

THE ULTIMATE SHACK CLOCK

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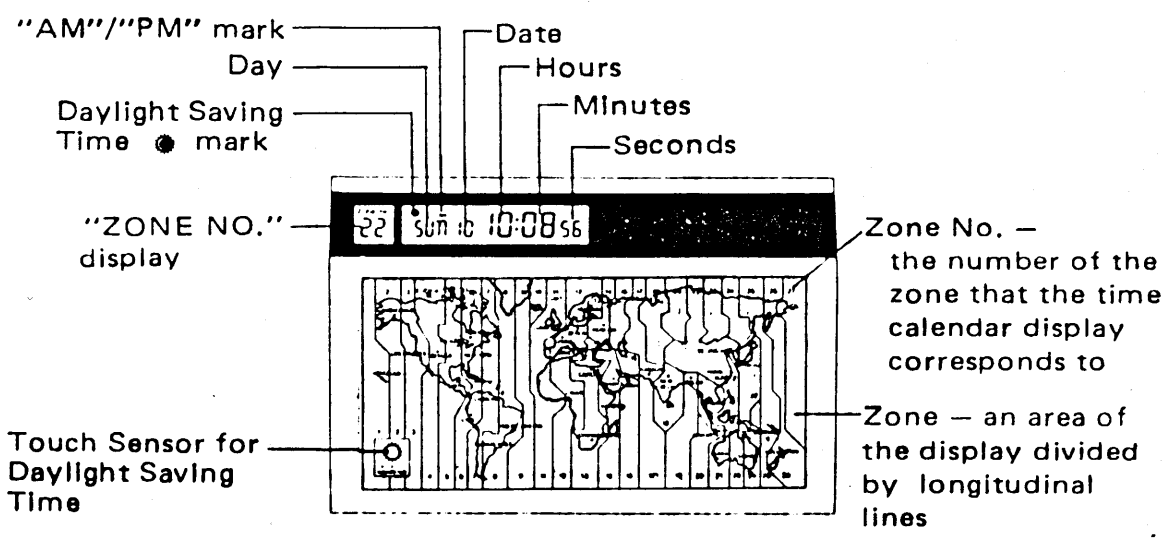
As an avid QSL hound, accurate time, to the second, is very important to me. Like most DXers, I need to anticipate ID'S and time checks by watching the second-by-second count down at "the top of the hour." When digital liquid crystal clocks first came out, we all lusted after one with a 24 hour format. When they appeared, we either bought two or lusted for one clock with dual output to handle UTC and local time. Finally, they appeared! But where, oh where, were the seconds on the display? The clock had to be counting them! Usually they were hidden, "a button push" away. With these digital wonders, we could not see the "time" and the "seconds" at the same time.

Once, rather too deep in DX'ers "tuning oil," I decided that I needed one digital clock that read at least six time zones (for my favorite DX target areas) as well as local time and UTC. It must (for sure!) continuously display the seconds, also. Some dream!!! No way!

Well, the next time that I was too deep in the old tuning oil, I noticed that Radio Shack was running a special sale on Micronta 1" x 3" digital clocks (cat.#63836A). They were about \$7.00 each and would display in either 24 hour or 12 hour format. Like all the rest, they would either show you the time or display the seconds. With my usual clear thinking when experimenting with tuning oil, I decided that I would buy nine of these little beauties and mount them on the wall above my radio. I even made nice little signs saying "UTC" "LOCAL" "TOKYO," etc. At last, The Ultimate Shack Clock! Nirvana! Wrong, Buffalo Breath! The first problem was that those Radio Shack wonders would only display seconds for about 1 minute before defaulting back to the "time" mode. Drat! Should have checked that out. So, the continuous "seconds" display didn't work. Further, the manufacturers quality control was awful. Out of 10 clocks, ONLY TWO kept anything like accurate time (± 1 second per day). Most were around ± 5 seconds PER DAY out of sync with reality!!! So, I had a choice: Either reset all nine clocks daily or put up with nine cheap little clocks, each rather randomly claiming to know what time it was. Obsessive/compulsive, YES, but I'm not totally nuts... THIS AIN'T WORKING!!! I'm out \$70.00 and have two cheap clocks that work and seven that don't!

So back to the tuning oil!! What did I really want? I wanted one clock which showed me hours, minutes and seconds, at all times. I wanted this mythical wonder to tell me the time at any location on earth, even the crazy 1/2 hour time zones like India and central Australia. What's more, I wanted it to tell me the DAY and DATE at my target location, since I often forget the International Date line and UTC midnight and stuff like that. I also wanted it to handle Daylight Savings time, to hang on the wall and to be battery powered since my power mains here go out with some regularity.

I swear to you, not one week after dreaming up this performance specification, I was flying on business and found the clock advertised in the "In Flight" catalogue! It was the SEIKO WORLD TIME DIGITAL QUARTZ TOUCH SENSOR CLOCK, MODEL QNS901G. It is beautifully constructed of gold anodized aluminum and dark brown glass and measures approximately 8" w. x 5" h. It has a large electronically touch sensitive world map and a display made from 1/2" LED's. You simply touch your target area on the map and the display shifts automatically to the proper time, day and date at that location. The section from the instruction book shown on the next page covers most of the bases:

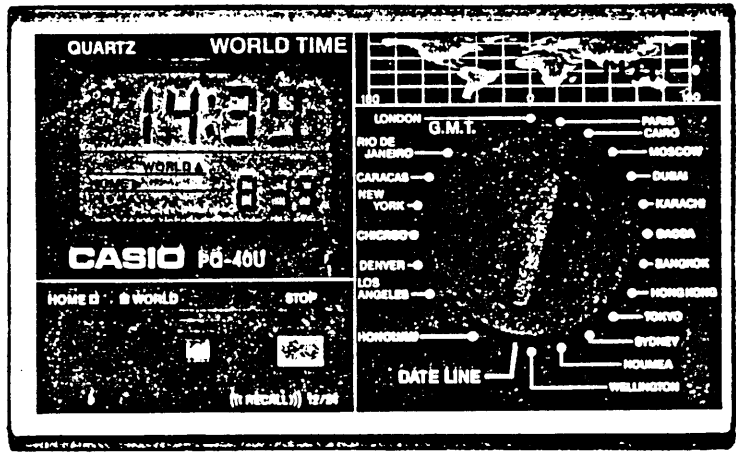


You should note that the Ultimate Shack Clock will do everything that I dreamed of except hang on the wall. It comes with a plastic stand so that it will set on a desk with the face at about a 20 degree angle to horizontal. I was able to remove the face plate (containing all of the working parts except the time setting buttons and the batteries) from the under-chassis, and wall mount it, using some scraps of plywood, Velcro and good bit of ingenuity. (PLEASE NOTE, this certainly voids Seiko's warranty and would probably send their engineers into convulsions!)

The suggested retail price of the Ultimate Shack Clock is around \$90.00, but it can be had from the major electronics discount houses (47th Street Photo, etc) for about \$70.00. The clock is my most valuable piece of peripheral equipment, simply because when I touch Laos on the world map it tells me that in Vientiane it is 21 April at 18:31:16 AND I KNOW THAT ALL OF THE INFORMATION IS CORRECT!

A VARIATION:

There are a number of versions of the clock pictured below currently on the market. They retail for anywhere from \$23 to \$40. Most of these have 24 position rotary switches to give you each of the 24 main time zones. I have noticed one Casio watch with the same capability and at least one "credit card" with 29 zones on it. Most of these little beauties will display the time (12 or 24 format) from two time zones simultaneously. One of the displayed times is a constant time zone (used for your QTH or for UTC) and the other display is controlled by the rotary switch.



The limitations of these designs are that they usually DO NOT:

- A) Display seconds
- B) Deal with 1/2 hour zones
- C) Give you day and date

In mid-1988 Casio introduced the World Time Watch (\$39.95) with most of the capabilities and limitations of the "credit card" unit at the left.