the Fisher engineers had done their testing? They describe, Negative hot rocks (also called cold rocks) and Positive hot rocks (iron bearing rocks or coke from fires). I believe my rocks are the latter.

Tip: Such targets might not sound very consistent or repeatable in other words. The audio might drop off and come up again. The Target ID can show all the 40s and 50s in a split second. The three segments of the Target Scale of the arc can jump around with heavier hits in the 40s. They might sound flat, or

monotone. They can double bleep. The audio will at times sound “fuzzy” in all metal and appear to move around, and the threshold can dip quickly either just before or right after passing the rock. The Signal Strength indicator can be erratic. This is behaviour that is completely the opposite of accepted good targets.

Small pieces of iron, for example triangular-shaped and flat larger pieces, can also cause apparently good signals. With a working frequency of 19kHz this can only be expected. Remember, the F19 is also a gold detector and thereby extremely sensitive to the tiniest thing. Also, iron will still fool most detectors today.

The F19 was run on a number of other sites including pasture, woodland and on well-detected footpaths. It turned in very good and decent performances and as mentioned earlier, had enhanced sensitivity to mid-range items. I found several threepence and sixpence coins that have always proved difficult for me to find for some reason through the years. On my searches in the past few have ever turned up.

The woodland site was one I had discovered several months ago and I found a number of small army tunic buttons and some old copper coins.

On pasture, the F19 quieted down considerably and wasn't as “sparky” as it can be over loose soil and stubble where I encountered much shallow iron and the coke as described. Targets were deep on pasture. Some were found with weak signals and weak pinpoint sounds. The signal strength indicator proved invaluable here, as I could always dig without fear of scratching something.

One memorable coin was initially



Holed Henry groat.

Earring with stud.



Difficult low to mid conductors.



heard as a “blip”. At that very moment I had raised the coil to avoid a thistle and thought the sound was a false signal. But stopping and moving the weed aside with my boot, I scanned the surface again and found it was a definite signal – albeit a weak one.

Showing an ID of 68 with a low pitch, I dug out the only hammered coin of the tests. It was well worn and had a hole in it and came from a measured 8 inch down in hard stony dry soil. I’d imagine the 11 inch DD accessory coil would have got it even deeper still.

Factory Preset

A F19 factory preset is available and is a handy default. Simply hold the Menu button as you power up and release the Menu button after it goes through the start-up sequence.

Headphones

None were supplied with the detector so I went through a few of my own and had mixed results. I didn’t wear any at the beach as it was high summer. I wore them on the inland sites. A few sets just would not work as they were mono plug types. Others sounded as if my head was in a bucket of water! Did you know that some headphones can cause a depth loss? One set stood out as being excellent: a set of “Troy Pro” phones with two separate volume controls. These could be hard to come by now. My advice would be go to your dealer and try them all!

Note On EMI

Some mild interference (EMI) was heard at two beaches. As to why, I can’t be certain. Some “blipping” was also



Army tunic buttons.

noted at a few farm sites – possibly from electric fences. This is normal and happens with all detectors. It never detracted from the hunting experiences.

Accessory Search Coils

- 11 inch DD biaxial (elliptical)
- 5 inch DD round

Note On Finds

Many of the finds made during testing were given to the landowner of the skirmish site. He requested them for a relative who had a small museum nearby, run on a completely voluntarily basis. So some finds were photographed in the field and others I did not get to photograph at all.

Conclusion

First Texas has invented a new class of detector, a separate niche if you like, with a few new models (e.g. Gold Bug, G2, and the F19).

There are other brands of gold and relic detectors available, but in my view none you could really use all the time. This is because many would simply drive you mad as they are overly erratic, and you just cannot work quickly with them. The F19 allows you set any pace you desire and behaves admirably the entire time. I did note that a medium sweep speed did produce the deepest finds:

that is a sweep of 3 feet per second. That said, when I worked really quickly it also delivered.

Would I use an F19 every day? Probably not. It’s a bit like having a fast powerful car, but one you could not drive fast every day. But if you regard the F19 as a specialist tool then it is certainly worth having one in your arsenal.

The El Paso arm of First Texas Products has designs on moving itself upmarket in the coming years, and the F19 is very definitely a signpost as to where this brand wants to go. If that is truly the case, then Fisher Labs are in a good place. On the evidence I’ve seen while testing their machines in recent times, the company’s progression up the sales charts should continue apace.

To see a video of some of my test experiences with the Fisher F19, go to YouTube and type in the following: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?V=HxjqvCa2nno> or type Fisher F19 a QUIK look

Availability

The Fisher F19 is available from: Joan Allen Metal Detectors, 190 Main Road, Biggin Hill, Kent. TN16 3BB
Telephone: 01959-571255
E-Mail: sales@joanallen.co.uk
www.joanallen.co.uk

TH

Finds returned to the landowner.

