41 An RF changeover circuit

Introduction

The simplest entry route to operating an HF station is to buy or build a receiver, and to add a simple CW (Morse) transmitter. In theory, this sounds so simple, yet in practice there is one significant hurdle to be overcome. How can they both share the same aerial? A manually operated changeover switch is the obvious solution, but it takes time to perform the switching operation, by which time someone else has squeezed in before you and contacted the DX station! This small circuit accomplishes the changeover automatically, as soon as the transmitter is keyed.

How it's done

The circuit is shown in **Figure 1**, and uses the signal from the transmitter to operate a relay. A relay is a switch which is operated electrically in the following way. A coil of wire with an iron core is used as an electromagnet. When current flows through the coil, it produces a magnetic field which, in turn, is used to pull a set of switch contacts. These contacts will be used to switch the aerial from transmitter to receiver and vice versa. The relay used here has a double-pole changeover (or DPDT, or DPCO) switch. If you are confused by the different types of switch, look at the basic descriptions elsewhere in this book. The *pole* of a switch is the part that doesn't move; in Figure 1, one pole is connected to L1 and the other to the aerial output. In a circuit diagram, the switch contacts are always shown in their *normal* state, i.e. when *no* current flows in the relay coil. The changeover switch is normally in the receive position, so we say the receive switch is *normally closed*, and the transmit switch is *normally open*. We choose to have the circuit in the receive position normally, because everyone spends a lot more time receiving than transmitting. The relay is energised only when you are transmitting.

There are three RF sockets – one for the transmitter, one for the aerial, and one for the receiver. When the transmitter is not in use, there is a direct connection (via the Rx normally closed contacts of the relay) between the aerial and the receiver. The transmitter (which is not keyed at this time) is connected to a 50 ohm dummy load, R1.

When the transmitter is activated by pressing the Morse key, an RF signal appears at the transmitter socket. The wire carrying the signal to the relay

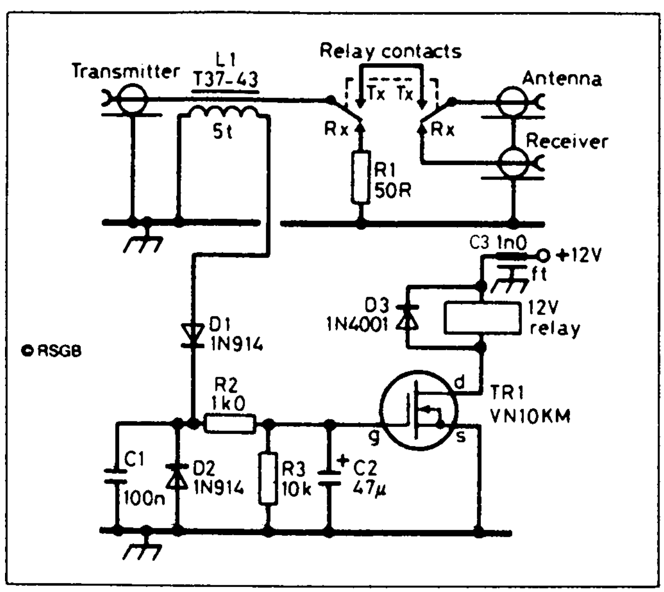

Figure 1 RF activated relay

Tx contacts passes through a toroid (a ferrite coil former, looking like a black Polo mint), which has a five-turn coil wrapped around it. This five-turn coil picks up the signal, which is then detected by D1 and D2, and converted to a steady voltage. C1 removes any remaining RF and C2 provides *hang*. Without it, the circuit would detect the gaps between every dot and dash being sent, and switch the aerial over very rapidly and very frequently! This is *not* what we want. We need the relay to remain in the transmit condition at normal Morse keying speeds, and then return to receive when the sending is complete. The combination of C2 and R3 achieves this.

The voltage appearing across C2 is fed to a VMOS field-effect transistor (FET), TR1, which acts as an electronic switch. When a voltage appears across C2, the FET switches on and passes a current through the relay coil, changing the contacts from receive to transmit. The diode, D3, across the relay winding protects the FET from being damaged by the large reverse-voltage spike which occurs across the coil when the FET switches off.

Construction

This is very simple – a circuit board is not required. The prototype was built into an old 50 g tobacco tin. All ground leads are soldered directly to the tin, thus supporting the components automatically. Phono sockets were used for the aerial, receiver and transmitter; you could use whatever connectors matched the rest of your station. The 12 V supply is fed through the tin using a 1000 pF feed-through capacitor, C3.

The ‘dummy load’, R1, must be able to withstand the RF output power of the transmitter. For novice use, 4 watts is adequate. Two suggestions for making up R2 from standard resistors are shown in **Figure 2**. Six 330 ohm, 1 watt resistors in parallel have a combined resistance of 330/6 = 55 Ω at 6 W. Two 100 ohm, 2 watt resistors in parallel have a combined resistance of 100/2 = 50 Ω at 4 W.

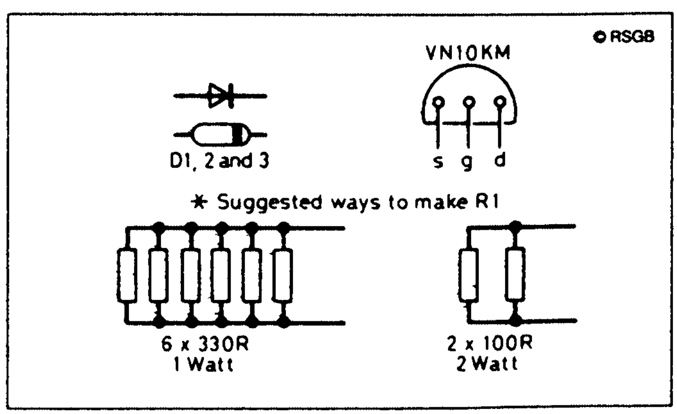

Figure 2 Component details

Make sure all the contacts to the relay are correct; also ensure that TR1, C2, D1, D2 and D3 are correctly wired.

Winding the toroid, L1, is very simple. It is made from PVC-insulated hook-up wire. Each time the wire passes through the centre of the toroid counts as one turn. The wire from the transmit socket to the relay simply passes through the centre! Use thin 50 Ω coax for the leads to the three sockets.

What happens to the receiver?

On transmit, the receiver is not connected to the aerial, but is only the separation of the switch contacts (about 0.5 mm!) away from the transmit lead. The receiver *will* pick up the transmitted signal, and there is a possibility that this signal will be enough to damage the receiver's sensitive input circuits. This can be prevented with the simple addition shown in **Figure 3**. Two diodes are connected back to back across the receiver socket. These act as a *limiter*, reducing the amount of signal that can enter the receiver. Solder these directly between the receiver socket and the tin.

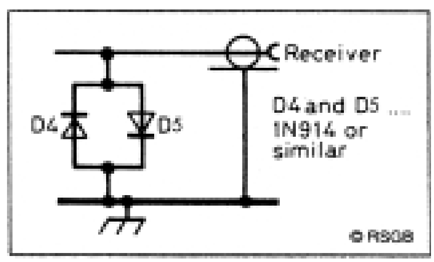

Figure 3 Receiver input protection

Warning

The wiring **must** be thoroughly checked. If the relay switch connections are wrong, there is a **great probability** that the full RF power will be applied to your receiver! You can check these connections as follows. With the 12 V supply connected, check that the relay energises (clicking sound heard) when the FET drain (d) is shorted to earth. Check the aerial and receiver connections with an ohmmeter or continuity tester. Disconnect the 12 V supply, and check that there is continuity between the centre pins of the aerial and receiver sockets. Reconnect the 12 V supply, short the FET drain to earth again (this will not damage the FET) and check that there is continuity between the centre pins of the aerial and transmitter sockets. If these tests show correct operation, disconnect the drain shorting wire (*most* important!) and your aerial auto-changeover is ready for use! Avoid using the device without the lid fitted.

Parts list

Resistors: 0.25 watt, 5% tolerance, unless otherwise stated

R1	50 ohms (Ω) – see text and Figure 2
R2	1 kilohm (kΩ)
R3	10 kilohms (kΩ)

Capacitors

C1	100 nanofarads (nF), 0.1 microfarad (μF)
C2	47 microfarads (μF) 15 V electrolytic
C3	1000 picofarads (pF) feedthrough

Semiconductors

D1, D2, D4, D5	1N914
D3	1N4001
TR1	VN10KM

Additional items

L1	T37–43 toroid
	Relay 12 V DPDT (DPCO) relay
	Three sockets to suit (phono, SO239, etc.)
	Thin coax cable and hook-up wire