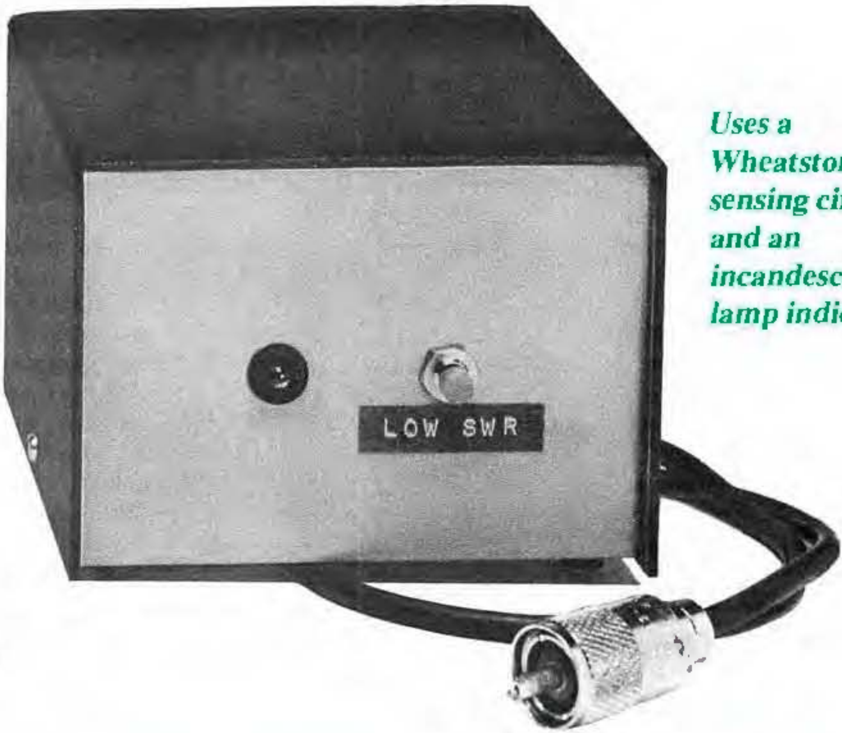


Uses a Wheatstone bridge sensing circuit and an incandescent lamp indicator.

BY CASS LEWART

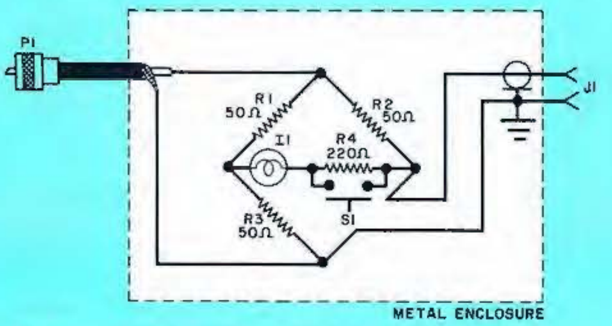
Build a Low-cost SWR TESTER

Initial adjustment of a CB antenna calls for the use of an SWR meter. However, the meter need not be left in the line after the antenna has been tuned, so most CB'ers have not felt the need to purchase one. The project presented here—an inexpensive SWR Tester—allows an operator to make periodic "good/bad" checks of his antenna system. Employing only a handful of resistors, a switch, and a small incandescent lamp, the project can be built for about $3. The SWR Tester will not yield a numerical SWR measurement, but will tell the user whether the antenna/line mismatch is severe enough to warrant further investigation.

About the Circuit. The schematic diagram of the SWR Tester is shown in the diagram. It is a Wheatstone bridge, one of whose arms is formed by the transmission line and antenna. The remaining three arms are 50-ohm carbon resistors. Indicator *I1*, a low-voltage incandescent lamp, current limiting resistor *R4* and pushbutton switch *S1* comprise the bridge's detector.

When an antenna having a 50-ohm resistive feedpoint impedance (the ideal condition for maximum power transfer) is connected to jack *J1* by a length of 50-ohm coax, the impedances of the bridge arms are equal. Therefore, the bridge is balanced and no voltage drop exists across the detector. Lamp *I1* remains dark, indicating an SWR close to unity. If the antenna's feedpoint impedance deviates from the ideal 50 ohms, the bridge becomes unbalanced and a voltage drop exists across the detector.

An antenna/feedline impedance mismatch (that is, an SWR) of about 2.5:1 will produce a voltage drop across the detector sufficient to cause *I1* to glow.

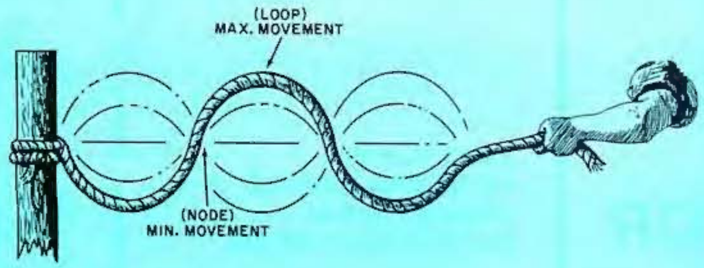


Schematic diagram of tester. The antenna/feedline combination forms the fourth leg of a Wheatstone bridge.

PARTS LIST

J1—SO-239 coaxial connector
I1—1.5-volt, 25-mA miniature incandescent lamp (Radio Shack 272-1139 or equivalent)
P1—PL-259 coaxial connector
R1,R2,R3—47- or 50-ohm, 2-watt 5% carbon composition resistor.
R4—220-ohm, ½-watt, 10% carbon composition resistor
S1—Normally open pushbutton switch
Misc.—Suitable metal utility box, ceramic standoff insulators or multi-lug terminal strip, hook-up wire, RG-58-U coaxial cable, rubber grommets, machine hardware, solder, etc.

WHAT IS SWR?



Tie a rope or string to some solid, stationary object such as a tree or post, as shown in the diagram. Grasp the free end and start waving the rope up and down. You are now generating a train of waves, much in the way that a transmitter sends waves down a transmission line.

When the wave reaches the point where the rope is anchored, there is no place for it to go so it is reflected back down the length of the rope. In this way, a pattern is formed as shown, with the loops being the points of maximum movement and the nodes the points of minimum movement of the rope. The ratio of the maximum to minimum waveform amplitude along the rope (called the Standing Wave Ratio, or SWR) in this case is 1:0, or infinity. This happens because essentially no energy is being absorbed by the wall and all is being reflected back to the driving source. This is analogous to the termination of a transmission line with an impedance that is different from that of the line. If the rope were not tied to the poles and were free to continue to move so that the transmission of the wave could continue, there would be no wave reflection. Each point on the rope would then reach the same maximum amplitude and the SWR would be 1:1, or simply 1.0.

In electrical terms, SWR can be considered as the ratio between the antenna impedance and the CB transmitter output impedance, with the larger value being the dividend and the small value, the divisor. The closer the ratio is to 1:1, the more of the transmitter r-f goes to the antenna. Besides reducing the power output to the antenna, a high SWR can also damage the transmitter output stage by submitting it to either excessive voltage or current. Therefore, keeping the SWR close to 1.0 is very important.

The table shows the relationship between SWR and the power delivered to the antenna, assuming a nominal 4-watt output from the CB transmitter.

SWR	1.0	1.2	1.5	2.0	3.0	5.0
Reflection Loss (dB)	0.00	0.04	0.18	0.51	1.25	2.55
Antenna Power (watts)	4.00	3.97	3.84	3.56	3.00	2.22

The higher the SWR becomes, the brighter *I1* will glow. Closing normally open *S1* increases the bridge detector's sensitivity so that *I1* begins to glow at an SWR of about 1.5:1. Note that this causes *R4* to be bypassed, removing the resistor's protective current limiting action from the detector circuit. If *S1* is closed when a high SWR exists on the line and *I1* is glowing, the lamp might burn out.

The bridge presents a 50-ohm impedance to the transceiver's antenna output when a 50-ohm antenna is connected to coaxial connector *J1*. However, there is a 6-dB power loss associated with inserting the SWR Tester between the rig and the antenna. The project is not designed for continuous monitoring of the SWR during communications, and should be removed from the signal path after tests have been completed. This can be accomplished by either physically disconnecting the SWR Tester or the installation of a ceramic DPDT switch inside the project's enclosure to bypass the bridge circuitry.

Construction. The circuitry of the SWR Tester is very simple, and point-to-point wiring is suitable. Solder lugs mounted on ceramic standoff insulators make ideal circuit tie points, but the standoffs might be hard to find. If you can't procure them, use a multi-lug terminal strip instead.

Mount the standoffs, switch, and coaxial jack in a small metal utility box. Drill holes for the indicator lamp and RG-58-U cable. Insert grommets into these holes, mount the indicator lamp, and pass one end of an 18-to-36-inch (45.7-to-91.4-cm) length of coax through the wall of the enclosure. Form a simple loop knot to act as a strain relief. Then remove 1¼" (3.2 cm) of the outer insulating jacket at the end of the cable inside the utility box. Comb out the braid, expose a short length of the inner conductor, and wire the circuit as per the schematic diagram. Terminate the other end of the cable with *P1*, a PL-259 coaxial connector.

Checkout and Use. Attach *P1* to the transceiver's antenna output jack. Prepare a dummy load by terminating a PL-259 with a 150-ohm, 2-watt carbon composition resistor and attach it to jack *J1*. Tune the transceiver's channel selector to channel 13, or to channel 20 if the radio has 40-channel capability. Place the mode switch in the AM position if you are using an AM/SSB rig. Then key the transceiver's push-to-talk switch.

Lamp *I1* will glow brightly. Note its brightness, and repeat the procedure on the other channels. If the rig's output remains relatively constant across the band, *I1*'s brightness will not vary from one channel to the next. Next, replace the 150-ohm resistive dummy load with a 100-ohm component. Key the transmitter. With *S1* open, *I1* will be dark. Closing *S1* will cause the lamp to glow.

The SWR Tester is now ready for use. Connect the coaxial feedline from the antenna to jack *J1*. If the antenna has been properly tuned and is in good working order, the lamp will remain dark when *S1* is open and the transceiver is keyed. The indicator might glow when *S1* is closed, especially when the channel selector is set to either end of the band and the antenna has been tuned to the center channel. This is normal because it is difficult to maintain a close impedance match over a wide band of frequencies. Short mobile whips with large loading coils are subject to such bandwidth limitations almost as a matter of course.

If the indicator glows when *S1* is open no matter which channel is selected, you should inspect the antenna and feedline for oxidized or corroded connections, clean metal-to-metal contact between the ground plane (vehicle body) and antenna base, etc. If no suspicious conditions are discovered, retune the antenna using an SWR meter and/or a field strength meter.

After you have retuned the antenna or completed your SWR tests, remove the project from the signal path—either physically or by means of a bypass switch. Otherwise, signals passing from the transceiver to the antenna (and vice versa) will be substantially attenuated. ◇