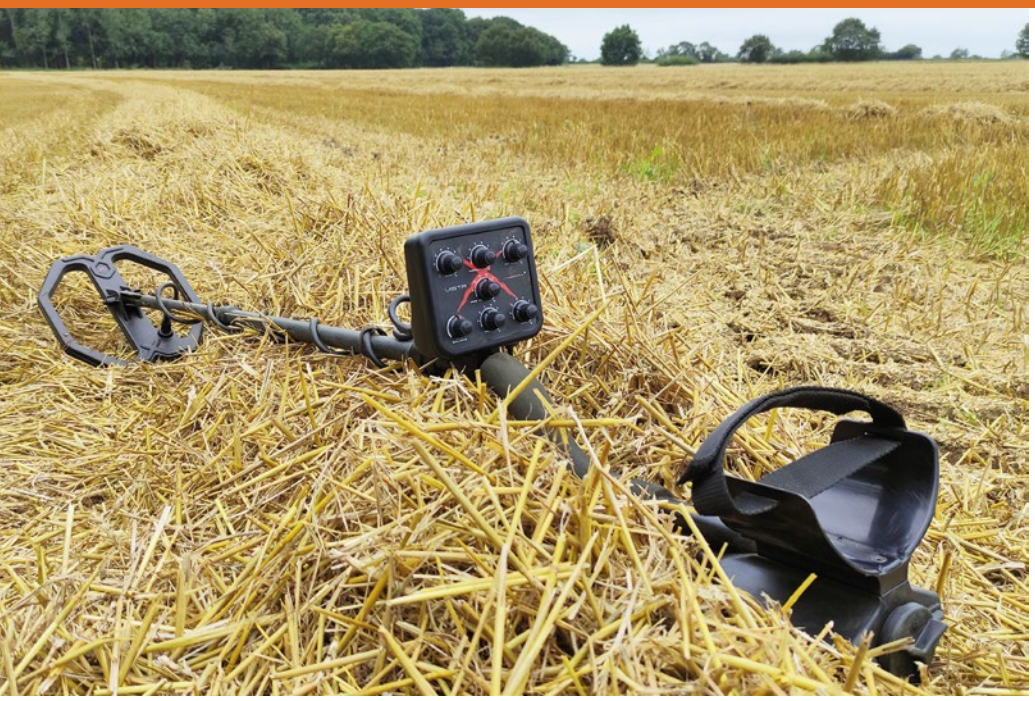
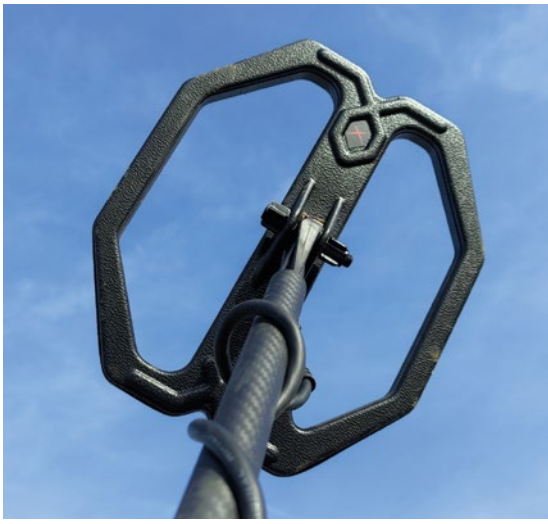
Field Test **Deeptech Vista X**

Adrian Gayler





Figs.1 & 2. The Deeptech Vista X ready for take-off and its interesting octagonal coil.

At the time of my writing this review, XP has just announced the new Deus II, Nokta / Makro is about to launch a new multi-frequency machine, and Rutus is shipping the new Atrex. I hope to test all of these machines for *Treasure Hunting* magazine very soon. However, what about those that have been launched not so long ago and have been forgotten? One such machine is the Vista X from Deeptech (Fig.1), a Bulgarian manufacturer based in Varna who are very well known in Europe but not so much in the UK. The electronic designer and owner of the company is Plamen Rashkov (Dipl. Eng.). Plamen started the company back in 2003, predominantly designing and making deep-seeking pulse detectors which were mainly exported to the USA, alongside security detectors for the demanding German market. In 2008, Plamen began designing a range of VLF detectors, starting with the Vista RG750. Today, Deeptech design and manufacture all the electronic circuits and carry out all research and development in-house and offer a range of performance VLF and PI detectors without the complexity that comes with some of the new digital display machines.

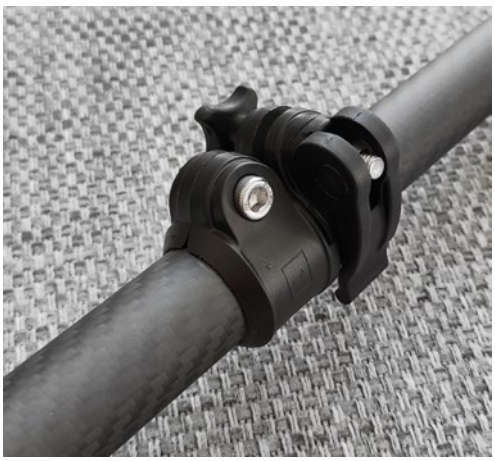


Fig.3. Carbon fibre shafts and adjustable camlocks.

Review Beginnings

This review all started due to my detecting friend 'Nik' who still prefers the analogue style older machines without a VDI display. We discussed this at a recent club meeting, where he asked if I had ever considered reviewing the Deeptech Vista X. It has been out for a couple of years now, but I had heard good things about the machine. I remembered first seeing it on a club dig with its interesting 50p style coil (Fig.2) and recalling the user doing very well with finds that day. So I contacted Tony at *Metal Detectors Online* (MDO), the UK dealer for the Deeptech range, who kindly sent out one of the machines the next day.

First impressions revealed that the Vista X was considerably well-balanced and lighter than I had imagined, weighing in at only 1.5kg with its 8 x AA batteries. Although a more traditional design than some of the newer machines from other manufacturers, Deeptech has added two carbon fibre shafts with adjustable cam locks (Fig.3), which has no doubt helped with the weight.

Vista X Specifications

- Operating Frequency – 16 kHz.
- Detector type – Motion.
- Manual Ground Balance.
- 2 Tones.
- Iron Volume control – Two functions in one knob: Iron Volume + Silent discrimination.
- Gain control.
- Threshold control.
- Modes of operation – DISCRIMINATION Mode: 2 Tone Mode (low tone for ferrous objects and high tone for non-ferrous objects), All Metal Mode, Alternative discrimination,
- Silent discrimination.
- Octagonal waterproof search coil 11"/ 9.5" (28cm/24cm).
- Audio Frequency – 780/390 Hz.
- Weight (with batteries, 8 x AA) – 1500g.
- Battery Life – 20-25 hours with headphones, 18-20 hours without headphones.
- Two-year manufacturer's guarantee.

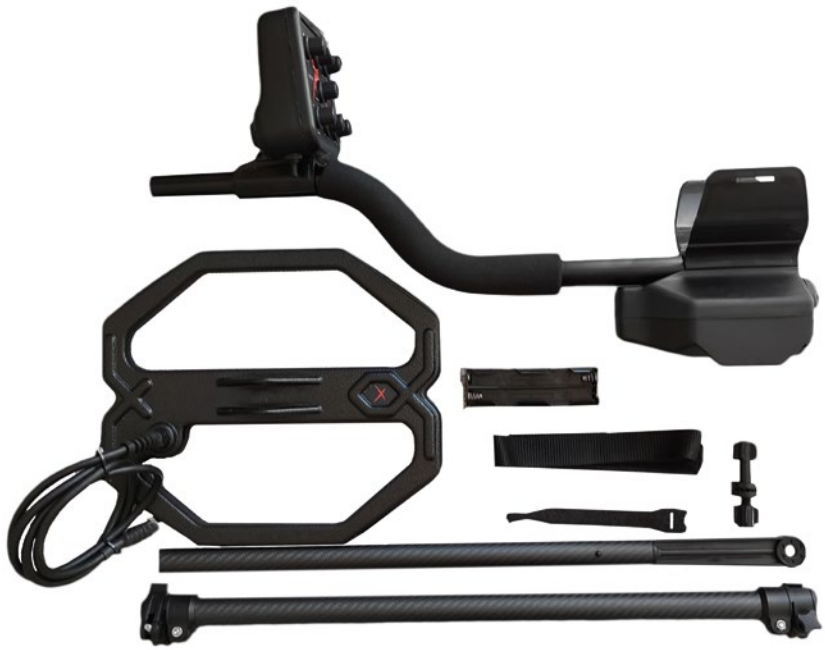


Fig.4. The Vista X out of the box.

Initial Assessment

I would not describe this machine as an entry-level, 'turn-on-and-go' type machine (Fig.4). The Vista X has multiple knobs, including threshold control, manual Ground Balance, Gain, Volume, Iron Volume, and both a primary Discrimination control and Alternate Discrimination controls. An experienced detectorist who understands the importance and need for manual controls will appreciate what the Vista X offers. However, all these knobs may look confusing for a beginner, but don't let this put you off, as once grasped this quite quickly becomes a straightforward and very potent machine to use.

Assembling the Vista X took minutes: connect the two carbon fibre shafts with the adjustable cam locks, join the coil and add the batteries and you are ready to go. Now for the instruction manual…. I couldn't find one in the box so thought I was going to have to Google it. However, I discovered a slim credit-card sized USB drive within a bag stuck to the box. On connecting it to my PC's USB port, I found not only an instruction manual, but multiple PDF's from users of the Vista X, along with videos on how to get the best out of the machine. A nice touch from Deeptech and an excellent way to introduce the machine by featuring 'actual' users. As well as saving on printing, you also get a nifty USB drive to keep and use (Fig.5).

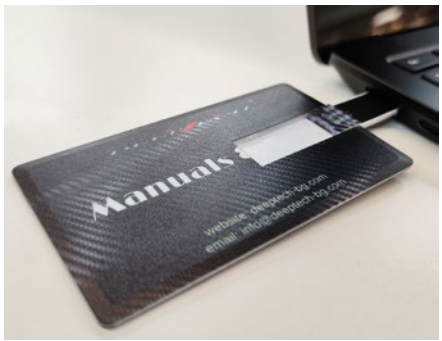


Fig.5. Unique USB card with instructions and videos.

The Vista X Controls

If you are used to a simple screen with a few menu/programme buttons, the vast array of knobs (Fig.6) on the Vista X (7 in total), may make you feel like you are getting out of your Ford Focus into the seat of a modern-day F1 car. To turn the machine on, you have an on/off rocker switch on top of the battery compartment next to the large headphone jack. Nice and easy.

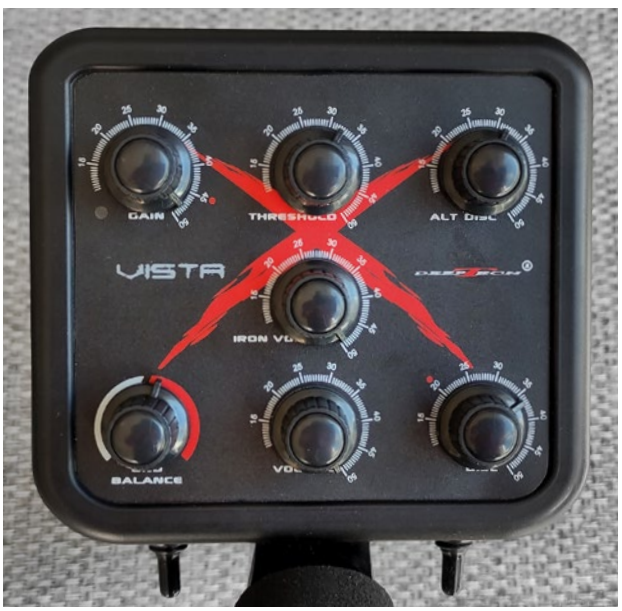


Fig.6. The Vista X controls.

The Two 3-Position Toggle Switches

These are on the underside of the control box and easily accessible from the foam handle grip. Both switches do the same thing and are there to serve both left and right-handed people. These spring-loaded switches (Fig.7) have a short position when pushed forward to activate the alternate discrimination. When released, they spring back to the main-use centre position for the primary discriminate search mode. When pulled to the rear, the machine is locked in All-Metal mode and requires you to push them forward to the centre for your primary two tone discrimination search position.

The Gain

This control doesn't have a factory preset mark (except for ground balancing), and you can adjust as you desire. It is a 1-turn control from end-stop to end-stop. I found I could run this at near maximum without any problems from EMI in the field.

The Threshold

I used the setting between '40' and the '45 line', and the Vista X functioned just fine with no interference from the speaker audio or using the ¼ inch plug with headphones.

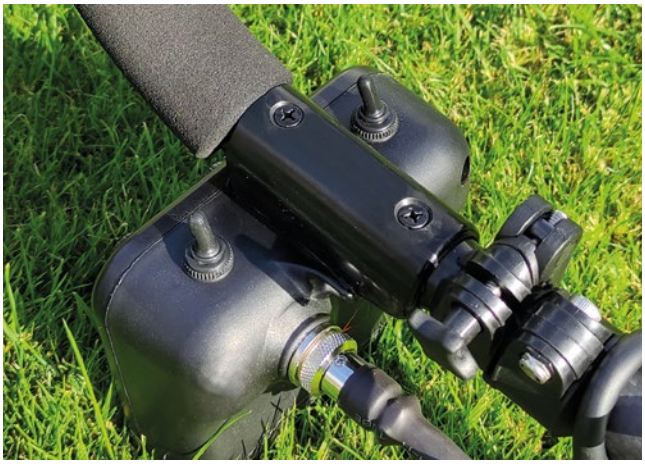


Fig.7. Both left and right handed toggle switches.

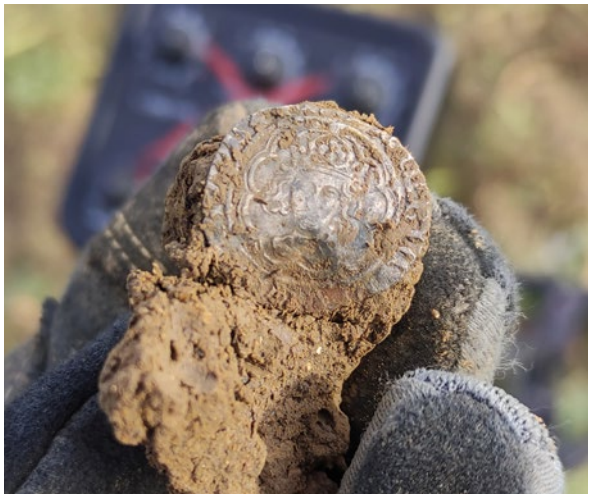


Fig.8. 'Clod shot' of a halfgroat – I found that the Vista X loved hammereds.

The Alternate Discrimination

In conjunction with the position of the twin trigger toggles, this works the same as the Discrimination control in line with the Iron Volume (Low-Tone). So, for example, if the Primary Disc is at the default to produce a Low-Tone on Iron nails, and the Alternate Discrimination is set where a piece of coke is 'Discriminated' (I found 30-32), it makes a Low-Tone when pushing the toggle switch forward. I found the Vista X did like coke, and this worked brilliantly in removing it from heavily-infested coke sites.

Iron Volume

This knob has two functions in one, Iron Volume + Silent discrimination. It allows you to adjust the audio level of the low tone (the iron signal) in Two-Tone Mode (toggle switch pushed forward), which I found allowed me to analyse my sites.

Ground Balance

There is no auto ground balancing here with the Vista X. Instead, you must manually pump the coil after selecting the marked areas on the threshold and gain. The detailed instructional video that came with the machine made it a lot easier than reading the instructions and I loved how easy and quickly it could be adjusted.

Volume

The sound was good from the Vista X and the speaker at the back of the control box was very clear. When connecting headphones via the ¼ inch jack, the volume control was just right, and the volume control, like all the other knobs, was not too loose, unlike some other machines where you accidentally knock the volume up and blow your ears off.

Discrimination

The machine has a default indicator mark at '20' and applies to the two-tone search mode. I mainly ran this at just under as I did not want to miss any hammereds and only dug a couple of iron pieces along the way. I found that with the ability to hear any iron present, you can slowly and methodically work around it to unmask good finds, which worked well for me with the finding of plenty of hammered coins, including a lovely halfgroat (Fig.8).

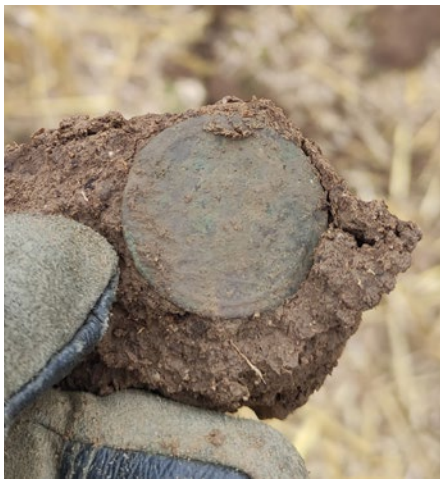


Fig.9. 'Clod shot' of a George I 'dump issue' halfpenny.

Fig.10. The 'dump issue' George I halfpenny after cleaning.

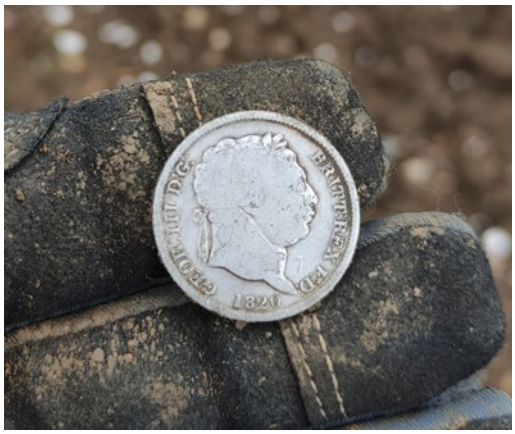
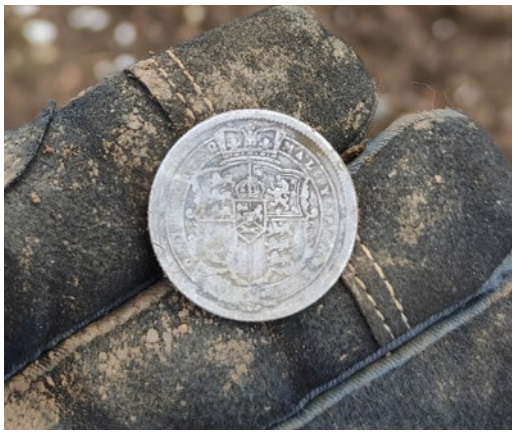
The Controls

If you think that mastering all those knobs sounds like trying to teach yourself to take off in a 747, don't panic! It may sound daunting to anyone new to the hobby who isn't used to pushing buttons and menus, but it does have its advantages. With all your settings visually in front of you at any time, you can instantly see where you are with the machine. I often find it's a real pain, pushing the minute buttons on some machines to check my settings with my cumbersome glove covered in mud, instead of just the 'tweak' of a knob. Once you understand and master these settings, I feel you will really reap the rewards.

Out in the Field

It was late August, and the farmer called to mention that he would be harvesting in the week. Perfect, I thought, an ideal time to try out the Vista X and hopefully the stubble would not be too high. On arriving on my permission, the stubble was a good 5-6 inches high, which I must admit I do not enjoy. However, I also see it as a challenge, especially when detecting with my buddy James.

After finding a clean piece of land, I ground balanced the Vista X to a point I felt was perfect and headed off over the dry ground. After bashing through the stubble with the uniquely-shaped octagonal coil, I found that it was not continually falsing out and doing a good job even on a high sensitivity setting. My first signal was a high toned one, upon which James immediately looked over (I had forgotten my headphones, so I was running on

Figs.11a & b. Obverse and reverse of a George III shilling.


Figs.12 & 13. Medieval globular steelyard weight viewed from the side and below.

the speaker). The Vista X punches an absolute belter of a tone when it hits a good signal, and I hoped this would be something worth digging. The machine does not come with a pinpoint function, so I was intrigued as to how accurate this would be, swinging over the target with stubble. With James eagerly awaiting and staring over at me, I ploughed my spade into the soil. Lifting out a six inch plug, I could see a thick coin stuck on its side. Carefully picking it out, I was rewarded with a lovely George I 'dump issue' halfpenny dated 1719 (Figs.9 & 10) – a little worn but an excellent find for my first signal. It was especially impressive as my coil had been at least 2-3 inches above the soil due to the stubble height.

As we both continued to battle through the stubble field, I came across lots of lead for which I gradually began to recognise the tone the Vista X gave. A few more worn coins came up, including a lovely George III shilling (Figs.11a & b), then the same of Victoria, followed by a Royal Artillery cap badge and a few musket balls to throw into the mix.

After four hours, heavy rain drifted in and I headed back to the car. Firstly, I didn't have a coat, and secondly, the Vista X doesn't have a waterproof control box unless you purchase an aftermarket cover (which I didn't have).

I was pleased with my finds for only a few hours and I was warming to the machine. There isn't a multitude of programs or displays to worry about, listening to the sweet tones with the odd tweak of the knobs seemed very enjoyable and reminded me of the old Tesoro Bandido II, which I greatly enjoyed when I owned one. I wondered about trying the Vista X on the beach, but as it is not designed as a beach machine, being more for inland use, I didn't carry this out as part of my review.

Medieval Globular Weight

Once the rainy period had ceased, the harvest was back in full swing again and I continued testing the Vista X on various land, from pasture to heavily iron-infested and mineralised soils, on which it seemed to excel. One field that it proved itself very well on was one that I have detected for the last three years which has seen a lot of human activity in the past. The ground here was heavily compacted from the recent farming machinery, but was flat and ideal for detecting on.

James and I started early and went our separate ways. After ground balancing the machine, it was noticeable that this heavily mineralised soil was well off the standard settings I would typically use. Within minutes of detecting I had that lovely high tone and dug down. After lifting out the plug, the compacted soil took a while to lift out with water gushing into the hole. I pressed my pinpointer in after removing eight inches to the base of the hole and it fed back a faint beeping. I dug down another four inches to see a lovely green coloured patina on what I thought was a crotal bell. On taking it out, I discovered it was heavier than expected, and after a quick clean, shields were visible along with carved chevrons. It was not until I got home that I realised this was quite a rare medieval globular steelyard weight (Figs.12 & 13). As the day went on, we continued on the field, and I unearthed an excellent range of finds, including a gaming dice, watch winder, crotal bell, buckles and musket balls (Fig.14).

Interpreting Signals

I was beginning to understand the signals more, especially coke – I had used the Alt Discrimination to notch this out, but occasionally the odd piece would creep in (Fig.15). This became more noticeable, with the tone being a cloudier elongated beep than a sharp, clean beep. The same applies to lead – when passing the coil back over the target, you get a break at the end of the second tone, which was also the case for the dreaded shotgun cartridge tips.

I did dig the odd piece of iron with the Vista X, but this was only when deep at around 10-12 inches. However, using the trigger button to confirm whether ferrous or non-ferrous worked excellently at lower depths (I dug a good half a dozen targets to confirm this).

Recovery speed in this iron infested area was also excellent and one of the reasons I think I made some great finds. Even using little discrimination, it was possible to pick out the good targets from the ferrous ones, which happened quite a few times on this particular day, especially with coins.

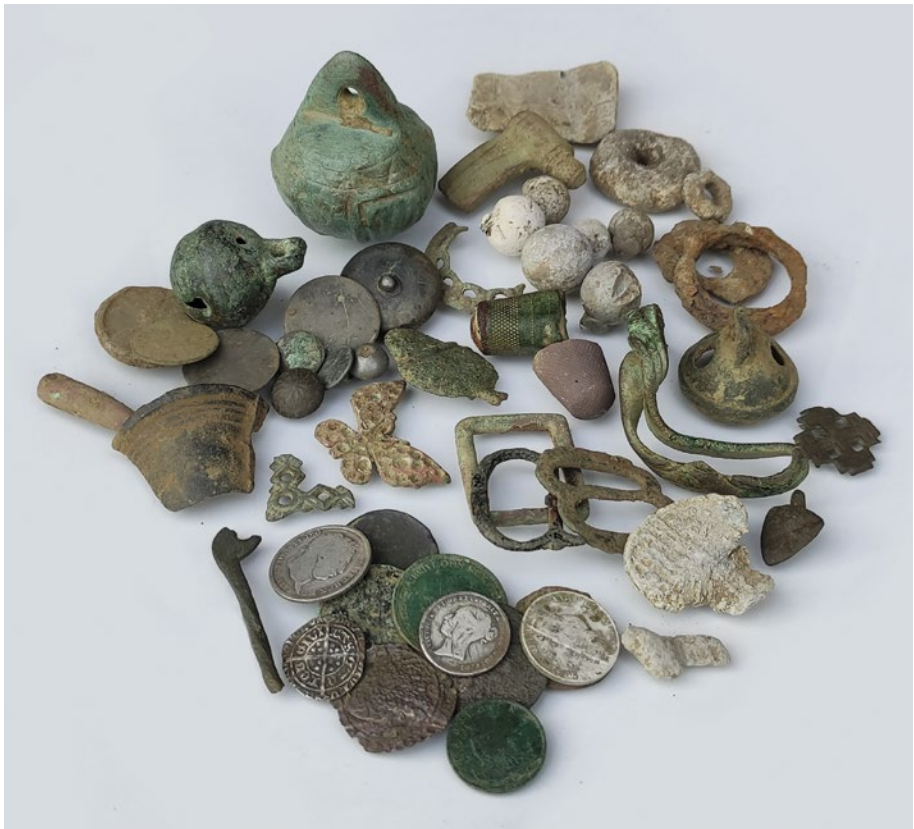


Fig.14. A selection of finds made with the Vista X.

The reactivity speed was a little slow at times and I needed a double sweep on some signals to ensure an accurate tone, but to be fair this machine is not a fast sweeping model like the Deus.

General Product Observations

As more fields became available, I used the Vista X every weekend and found the balance good and a comfortable machine to use and hold – the foam wrap-around grip is basic but perfectly functional. Not having covers on the control box and battery compartment (Fig.16) bothered me a little, especially in a moisture laden field or when it started to rain, but you can purchase covers for these. However, the speaker (Fig.17) has a plastic membrane so, unlike old paper membranes, if it was to get wet I am sure it would dry out satisfactorily.

The required eight batteries is quite a lot for a modern detector and

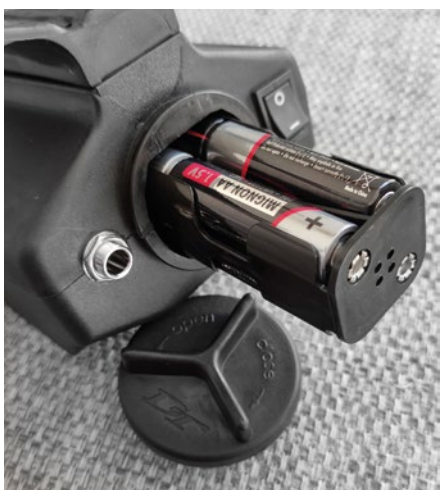


Fig.16. The 8 x AA battery compartment, power button and headphone socket.

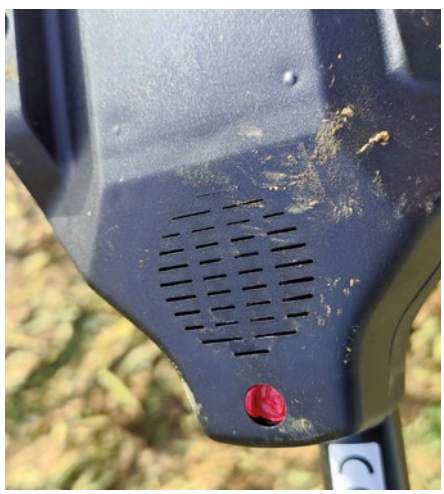


Fig.17. The rear speaker socket which ideally needs a cover.

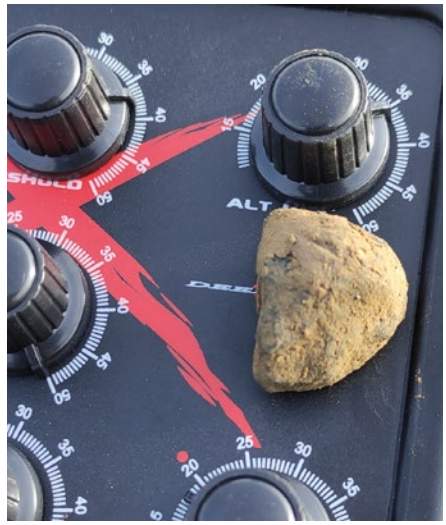


Fig.15. The Vista X likes coke but this was easily discriminated out with the Alt discrimination.

may put some people off, but a few pounds spent on rechargeable batteries and a charger would easily resolve this issue. The coil continued to work exceptionally well, even though I do not fully understand why it is that specific shape, but overall sensitivity was good, including the entire edge around the coil – I found that holding it at an angle was very accurate for pinpointing targets. I would like to have tested a smaller 5.7 inch coil, but I feel it would have been a little too small for my liking. I think a 7-8 inch elliptically-shaped coil would be better suited should Deeptech ever consider manufacturing one!

You Will Find Gold Today

The final weekend out with the Vista X, before writing this review, I detected on a newly ploughed field which is the main one I use for reviewing machines so considered it only fair to let the Vista X free on it. I was keen to see how the machine faired as this area has a broad mix of soil types. It was Remembrance Sunday and having ensured my poppy was firmly in place, I observed the two minutes silence and started to detect. Earlier that morning my wife had said, "You will find gold today," so I was full of additional enthusiasm.

My first signal was a military button a good ten inches down, which again gave a booming signal from the lovely two tones on the Vista X. I was probably only 60 feet from the edge of the field when James pulled up (he's

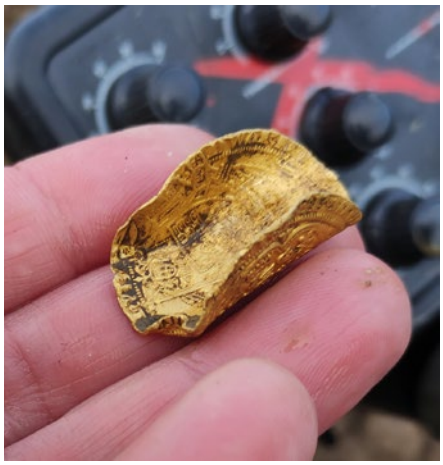
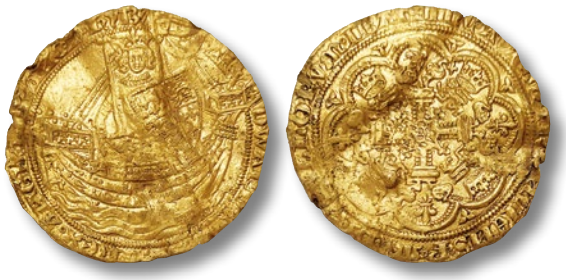


Fig.18. A battered and curled noble – hardly surprising after hundreds of years fighting with the plough.



Figs.19a & b Obverse and reverse of my gold noble that I believe is an issue of Henry IV dating from 1399-1413.

always late). He shouted the usual "Found much yet?" I replied, "Just a military button, but the gold is just over there mate," putting a smile on both our faces.

I continued to detect through the heavy iron infested field and hit a faint signal which was a bit washy but was one that I had not experienced with this machine before. I walked around the target with my coil and it seemed to get more prominent. I pinpointed with the edge of the coil, marked the spot, and dug down. With around five inches of the soil out, I pushed my pinpointer into the hole. An unmistakable buzzing came from a lump that had detached from the main clod and fallen back. Lifting it out I began removing the thick, sticky mud. When I spotted the target, I immediately shouted out "James, James, James!" Followed by some unprintable words and then "Come over here!" In my hand was gold indeed, in the form of a crumpled noble (Fig.18). I have been fortunate to find gold for the previous two years and was desperate to see it again this year and had done it at last. My wife was right!

Now at this point, most may go home to identify their find, drink loads of beer and do a 'gold dance' in front of their family. However, having safely secured my gold treasure, we carried on detecting with a passion around the findspot. There were no more signals in the area sadly, but I went on to find three more hammereds, some trade weights and a few grotty Romans. This is land we have detected on before and despite the oft quoted line, "You have to walk over it", I did feel the Vista X was performing extremely well and is a powerful machine. Later on I had the pleasure of cleaning my gold noble find as can be seen in Figs19a & b.

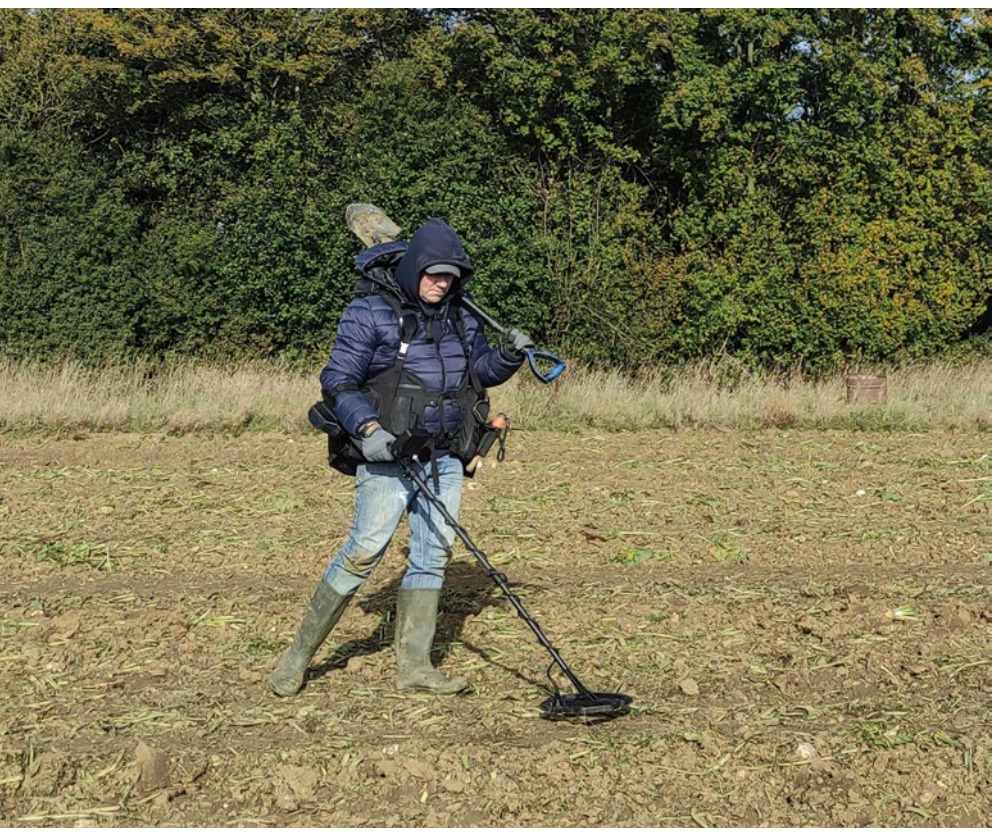


Fig.20. Me thoroughly enjoying using the Vista X out in the field.

Conclusion

If you are looking at upgrading your existing machine and do not rely on a visual identification display and aren't fussed about multiple programs, tones, or frequency adjustments, this could easily be the machine for you. If you understand the principles of a metal detector or wish to learn, the Vista X is a machine for those who want performance without complexity.

Things to bear in mind are that it is a land-based machine and not designed for the beach. The coils are waterproof but not the control box, so ensure you purchase the machine with the appropriate covers. A single frequency of 16Hz may put some off, but it is a good base, I found it worked well on tiny targets and retained good depth overall. Finally, as mentioned previously, there is no pinpointer function, however I found absolutely no issues with accuracy when digging targets. The Deeptech brand may not be in the mix with the 'big boys' out there, but nevertheless this is an awe-inspiring machine for which I have nothing but praise (Fig.20). Also a big thank you to my friend Nik for getting me to review the Vista X and also Tony and Suzanne of *Metal Detectors Online* who kindly supplied this machine for testing.

Available to order from
www.metal-detectors.online
or call 01493 782172.