

Quite recently a message on the KX3 Yahoo! Group invited its readers to view a YouTube video: a new paddle for the KX3 had been born, the message told us. I followed the link, watched the video and very soon had ordered a new Pico Paddle from Palm Radio in Germany.



Pico Paddle on the left, with a Schurr Profi for size comparison

What the Pico Paddle is, it transpired, is a diminutive sibling for the company's well-known dual-lever Mini Paddle. The familiar three-pin, single in-line connector on the Mini Paddle is replaced on the Pico Paddle with a 2.5mm jack—otherwise the key looks, externally, exactly like a small Mini Paddle.

It's shown here beside a Schurr Profi to give an idea of scale.

The new paddle is enhanced by the availability of custom mounts for both that venerable stalwart of portable operations, the Yaesu FT-817 and for the new kid on the back-packing

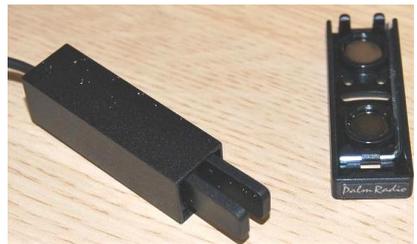
block, the Elecraft KX3.

The Paddle

The key itself is a joy to use: it has a natural feel to it and, even though the paddle area measures about 15mm by 8mm, the paddles feel good against finger and thumb. Their action is positive and adjustment is both simple and straightforward. The key mechanism is contained inside a metal case and it slides out for use and retracts for storage. Slipped entirely out of the case, the paddle can be adjusted to optimise each of three parameters:

- spring tension—firmness of the paddles
- contact gap—distance the paddles travel
- paddle stop feel—hard or soft feel to the paddles

The case is extruded aluminium—a 15mm square cross-section and 50mm in length—and its finish is black powder coating. With the paddles extended for use, the overall length is just on 65mm. Pico Paddle weighs 14 grams which is, of course, al-



Pico Paddle and quick release base

most nothing at all. Even with the plastic quick-release mount attached, having two neodyme magnets and the adjustment Allen key clipped into the base, the whole thing comes in at a touch over 27 grams, which is still almost nothing at all!

The quick release base can be clipped to the key. The base itself has screw holes for mounting to a surface and, as mentioned, two magnets that allow attachment to a suitable surface when appropriate.



Underside of quick release base with Allen key

This base is also used to attach the paddles to the mount for a KX3 or an FT-817. But more of that later.

The three-pin Molex connector used on the Mini Paddle has been replaced in the Pico with a three-pole, 2.5mm jack (stereo jack, that is) and the supplied cables are fitted with stubby plugs. This provides a good and firm mate with the key. The basic paddle is supplied with a 600mm patch lead terminated at the other end with a 3.5mm 3-pole plug. Options of 300mm and 900mm leads are available.

A 3.5mm to standard jack (6.3mm) adaptor is also included, making the key and patch lead combination suitable for most keyers and radios.

The Mounts

The mounts are designed to be installed on either an FT-817 or KX3—different mounts for each—and to be left in situ.

Anyone with an FT-817 should note that the key can be mounted on the top surface of the radio's steel casing and used there, thanks to the magnets in the quick release base. This is shown very clearly in the [FT-817 video](#) on YouTube. I tried this with my [Winkeyer](#) to be disappointed because of its aluminium enclosure. Ditto the KX3.

The MK-817 mount is, in fact, just a quick release mount without the magnets fitted. A single screw is used to attach it to the underside of the FT-817: one of the front casing anchor screws is removed from the radio and a longer screw, supplied with the mount kit, used to attach the mount.

There are two issues with this attachment method. One is that the key is mounted upside down so the sense of left and right paddles must be reversed. Also, because the body of the key is below the radio's base plate, the FT-817 must be used with its front raised. That can be done using the Palm Radio peg

legs or another bail product. But given the ease of attachment by magnets, I prefer mounting the Pico Paddle on the top of the radio.

It seems, too, that the MK-817 mounting kit fits the Yaesu FT-857 also and, of course, the 857 has a factory-fitted bail to keep it above the work surface.

The KX3 mount, known as MK-KX3, installs in the same position as the Elecraft KXP3 paddles. The KXP3 mounts using two knurled-head screws with an integral square, four-pole connector. The Palm mount uses an identical four-pole connector but on a short fly-lead and the mount is installed using two countersunk screws. These screws are fiddly to fit and you wouldn't want to be fitting and removing the mount as often as you might consider attaching



MK-KX3 mount on a KX3



MK-KX3 with Pico Paddle fitted

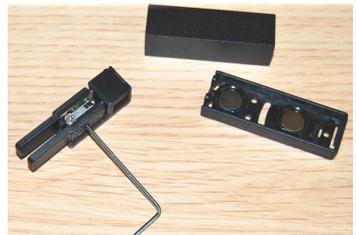
and demounting the Elecraft paddles. The flip side is, of course, the convenience of leaving the mount in situ and detaching the Pico Paddle, which can then be used with a keyer or with another radio.

Once fitted to a KX3, the adjustment left and right is easy, and in use the paddle is firm and stable.

Conclusions

Over the past couple of years I have begun to experience, shall we say, issues with the extensor pollicis longus on my paddle-keying side. In short, that means thumb-trouble. So I tend to tolerate paddle idiosyncrasies rather less well than I did when younger. I've found Palm's Mini Paddle to be pleasant to use over a number of years and the Pico Paddle is very much in the same category. And easy on my thumb! It appears to retain its adjustment so, once set up, there's no continual tweaking to contend with.

Everything is contained in a single, small and rugged package – including the adjustment Allen key and, if you're using the magnets, the mounting hardware. It is extremely well finished with the powder coating an obviously excellent quality. When buying the Pico Paddle barefoot or choosing the key with a mounting kit option, a travel case is included, providing a protective box to keep to-



Pico Paddle key, Allen key, case, and base



*Plastic travel case
supplied with the
Pico Paddle*

gether the patch leads, the jack adaptor and Pico Paddle itself.

I find the people at Palm Radio helpful and understanding (they are hams themselves) with a pride in the products they sell. The cost is €85 for the Pico Paddle, which is not cheap, but the design, engineering and production quality is obvious at every step. It makes an excellent adjunct to either a Yaesu FT-817 or an Elecraft KX3, ideally suited to portable operations, not to mention being otherwise a useful two-paddle key.

I have submitted a [review](#) to eHam and gave the Pico Paddle a five out of five. I stand by that assessment and, the more I use the key, the more certain I am that it deserves full marks all round.

YouTube Videos

Pico Paddle: tinyurl.com/picovideo
MK-KX3 mounting kit: tinyurl.com/picomkx3
MK-817 mounting kit: tinyurl.com/picomk817
eHam Reviews: tinyurl.com/ehampico



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