

## microHAM USB microKEYER

Within the relatively short time that the *microKEYER* has been available, it has quickly become a favorite among active amateurs, particularly in the DX and contest communities. Its appearance is deceiving. At first glance you would be tempted to say, “Oh, this is just another sound card interface box,” but you’d be mistaken.

The *microKEYER* certainly does include sound card interfacing in its feature list, but it is much more than that. The *microKEYER* is a “hub” for everything going to and from your transceiver, regardless of whether you are operating voice, CW or digital. The *microKEYER* also contains an interface that allows computer transceiver control.

The compact enclosure (approximately 7×2×3 inches) offers rear-panel jacks for sound card cables, microphones, CW paddles, a footswitch and more. There is also a DB25 port for the cable to your transceiver. You can make your own transceiver cable, but for this review we purchased a transceiver-specific cable from *microHAM*.

### Exploring the *microKEYER*

As I examined the *microKEYER* for the first time, I immediately noticed a standard PS/2 computer keyboard jack. What could this possibly be for? I soon discovered that the *microKEYER* has an internal CW keyer chip with a keyer speed control on the front panel and nine message memories. Not only can you plug your favorite set of paddles into the *microKEYER*, you can attach a computer keyboard and send CW as fast as you can type, or as fast as you can press a key to send a message from the *microKEYER*’s CW memories.

Although I prefer to send CW with iambic paddles, I had to give the keyboard feature a try. Sure enough, the *microKEYER* recognized my flaky surplus keyboard and I was on the air in no time.

Digital operating was as smooth as silk with the *microKEYER*. The front-panel controls allow you to quickly adjust the transmit and receive audio, and all digital lines are optically isolated. The *microKEYER* even includes FSK for RTTY use.

On phone it was simple to switch from computer transmit audio (for contest “voice keying”) to my trusty microphone. Easy switching is at the heart of the *microKEYER*’s design, thanks to an innovative software approach.

### Software-Defined Interface

Like many USB devices, the *microKEYER* works by setting up “virtual” COM ports when you run the installation software. Once this is accomplished, you simply re-configure your software to use those ports.

What makes the *microKEYER* different, however, is its Windows-based control software (see Figure 1). By using the control software, the *microKEYER* essentially becomes a software-defined interface. That is to say, you can configure its functions and change the way it operates through the control software. You can re-route audio paths or switching functions as you wish. Better yet, you can save the changes in the *microKEYER*’s onboard memory and dispense with the computer entirely!

I found the control software to be a little confusing at first, but

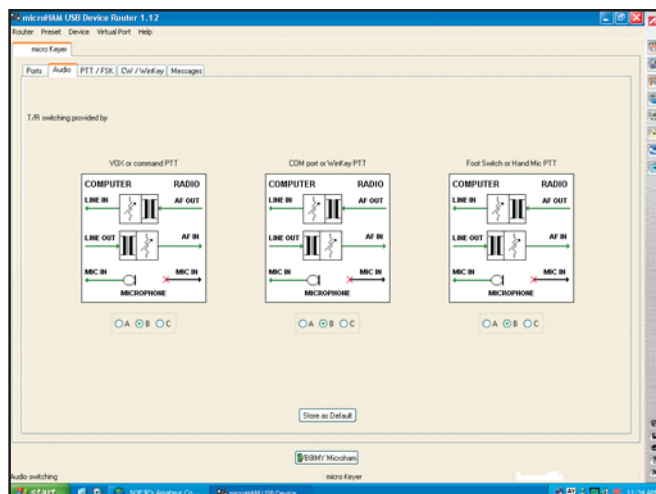


Figure 1—The *microKEYER* control software allows you to configure the interface for almost any application.

with practice I was able to appreciate its extraordinary flexibility. One note: When you shut down the control software, there is a 45-second delay as it apparently saves to the *microKEYER* memory. Be patient; your computer hasn’t frozen.

### Do You Need a *microKEYER*?

The answer depends on how you operate. If you are a casual operator who dabbles with HF digital or CW, the *microKEYER* is overkill. It does much more than you really need. On the other hand, if you are an active ham who would enjoy the ability to jump between CW, digital and phone at a moment’s notice, the *microKEYER* is worthy of your consideration. DX and contest enthusiasts in particular are prime customers for the *microKEYER*.

*MicroHAM* is located in the Slovak Republic and the company did not have a US distributor at the time of this writing. Even so, we had no difficulty ordering the *microKEYER* from their Web site. Shipping was quite fast. Our *microKEYER* arrived within two weeks after we placed our order.

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