

Don Lancaster's

# RESOURCE BIN

number five

## Exploring labor-of-love technical newsletters.

**O**ur usual reminder here that the *Resource Bin* is now a two-way column. You can get tech help, consultant referrals and off-the-wall networking on nearly any electronic, *tinaja* questing, personal publishing, money machine, or computer topic by calling me at (520) 428-4073 weekdays 8-5 Mountain Standard Time.

I'm now in the process of setting up my new *Guru's Lair* web site you will find at (where else?) [www.tinaja.com](http://www.tinaja.com) This is the place you'll go for instant tech answers. Among the many files in our library, you will find complete reprint sets for all of the *Resource Bin* and other columns. Plus a brand new [Research InfoPack Service](#).

You will get the best results if you have both [Netscape Communicator](#) and [Acrobat Reader 3.0](#) installed.

### Labor-of-love Newsletters

Information is where you find it. Over the years, I've noticed that the home crafted labor-of-love specialty newsletters often give you more info faster and better than do many larger circulation magazines. With honest "from the trenches" reviews and more genuinely usable material for you.

At its outset, any publication has to decide what or who is to be in charge. The options are to be *reader driven*, *ego driven*, or end up *advertiser driven*. In an advertiser-driven publication, you the reader, are the product delivered to paying advertisers. Done so on a cost-per-thousand basis.

If you are lucky, you are worth an entire nickel. There is thus an inherent conflict in delivering any useful and unbiased end reader info within any advertiser driven pub. Especially stuff that warns you about poor products, operating defects, or any third party alternatives. Or workarounds that let you avoid buying anything in the first place. Sadly, the economics of any high-circulation marketplace strongly

will favor being advertiser driven.

For our resource bin this month, I thought I'd gather up a great heaping bunch of labor-of-love newsletters, fancier reader-driven magazines, and several related resources...

### Great Newsletters

Let's start off with the *TecSpec* from *Allegro Electronics*. This hobbyist and homebrew electronics newsletter is heavily into electronic strobes, optical communications, lasers, magnetics, and such. Most of which are easy to build from low cost parts and offered kits and pc boards.

By far my favorite labor-of-love newsletter is Frank Reids *Speleonics*. This "underground" publication is specifically intended for spelunkers and cavers who have an interest in high-tech goodies. Covered subjects include low frequency radio comm, rescue gear, electronic compasses and survey instruments; nav stuff, high tech lamps, piezo lighters, mapping software, remote sensing goodies, and geophysical fundamentals.

Amateur radio astronomy is one rough row to hoe. All the equipment is expensive, the math is messy, and finding low noise sites is tricky. For

**NEXT MONTH: Don looks at the uniquely bizarre world of electronic surplus.**

credibility, you also have to avoid the e.t. crowd like the plague.

The leading newsletter is called *The Radio Observer*. It's published by the *Assoc. of Amateur Radio Astronomers*.

Getting useful tech info on radio controlled models has been hard. But a brand new *Micro-Avionics Newsletter* promises to deliver lots on this sorely needed topic. Several of those R/C models are now up to one-fifth or

one-quarter scale. Which gives you a quite respectable platform for aerial measurement, experiments and video observations. At a ridiculously tiny fraction of a "real" aircraft.

And, speaking of which, *Homebuilt Rotorcraft* is a newsletter on building your own helicopters. It is intended for the gyro gearloose crowd. Yes, the lawyers completely ate up the entire personal aircraft industry for lunch. But, there's still plenty of interesting experimental and homebrew small scale possibilities. No profit potential, of course. And they just might end up calling you "shorty".

There is some amateur interest in high vacuum techniques now being addressed by Steve Hansens *Bell Jar* This one is on building up your own vacuum pumps, compressors, neon displays, and such. The *Bell Jar* is a newer publication that is currently in its third issue.

There are quite a few collectors of old radios. Whose primary newsletter seems to be *Antique Radio Classified*. Besides the hundreds of buy/sell ads for older AM broadcast band radios, they also cater to ancient military and wireless receivers, do early television, loudspeaker rebuilding, upcoming auctions, and special services.

At one time, building a Tesla coil was a mandatory rite of passage for an emerging technonerd who simply could neither afford nor understand girls. Although interest in these "lots of sparks" machines has dwindled, a dedicated cadre of enthusiasts still remain. And gets addressed by the ongoing *Tesla Coil Builders Association* newsletter. But be forewarned: The name "Tesla" tends to attract several rather strangish denizens out of the woodwork. Such as those alien UFO free energy power conspiracy buffs.

Any useful reader-oriented desktop publishing magazines which address the lower end needs of beginners are

few and far between. Be sure to let me know when you find one, for I would very much like to upgrade my *Ask the Guru* and *LaserWriter Corner* columns from their present near-limbo state.

There are now many hundreds of computer user group newsletters of varying quality. Two of my favorites include Tom Weishaars exceptionally well done *Resource Central* that tightly focuses on those Apple IIe and IIgs products; and *BMUG*, an incredible publication produced by the Berkeley Macintosh Users Group.

One Mark Voorhees newsletter of interest to traditional craftsmen and musicians is the *Classic Organ Builder*. Or, if coin operated music is more to your style, check into *Always Jukin' The Monthly Jukebox Magazine*.

I've only reviewed a scant few of those hundreds of ham and specialty communications magazines. But one I have found of interest is *The Lowdown*, which does specialize in all those low frequency comm services that reside below the AM broadcast band. These include air beacons, navigation aides, and natural geophysical phenomoma related to earthquakes and whistlers.

A second new comm newsletter is the *Spread Spectrum Scene*. Uh, spread spectrum communications is getting super important for everything from power line controls through wireless modems through ham packet radio on up through navigation satellites. And offers the promise of allowing many stations on the same frequency at the same time without major interference. With greatly simplified licensing.

If you are at all into home printing, be certain to check into *The Printers Devil* newsletter from the *Mother of Ashes Press*. Whose masthead motto is "A home in every press. A press in every home." Old line fer sure. And exceptionally well done.

Many of the so-called inventors publications are marketing scams in disguise. But one of the few and far between that I can recommend is Ed Zimmers useful *Inventor-Entrepreneur Network* newsletter. It addresses the realities of product marketing and development on an individual, small scale, and real-world basis.

There's also a new resurgence in traditional crystal sets and real down home electronics using a minimum of the simplest possible parts and found materials. One newsletter that covers these projects is that new *Crystal Set Builders Association*. Several similar mags are supposedly in the works.

## House Organs

A *house organ* will differ from any labor-of-love newsletter in that it is published by a company rather than a person. House organs obviously have "sell our product!" as their primary mission in life. Once you recognize their total and their overwhelmingly obvious bias, you will often find lots of useful info. Much of which can clearly be applied way beyond what the writer intends. Or at least get you started off in a research direction.

And house organs are usually free on a credible enough request.

There are countless thousand upon thousands of house organs. Let's look at three wildly different ones

The first of these is that *Hewlett Packard Journal*. Which gives excellent technical coverage of the underlying principles behind electronic test and comm gear. This is particularly handy for picking up any new applied math concepts, unusual packaging ideas, and all of the fundamentals of newer measurement technologies.

*Thomson-Shore* is a premium quality printer that specializes in limited run paperback and hardbound volumes. Their *Printers Ink* house organ is an every now and then pub which has lots of really useful info in it for self publishing. Especially if you do read between the lines to pick up what is really being said. They also have a free hardback reprint demo.

In what has to be the greatest name ever thunk up for any trade journal, *Foiled Again* is published by *Transfer Print Foils*. This beauty covers all the different uses for hot stamping foils. Including scads of emerging desktop publishing uses. And various ongoing product decoration and enhancement tricks and techniques.

## Beyond Labor-of-love

The next step up from labor-of-love newsletters are what I like to call *high energy resources*. Quite often, these are professionally done "real" magazines which have clearly gone beyond the newsletter class. But they still remain rather strongly reader oriented. They usually have one very charismatic or highly creative head honcho who is obviously in total charge.

Most importantly, they remain on a strongly reader driven mission, rather than being advertiser based. Which means that useful and top-notch info can still be given out to you without offending any advertisers.

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PostScript: A Visual Approach	\$22.50
PostScript Program Design	\$24.50
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Acrobat Reference	\$24.50
Whole works (all PostScript)	\$380.00
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## LABOR-OF-LOVE NEWSLETTERS AND SIMILAR RESOURCES

**Allegro Tec Spec**  
3 Mine Mountain Road  
Cornwall Bridge, CT 06754  
(203) 672-0123

**Always Jukin'**  
221 Yesler Way  
Seattle, WA 98104  
(206) 233-9460

**Am. Radio Astronomers**  
247 North Linden Street  
Massapequa, NY 11758  
(516) 798-8459

**Antique Radio Class**  
PO Box 2  
Carlisle, MA 01741  
(508) 371-0512

**The Bell Jar**  
35 Windsor Drive  
Amherst, NH 03031  
(508) 689-1027

**BMUG**  
1442A Walnut Street #153  
Berkeley, CA 94709  
(510) 849-9114

**Classical Organ Builder**  
PO Box 27476  
Phoenix, AZ 85061  
(602) 973-1395

**CompuServe**  
5000 Arlington Center Blvd  
Columbus, OH 43220  
(800) 848-8199

**Foiled Again**  
PO Box 538  
East Brunswick, NJ 08816  
(908) 238-1800

**Hewlett Packard Journal**  
3200 Hillview Avenue  
Palo Alto, CA 94304  
(415) 857-1501

**High Energy Enterprises**  
PO Box 5636  
Security, CO 80931  
(719) 475-0918

**Home Power**  
PO Box 130  
Hornbrook, CA 96044  
(916) 475-3179

**Homebuilt Rotorcraft**  
5555 Zuni SE, Ste 281  
Albuquerque, NM 87108  
(505) 298-9362

**Inventor-Entrepreneur**  
1683 Plymouth Road  
Ann Arbor, MI 48105  
(313) 663-8000

**Lindsay Publications**  
PO Box 538  
Bradley, IL 60915  
(815) 935-5353

**Low Down**  
Longwave Club of America  
45 Wildflower Road  
Levittown, PA 19057

**Micro-Avionics News**  
4241B Valley Road  
Drexel Hill, PA 19026  
(215) 259-6430

**Model Railroader**  
21027 Crossroads Circle  
Waukesha, WI 53187  
(414) 796-8776

**PC Techniques**  
7721 E Gray Road #204  
Scottsdale, AZ 85260  
(602) 483-0192

**Printer's Ink**  
7300 West Joy Road  
Dexter, MI 48130  
(313) 426-3939

**Radio Observer**  
7605 Deland Avenue  
Ft Pierce, FL 34951  
(407) 464-2118

**Recharger/Supplies Unlim.**  
101 Granite Street, Ste F  
Corona, CA 91719  
(714) 371-8288

**Resource Central**  
PO Box 11250  
Overland Park, KS 66207  
(913) 649-0567

**Science Probe**  
500-B Bi-County Blvd  
Farmingdale, NY 11735  
(516) 293-0467

**Speleonics**  
Box 5283  
Bloomington, IN 47407  
(812) 239-7305

**Spread Spectrum Scene**  
PO Box 2199  
El Granada, CA 94018  
(510) 278-3157

**Synergetics**  
Box 809  
Thatcher, AZ 85552  
(520) 428-4073

**Tesla Coil Builders**  
3 Amy Lane  
Queensbury, NY 12804  
(518) 792-1003

**The WELL**  
27 Gate Five Road  
Sausalito, CA 94965  
(415) 332-4335

**Whole Earth Review**  
27 Gate Five Road  
Sausalito, CA 94965  
(415) 332-1716

Here's a few of my favorites...

First and foremost on my list would have to be the *Whole Earth Review*. Still at that same old stall after all of these years, their "access to tools" charter remains their central editorial goal. Of the several hundred magazines and trade journals which I personally do subscribe to, WER is number two.

Second only, of course, to MAD.

Most of the solar energy mags have long gone belly up. But *Home Power* is coming on like gangbusters. And they do practice what they preach, doing everything off grid and off line. All in a down-to-earth and totally hands-on, recycled, and eco-friendly style.

Jeff Dunteman's *PC Techniques* is an interesting bimonthly programming magazine having a strong focus on solving end-user problems. A similar electronic hardware journal would be Steve Circia's *Circuit Cellar* with lots of hands-on construction projects, especially those related to embedded controllers and systems.

Most of you do know by now that Forrest Mims is publishing *Science Probe*, an amateur science magazine heavily into science education and atmospheric research topics. Kind of a "what *Scientific American* should have become" publication.

*Recharger* and *Supplies Unlimited* are a pair of magazines aimed at the laser printer repair and the toner recycling industries. While these obviously are

advertiser driven (one offers poorly done technical content; the other none at all), the fact that certain Fortune 500 companies definitely do not want you reading either of these mags makes the entire trip worthwhile. These are also the only pubs I know of where a careful reading of all of the ads can immediately save you hundreds and even thousands of dollars.

I would also have to include *Model Railroader* here for three reasons. First, because this magazine has by far the very finest technical writing of any publication anywhere in the world. Period. It should be required reading for any and all tech writers and tech illustrators on all levels everywhere. I hope to someday eventually be able to communicate with my readers as well as the Model Railroader authors do.

Second, Model Railroader reveals how a large circulation magazine can have zillions of wall-to-wall ads and still remain overwhelmingly reader driven. Its common to have a "this kit sucks" review right beside a full page color ad for the reviewed kit product. Their enlightened advertisers do not mind in the least, since they do know that any loyal and dedicated readers consistently given accurate and useful info tend to buy more products more often. Besides, the kit probably is an atrocity, or they wouldn't have said so. And hobby kit suppliers have to be in the game for the long haul.

Third, because there's lots of neat tools, materials, and techniques here that you just may not be exposed to otherwise. Low cost chemical milling forms a typical example. Amazingly, Model Railroader published one of the very earliest practical examples of non-volatile memory projects. Long before any of the electronic ones.

### Not Quite Newsletters

While these are not exactly "on paper" periodical publications, three other resources deserve mention. First, do check out *Lindsay Publications*, who have now taken upon themselves to reprint great books and articles as far back as the turn of the century. They are very good at "lost" machine shop techniques, unusual craft secrets, and early radio titles.

For perpetual motion, zero point scalar energy, zillion mile per gallon carburetors, magnetics-only motors, pan-galactic happy faces on Mars, and for "Boy, a whole flock of em flew over that time" pubs in general, the definitive bookstore is *High Energy Enterprises*. A free catalog is offered. Totally fascinating reading for sure.

Even if you do not really expect Congress to repeal the second law of thermodynamics. At least not in this legislative session.

Finally, of course, there are now lots of on-line options for electronic labor-of-love publishing. Among the



other benefits is instant world wide accessibility. Avoiding the months of delay and high costs of traditional publishing. Not to mention the rapid error correcting and direct end user "close the loop" feedback.

My favorite here is *GENie*. Partially because they pay me to say things like that. Besides my own PSRT on GENie where a special area has now been set aside for use by all you *Nuts & Volts* readers, you might also find all their RADIO, HOSB (home office and small business), MAC, IBM, AMIGA, A2, ATARI and DTP (desktop publishing) RoundTables of more than passing interest. The average cost of a PSRT download is around twenty one cents. System wide, over 120,000 downloads are immediately available.

It never ceases to amaze me that I can press a button on GENie and then immediately route a "must read" ad message to scads of people. At a cost per thousand of zero!

I have now seen the future and it is clearly email oriented.

Two obvious competitors to GENie include *CompuServe* and *The Well*. But there are, of course, thousands more.

### The SCAR Ploy

Because sub prices vary all over the lot, I've purposely avoided giving you current subscription costs. But your typical range runs from free to \$4 to \$30 a year. I very carefully excluded anything that I'd consider too costly for what they deliver.

Please bear in mind the "labor of love" in the smaller newsletters. Most

of these are struggling to say the least. Many are running at a dead loss. So, on the really tiny mags, just go ahead and flat out subscribe. Or send along five bucks cash with your request for info. And a very large pre-addressed envelope with lots of postage.

But, on any "real" magazine, there is one simple and useful ploy which is almost certain to get you at least one free copy and perhaps even a comp subscription. I call this one the SCAR technique. Which is short for *Sample Copy Ad Rates*. Call up the advertising department of the magazine and then pretend that you just might become a potential advertiser. Then just ask for a sample copy and a rate card. Almost always, you'll have an express mail copy of the publication in your hands the very next day.

### Another Contest

I do suspect my coverage here is grossly uneven. Especially for all the zillions of regional ham radio mags and computer user group newsletters. Almost certainly, you should find a dozen ads right here in *Nuts & Volts* for several labor-of-love newsletters that I've obviously missed.

So, let's have us another one of our contests. Simply tell me about any publication of any sort that (A) you happen to like, that also (B) actually delivers genuinely useful end reader info on a no-holds-barred, objective and fairly priced basis.

There will be a dozen or so of my newly revised *Incredible Secret Money Machine II* book prizes going to the

best entries, along with an all expense paid (FOB Thatcher, AZ) *tinaja quest* for two going to the best of all.

As usual, be certain to send all your written entries directly to me here at *Synergetics* per the end blurb, rather than to *Nuts & Volts* editorial.

If possible, get me a sample copy. Or, better yet, placed on their comp list. A few months from now, then we can do a resource bin on your favorite newsletters and pubs.

While you are at it, be sure to let me know which other types of topics (especially insider secret stuff) that you would like to have appear here in *Nuts & Volts*. I'll see what I can work up on my own or pass on to others. ♦

UPDATE: I've left this mostly as is for historical purposes. A few of these are long gone. Use the *Oxbridge Media Finder* and *Factsheet 5* and the search box on my *Guru's Lair* for current info.

*Microcomputer pioneer and guru Don Lancaster is the author of 35 books and countless tech articles. Don maintains his no-charge US tech helpline found at (520) 428-4073, besides offering all of his own books, reprints, and consulting services. Don also offers a free catalog full of his unique products and resource secrets. The best calling times are 8-5 on weekdays, Mountain Standard Time.*

*Don is the webmaster of his Guru's Lair found at <http://www.tinaja.com>*

*Full reprints and preprints of all Don's columns and ongoing tech support appear here. You can reach Don at Synergetics, Box 809, Thatcher, AZ 85552. Or send any messages to [don@tinaja.com](mailto:don@tinaja.com)*

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