21 A portable radio for medium waves

Introduction

The ZN415E integrated circuit (IC) can be used to make a very efficient AM portable MW broadcast radio with a built-in loudspeaker. Here's how!

The circuit

Figure 1 shows the circuit diagram of the portable radio. It's not as complicated as it may appear, especially after you have got started. L1 is a coil of wire mounted on a ferrite rod, acting as an aerial; VC1 is a variable capacitor which works, with L1, to tune in different stations. IC1 contains circuits of its own which boost the selected signal and it includes a *detector* which extracts the audio signal from the incoming RF signal. Earphones could be connected to the output of IC1 (between pins 4 and 5), but the output would not be powerful enough to drive a loudspeaker.

More sound

This is where IC2, an LM386 comes in. This is a small audio *power* amplifier which produces audio signals with enough power to drive a small

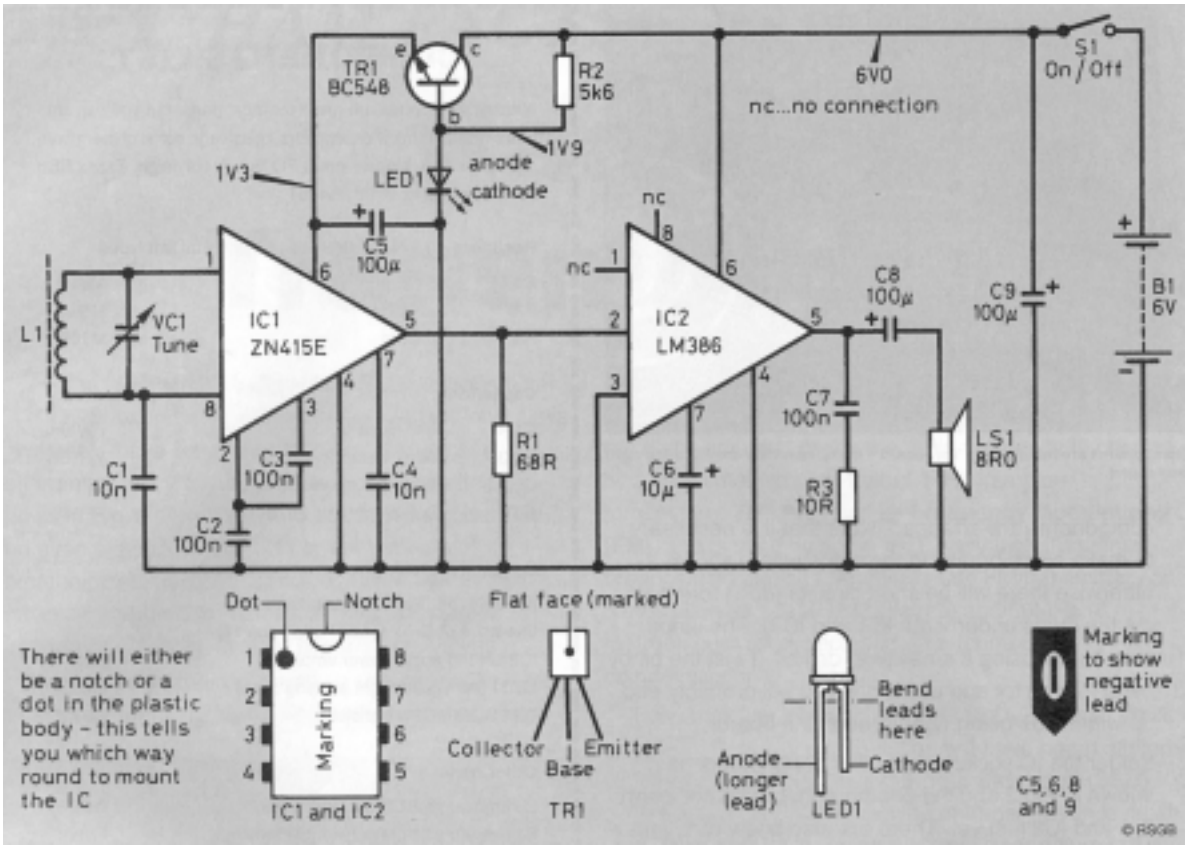

Figure 1 The circuit diagram of our easy-to-build portable radio. Take care to mount the ICs and LED the correct way round

loudspeaker, LS1. The radio uses a 6 volt battery, which is made by connecting four 1.5 volt AA cells in series (4 × 1.5 V = 6 V) using a battery holder designed for this purpose. Although a 6 V supply is ideal for IC2, it is far too great for IC1, which needs only about 1.3 V. This lower voltage is provided from the 6 V supply by TR1 (an npn transistor), R2 and LED1 (a light-emitting diode). When current passes through an LED (see the description of the LED in this series) a reasonably constant voltage of 1.9 V appears between the anode and the cathode. Because of the voltage (0.6 V) that *always* exists between the base and emitter of a working transistor, the voltage on the emitter is about 1.9 V – 0.6 V = 1.3 V, and this is used as the power supply for IC1.

To keep the radio as simple as possible, no volume control has been fitted. Instead, you can use the directional properties of the ferrite rod aerial (see the information on ferrites in this book) to reduce the volume by rotating the set about a vertical axis using the handle provided.

Putting it all together

1. Start by covering the ferrite rod with Sellotape, or alternatively wrap a piece of paper tightly around it, and secure it with Sellotape. Then, with at least 2 metres of 24 SWG enamelled copper wire, wind 75 turns tightly around the rod. To be safe, leave about 50 mm of wire at the ends of the coil, then wrap the whole coil with Sellotape to hold the turns in place, leaving only the ends free. Then, using a small piece of sandpaper, remove the enamel from the last centimetre of each end of the coil.
2. Most of the components are mounted on a piece of Veroboard (the type with parallel copper strips on one side). The piece used on the prototype measured 32 holes by 10 strips, as **Figure 2** shows. Before you start fitting components, cut the copper strips as shown. It is easier to do it now than when the board is littered with components! The strips may be cut with a 3 mm (⅛ inch) twist drill rotated between thumb and forefinger. Resist the temptation to use a hand drill – the idea is just to cut the copper, **not** to drill right through the board!
3. Solder the IC sockets and the other components on the board as shown in Figure 2. Make sure that the IC sockets are fitted with their notches towards the *top* of the board, as viewed in Figure 2. Do not insert the chips yet. Always keep the wires left over from cropping resistors and capacitors, they will come in handy at times like this: make the wire links that are clearly shown in Figure 2. Connect the electrolytic capacitors (C5, C6, C8 and C9), the transistor and the LED the correct way round; then check it again when you have done it!
4. Finally, solder lengths of stranded insulated wire to act as 'flying leads' for future connection to L1, VC1, LS1, S1 and the battery connector.
5. Apart from the battery holder, everything is mounted on the case *lid*. This makes assembly and testing much easier, and eases fault-finding if

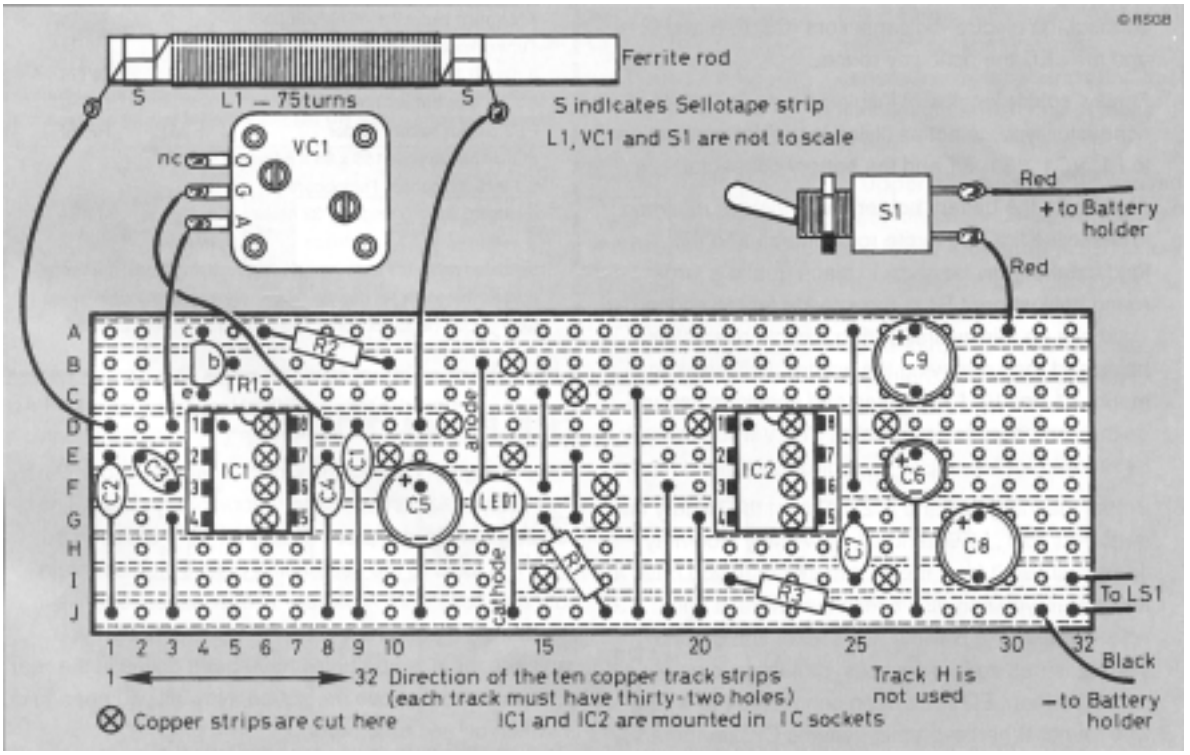

Figure 2 Veroboard layout for the Portable Radio. Make sure that all the wire links are included

the need arises! At the speaker position, make one large hole or a series of small holes to let the sound out. The ferrite rod may be stuck to the lid, as may the loudspeaker. Drill holes of the correct size to fit the particular types of variable capacitor (VC1) and switch (S1) that you are using. The Veroboard may be held in position by Blu-Tack or double-sided sticky tape.

6. Before inserting IC1 and IC2, connect the battery and switch S1 on. The LED should glow dimly (you may have to shield it with your hand in order to see it). If you have a test meter, check that there is about 1.3 V between pins 6 and 4 of IC1. If the reading is around 6 V or there is no glow, you may have connected the LED the wrong way round! When everything seems normal, switch off and disconnect the battery. Insert IC1 and IC2, making sure that the pins are straight and lie immediately above their corresponding holes in the sockets, and that the notches line up with the notches in the holders. Then push *gently* downwards on each IC in turn until the chip is firmly seated in its socket.
7. Switch on! By rotating the tuning capacitor, VC1, you should now be able to tune in many stations, rotating the radio to give you some volume control.

Final touches . . .

The handle was made with part of an old leather belt, secured to the case with 'number plate' nuts and bolts from Halfords. The loudspeaker grille is the lid from a *pot-pourri* container, and some extra holes were drilled in the back to improve the sound. See what you can find to finish off your radio!

Parts list

Maplin order codes are given for most of the parts, but you should get used to using the 'beg, borrow or steal' technique, or to use your ever-expanding junk box.

		Maplin code
Resistors: all 0.25 watt, 5% tolerance		
R1	68 ohms (Ω)	M68R
R2	5.6 kilohms (kΩ)	M5K6
R3	10 ohms (Ω)	M10R
Capacitors		
C1, C4	10 nanofarads (nF) or 0.01 microfarad (μF) ceramic	BX00A
C2, C3, C7	100 nanofarads (nF) or 0.1 microfarad (μF) ceramic	YR75S
C5, C8, C9	100 microfarads (μF) electrolytic, at least 10 V	FF10L
C6	10 microfarads (μF) electrolytic, at least 25 V	FF04E
Semiconductors		
IC1	ZN415E radio chip	
IC2	LM386 audio power amplifier	UJ37S
LED1	3 mm green LED	WL33L
TR1	BC548 npn transistor	QB73Q
Additional items		
LS1	Miniature 8 ohm loudspeaker	WB08J
S1	Miniature SPST toggle switch	FH97F
Ferrite rod	Length approx. 100 mm	YG20W
	24 SWG enamelled copper wire	BL28F

Additional items (*continued*)		
VC1	Tuning capacitor 140 to 300 picofarads (pF)	FT78K
	Tuning knob	FK41U
	8-pin DIL IC sockets (two required)	BL17T
	4 × AA-size battery holder (long)	HF94C
	PP3-type clip for battery holder	HF28F
	Plastic box approx. 158 × 95 × 54 mm	LH51F
	0.1 inch Veroboard, min. size 32 holes × 10 strips	JP46A

Plus

- Stranded insulated conductor for flying leads
- Multicore solder
- Materials for handle and speaker grille
- Double-sided sticky tape or Blu-Tack
- Sellotape
- Glue
- Four AA-size 1.5 V batteries