88 Matching the end-fed random-wire aerial

Introduction

Many amateurs who do not have the space (or money) for a multi-band beam aerial, make use of the simplest possible alternative – the longest piece of wire that they can erect, with its end connected to the transceiver or receiver by an aerial tuning unit (ATU).

The length of the wire is not of major importance. Any length between 10 m and 80 m, with bends if necessary, will suffice. A good earth connection to the radio is just as important. Bends in the aerial wire can have some interesting effects on the directional properties of the aerial; V- or L-bends, or even a square shape are permitted. The only thing *not* permitted is to fold the wire back on itself in a tight hairpin bend!

Longish wire aerials

The term 'long wire' is usually used (incorrectly) to describe an end-fed aerial. How long is a piece of string? It depends what you mean by 'long'. In aerial parlance, it means 'long with respect to one wavelength'. Again, this depends on the band you are using. A long wire at 20 m is somewhat different from a long wire at 160 m. However, if you have sufficient real estate for a long wire on the 160 m band it must, by definition, be a long wire on all the other bands, too!

This should put you on your guard when analysing published data about feed-point impedance and the directional properties of a long wire aerial. Such theoretical data relate to a *real*, *ideal* long wire which is straight, horizontal, very high above perfect (conducting) ground, and not obstructed in any way. So your aerial doesn't quite match these criteria? Join the club!

Don't let this dampen your ardour when it comes to evaluating what the longish wire can do for you. The following should explain why.

Feed-point impedance

The impedance at the end of a longish-wire aerial can vary from a few tens of ohms to several thousand ohms, depending on the frequency in use and the wire length. It is also affected by factors such as bends, height above ground, proximity to buildings and wire diameter.

The actual value doesn't matter, provided we can make the aerial *appear* to have a 50 Ω impedance at the aerial socket of the transmitter. This process is what we call *impedance matching*, or simply *matching*. It maximises the power transfer from the transmitter to the aerial, and from the aerial to the receiver.

That is why an aerial tuning unit, or ATU, is almost (but not necessarily) obligatory.

The ATU

Many commercially produced HF receivers and transceivers have single 50 Ω coaxial sockets as their one and only means for connecting an external aerial. This means that an external aerial should have a 50 Ω feed impedance if it is to work efficiently, and it rules out most of the aerials being used by amateurs on the HF bands. Some means is necessary to change the aerial feed impedance to 'match' that of the transceiver. Such impedance-matching, or *Z*-matching (because *Z* is the symbol for impedance, just as *L* is the symbol for inductance) is the rôle of the ATU.

These can be bought and will accommodate either an end-fed or a coax-fed aerial. They can be bought ready for use or in kit form. Whether you want one for receiving only, or for use with a low-power (QRP) or high-power (QRO) transmitter, will determine what you need and how much you pay.

A simple single-band ATU

The simplest form of ATU is shown in **Figure 1**. It is simply a parallel LC (coil and capacitor) circuit, resonant at the chosen frequency, with taps on the coil for the aerial and the coaxial feed to the transceiver. If we assume the circuit is resonant, a high impedance exists at the top of the coil, and a low impedance at the bottom.

We said earlier that the end-fed longish wire presented an impedance which was high (or at least higher than 50 Ω). This explains why the aerial is tapped to the coil near the top, where the impedance is high, and the 50 Ω coax is tapped near the bottom, where the impedance is low.

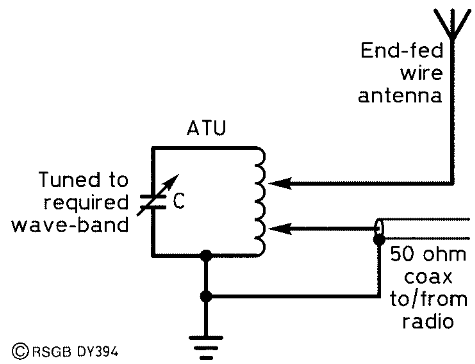

Figure 1 Parallel tuned circuit as single-band ATU for end-fed longish-wire antenna

Because the feed-point impedance of the aerial changes with frequency, so must the point at which the aerial is tapped to the coil to achieve impedance matching. The value of *C* must be changed also, to ensure that the circuit is resonant, and the 50 Ω tap will require tweaking also.

Setting up an ATU is quite simple. Make up an LC parallel-tuned circuit consisting of 50 turns of enamelled copper wire on an empty 35 mm film plastic container (or similar), tuned with a 500 pF variable capacitor. Make sure the enamel is removed from the ends of the wire before soldering.

Solder the inner wire of the coaxial cable from the radio to the first or second turn of the coil from its grounded end. Then solder the braid to the grounded end. Connect the aerial about one-third of the way down the coil from the top, removing the enamel at the connection point.

Adjust the variable capacitor for maximum noise or signal strength in the receiver. Then, try different tapping points from the aerial, to maximise the signal again. This matches the aerial impedance to that of the tuned circuit. Repeat the process with the coax tap, thus matching the impedance of the radio and the cable to that of the tuned circuit.

You will no doubt find that the tapping process on the coil was not easily accomplished, especially when the enamel must be removed at each tapping point without shorting adjacent turns together. It is therefore logical to produce a design where the taps have been prepared during the winding of the coil, and are selected with a rotary switch. To this end, the following multi-band design is described.

A multi-band ATU

The same type of coil design around a 35 mm film container is used (see **Figure 2**). The tapping points can be prepared in advance by a little judicious planning. Dismantle your original coil and measure the length of wire on it. It will be a little more than a calculation of $50 \times \pi D$ would suggest (where D is the diameter of the film container), due to the lack of tension in the coil and the wire diameter itself. You will need aerial tapping points at turns 1, 2, 3, 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35, 40 and 45, corresponding to all the bands from 28 MHz to 1.8 MHz. The coaxial cable tap is fixed at turn 2 (an acceptable compromise). All the turns are counted from the earthy end.

Cut another piece of enamelled copper the same length as you used originally. Then, with the aid of an ordinary calculator, work out the positions of the points where the enamel must be removed for the taps. For example, turn 15 will have to be made $\frac{15}{50}$ of the way along the wire, turn 20 tap made at $\frac{20}{50}$ of the way along. So, if the length of wire is, say 4.7 metres, the two taps in question will be made at $\frac{15}{50} \times 4.7 = 1.41$ m and $\frac{20}{50} \times 4.7 = 1.88$ m from one end. This must be repeated for each of the tap positions, and the enamel removed ready for the wire to be soldered to it. With a

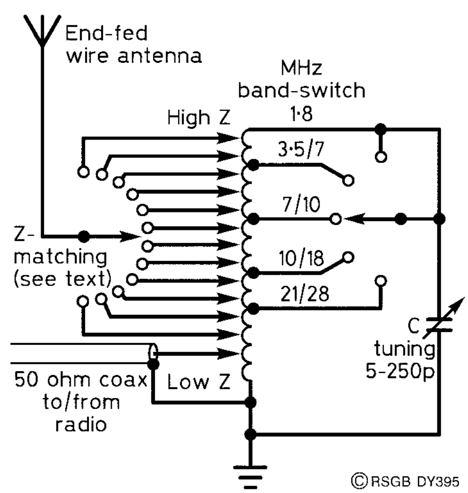

Figure 2 Simple multi-band ATU for end-fed longish-wire antennas

soldering iron, tin each tap point while the copper is shiny, thus ensuring a good, low-resistance connection. Do not solder on the taps yet.

The coil can now be wound as before. The taps can be soldered on, taking the lead from each one to the wafer of a single-pole 12-way rotary switch, the pole being connected to the aerial.

The tuning of the ATU is carried out by the same 250 pF capacitor, with a single-pole 5-way rotary switch used to select the band. Its tapping points will need to be chosen manually, using the method described earlier. Don't attempt to make new tapping points on the coil for this – use the taps available on the wafer of the other rotary switch, and find which is optimum for each band.

Notes

- For the aerial, use PVC-covered stranded tinned copper, of size 16/0.2 mm or 24/0.2 mm.
- Make the wire as long as possible, but anything over 10 m should be OK.
- Keep the wire as high as you can, in the clear and away from obstructions.
- Don't worry about bends, but don't use hairpin bends.
- Use a good insulator to attach your aerial – anything plastic will do.
- Anchor the wire near the point of entry to the building, but use a U-bend to prevent ingress of water.
- The wire can be brought in through the corner of a window, the PVC acting as an insulator. If you must drill a hole in the brickwork, make sure it slopes upwards from outside, so that water is deterred from entering.
- Use a good RF earth (as opposed to an electrical earth) such as half a dozen bare copper wires buried under the lawn in a fan shape. They should be joined together at the point of the fan and strapped to the earth connector of your ATU.