78 A delta loop for 20 metres

Introduction

HF aerials take up a lot of room when they are straight. Space can be saved by bending them and, at the same time, giving them properties which are quite different from their original linear forms. The delta loops shown in the accompanying diagrams have the shape of the Greek upper-case letter delta (Δ) upside down. It can be upright, except that it is more practical to have the feed point at the bottom than at the top.

Putting the loop together

This is the design for a loop to be used on the 20 metre band. It is a very popular band and carries most of the amateur radio DX traffic. The aerial is light in weight and operates best if the top section is at least 30 ft above the ground, with the feeder point being about 6 ft above ground. All you need is some good wire, some polypropylene rope, some insulators and a method of matching the output of this 75 Ω balanced aerial to the 50 Ω unbalanced coaxial input of your transceiver or receiver.

Each of the three sides must be 7.2 m long. Using tent pegs or six-inch nails, mark out the three corners on the lawn, making sure that each pair of pegs or nails is exactly 7.2 m apart. Put the wire around the nails, together with two insulators on the wire for the two top corners. These insulators can be of the 'dog bone' variety, or of the home-made type, using a piece of flat plastic with holes in each end. The use of these is shown in **Figure 1**. Located at the positions of two of the tent pegs or nails, they must be secured at those points by any convenient means.

Now attach a support rope to the free end of each of the insulators, ready for suspension, as shown in the diagrams, from any convenient supports (house, tower, tree, etc.). The top section of the loop could be taped to a continuous piece of rope between the two supports. You might like to try this if you think it is easier. Then, when you find some dog-bone insulators, you can change the design and see if there is any noticeable change of performance.

Connecting to the radio

If you are the proud possessor of an aerial tuning unit (ATU) with a balanced output, all you will need is a length of twin cable soldered to the

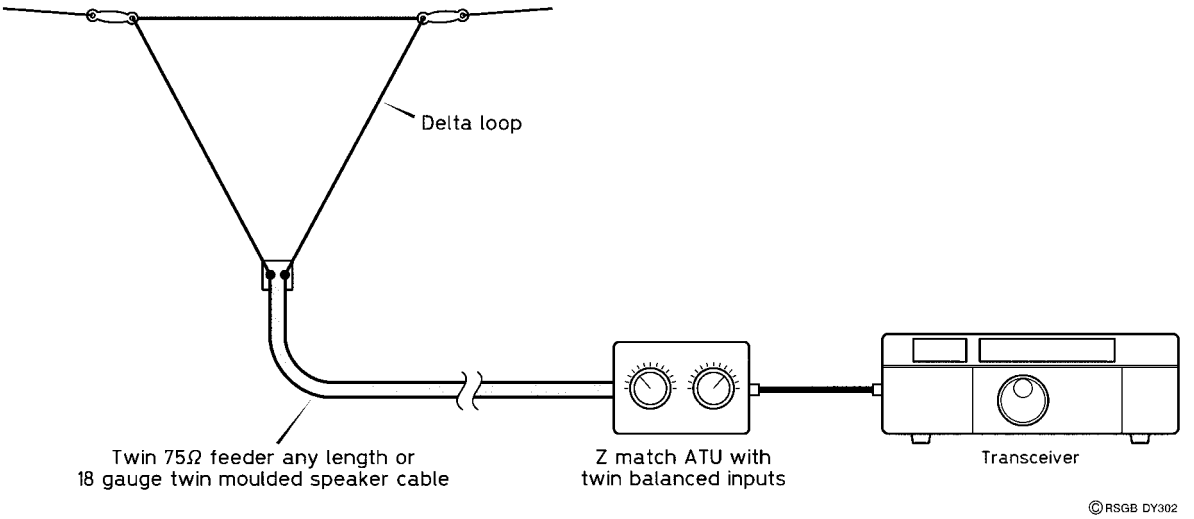

Figure 1 Multiband version of the delta loop connected to the ASTU using 75 Ω twin feeder

ends of your delta loop and connected to the balanced output terminals on the ATU, as Figure 1 shows.

Another way is to buy a ferrite-cored 1:1 balun, and use it as indicated in **Figure 2**. This produces an aerial which will operate over the whole range of amateur and commercial short-wave frequencies, when used with an ATU.

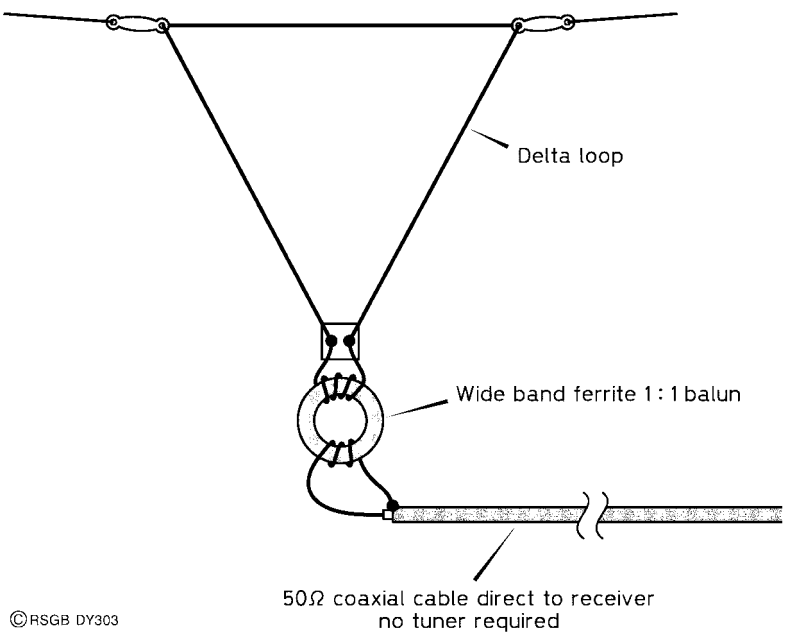

Figure 2 Multiband version of the delta loop using 75 Ω coaxial cable. This arrangement requires an ASTU if used with a multiband antenna

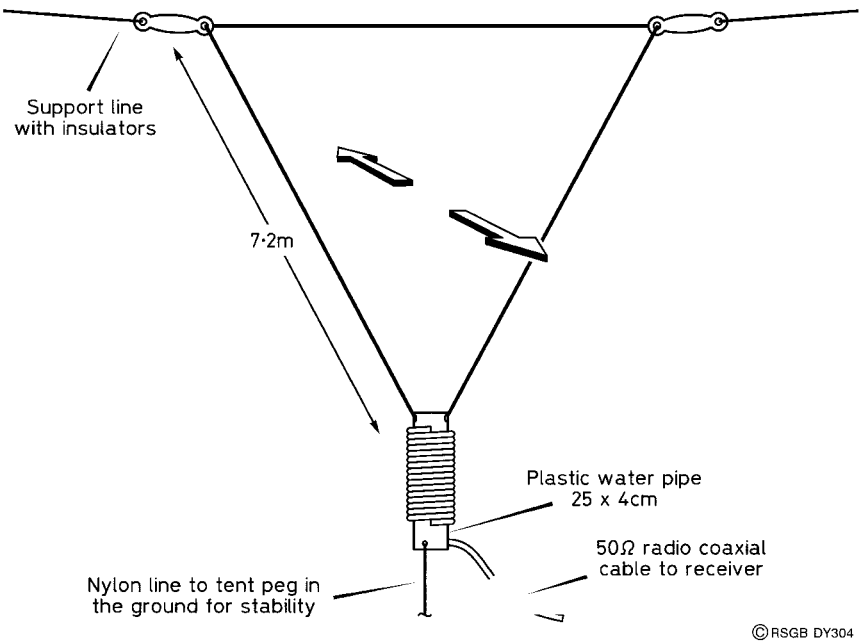

Figure 3 Single band version of the loop antenna using a coaxial balun. The direction of maximum signal strength is indicated by the arrows

However, since this aerial is designed to be a single-band type, there is a simpler answer to the problem of matching the aerial to your 50 Ω coaxial cable – **Figure 3** shows this. Make a tuned balun with a length of plastic water pipe, 25 cm long and 4 cm diameter and a piece of good-quality TV aerial cable. TV aerial cable has a characteristic impedance of 75 Ω, compared with the 50 Ω of the coaxial feeder that we usually use with amateur radio equipment. Use the type with a brown sheath and a closely knit earth braid, not the type having an earth foil inside the sheath.

The length we need for the balun is 3.8 m, but always allow between 3 and 4 cm extra for preparing the ends. Drill two small holes diametrically opposed in the top of the tube; these will be used to anchor the two ends of the delta loop, as shown in Figure 3. Drill another single hole in the bottom end of the tube, which will be used to anchor a nylon line going to the ground to add stability to the loop. Then, after drilling a pilot hole, drill a 5 or 6 mm hole near the top end of the tube, as shown in **Figure 4**. Prepare both ends of the coaxial cable, then feed one end into the tube, far enough for its ends to be soldered to the ends of the loop when the assembly reaches that stage.

Now, close-wrap the cable around the tube until only about 3 cm remain. Holding the cable tightly, drill another 6 mm hole beside the free end of the cable and feed it into this hole. At this point, feed the two ends of the loop into the top two holes and twist it back on itself. Figure 4 shows how this is done. Then, solder the ends of the coaxial balun to the ends of the loop.

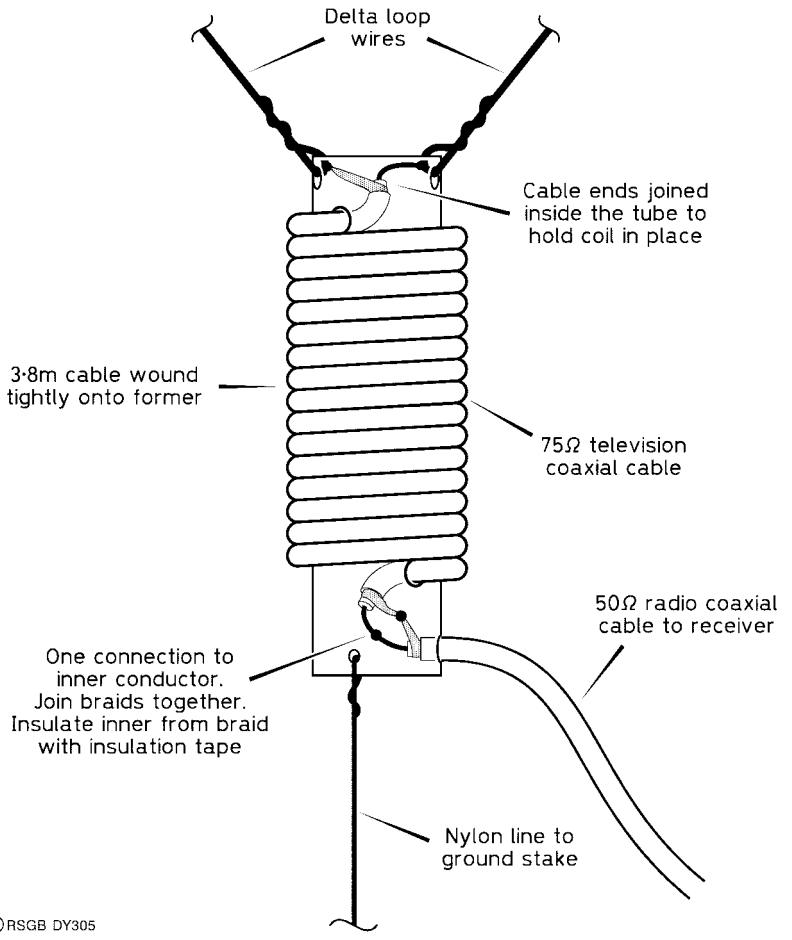

Figure 4 Construction of the balun

The bottom ends of the balun are then soldered to the 50 Ω coax which goes to your shack and to the transceiver.

Hoist the aerial into position carefully, being careful not to pull too hard on the support lines. Then, take the nylon line from the bottom of the balun to a peg in the ground. This adds stability to the aerial.

Using the delta loop

It is a directional aerial, as Figure 3 shows. It produces maximum power (and has maximum receive sensitivity) along a direction perpendicular to its own plane. Don't be too concerned with which direction it is pointing at first. Give it a try 'on the air' and see how it performs. Then you can contemplate how to point it in your favourite direction, to the USA, or Australia, for example.

Experimenting

You may want to enclose the balun in some sort of weatherproof container. Plastic ice cream containers are favourites for this sort of job. Seal all the holes where wires enter it with silicone sealant or self-amalgamating tape.

If you have used ordinary single-strand or multi-strand wire for your aerial, it will stretch over time under its own weight and that of the balun. Its operating frequency will fall slightly as a result. If you notice a significant difference, then dismantle it, remeasure and fix the sides and erect it again, perhaps facing a different direction. You can buy pre-stretched or hard-drawn wire for such purposes, if you feel that periodic tweaking of your aerial is a chore.

You can make a delta loop for different frequencies simply by scaling the lengths of wire for the loop and for the balun according to the design frequency. If your maths isn't quite up to this, enlist the help of someone well versed either in maths or aerial design!