

Golden Mask One 15kHz

Field Test by Adrian Gayler

Introduction

The Golden Mask One 15kHz is a detector that I have really been wanting to get my hands on for quite some time now. I have owned analogue versions before and was very keen to see how the digital display would compare in its performance. It is both designed and manufactured in Bulgaria and there is an interesting story on how the company got its name. Golden Mask is the successor of the Banditto brand, well-known for the fact that one of its products found the famous 2400 year old golden mask of a Thracian king in the Valley of the Thracian Kings in central Bulgaria.

The setup made available for me to review also included a rechargeable battery pack, WS 106 wireless headphones and a USB charger. For ease of reference from here on, the product will be referred to as the GM15.

Product Specifications

Operating Principle: VLF

Frequency: 15kHz

Ground Balance: Fixed (automatic)

Search Mode: Motion, One-tone, All Metal, Two-tone

Controls: Gain, Frequency Shift, Iron Volume, Back-lit LCD, LCD Contrast



Search Coils: 5 inch spider, 7 and 9 inch spider, 9x10 inch, 10x12 inch, 10.5 and 12 inch (10.5 inch used in test)

Weight: 3.0 lbs

Length: 55 inches full, 45.5 inches short

Battery: 10 x AA cells (rechargeable pack option)

Headphone: ¼ inch

Wireless Ready: Yes – WS-16 headphones

Extras: battery and control box cover and smart charger

Warranty: Two years

Setting Up

I was immediately impressed with the secure product packing and from opening the box to finished product assembly took just under five minutes. The only gripe which I have is the same

as with all Golden Mask detectors and that is the opening of the battery compartment. It is not the best example of injection moulding that I have come across and gives the feel that over time it could stress and easily break. I would also highly recommend purchasing the available rechargeable battery pack. The consumption of 10 x AA batteries can have a considerable cost over time, plus it would be very heavy having to carry spares when out detecting.

The telescopic carbon fibre adjustable shaft is lightweight yet feels very strong and easily adjusted to suit the smallest and tallest of detectorists. I found that aspect was also of great assistance when packing away the detector after use. At just over 3lbs in weight, it felt really light and extremely



GM15 battery compartment.



The compact appearance of the unpacked GM15.

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Hammered coin.

Some of the finds made with the GM15.



well balanced, with a very comfortable and sturdy moulded hand grip. However, I did have a slight issue with this when detecting for a whole day which I will come back to later.

USB Memory Stick

After assembly, I inserted the supplied USB memory stick into my laptop. There are three documents containing various dos and don'ts along with a user guide in PDF format. This is fine if you have a computer (which most of us do), however if you don't then you would be a little stuck. For the sake of a minimal cost I feel that a printed user guide would have been rather more customer friendly, considering it is only three pages. Or perhaps even advise the user to download them from the web rather than providing a USB stick which must surely cost more than printing? Only a little gripe, which I am sure would not put too many people off, however it's just a simple change that would certainly improve the overall first impression of the product.

The handgrip of the GM15 is both sturdy and well-made.



Ready to Go

After reading the user guide I was ready to go. With very, very simple instructions, the only thing that was clear was to remember that when you turn the detector on, it has to be at least 50cm from the ground or away from any metal objects for its auto ground balancing. The GM15 does not come with a pinpointer function which surprised me a little at first, but deep down I was rather pleased. This is a great function to have, but if it does not perform well

you can waste a lot of time. Don't get me wrong, I like using the pinpointer function on many detectors I own as it is only a simple press of a button – however when in the field, it sometimes annoys me when you accidentally change program or re-ground balance by pressing the wrong button.

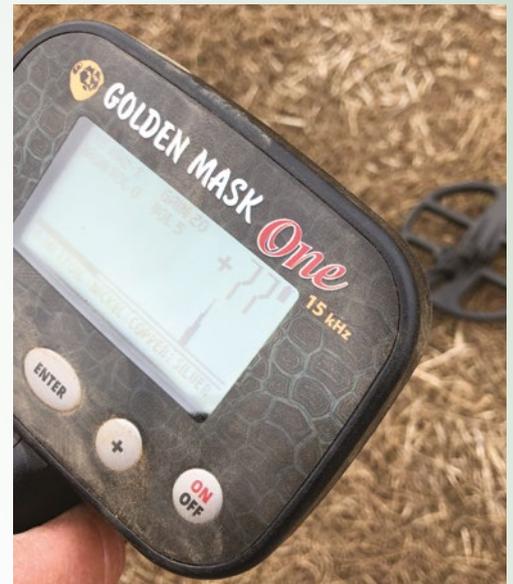
One great feature I liked a lot was the iron volume: with this set at 3 and the main volume at 10 you can really hear the positive tones well with iron as a dull tone in the background. Alternatively, with the iron volume turned down to 0 and main volume at 5 you can have a single tone machine. The test model of the GM15 was supplied with pair of Golden Mask WS-16 wireless head phones. These were very sturdy and comfortable and fitted well on my average to large head and paired quickly via a wireless switch located on the top of the battery box housing. These contain a sealed rechargeable battery that is said to last 8-10 hours.

First Trip Out

With fully charged battery pack and wireless headphones, I ventured out early one Saturday morning in late May accompanied by my detecting buddy James. This was a new permission where over 80 acres have been allocated for development and so consisted of dried out stubble from last year. The



Clod-shot of a coin (left) and the GM15's LCD display showing the coin's signal (right).



farmer met us by the road and we followed him into the field where we parked right next to a beautiful river whose banks were covered with broken pottery and bottles. It looked like an old Victorian bottle dump based on the surface finds – I was feeling excited.

The farmer looked at us said "So what is this detecting all about then?" We never miss an opportunity to explain about our hobby, so we put down some targets and I gave James the test machine – he set it up and swung the coil over them to give him an idea. Then we let the farmer have a go – he loved it and was off across the field with no problem even finding some targets of his own. I love seeing people show an interest in detecting. It makes a change from my son and daughter who constantly refer to us as 'The Detectorists', from the BBC series along with the constant quote of "Found gold yet?"

Anyway, back to the field testing: in my opinion the fact that the farmer, who had never detected before, could wield the GM15 successfully was a sign of a good starter/intermediate machine. I then explained briefly what the VDI was and the spectrum graph and that was it, he was off again. What had I done? That should have been me! After about ten minutes of walking around he shouted out "I think I've got something." With a reading of 84 and a pretty fragmented line on the graph I handed him my shovel. Eventually a rusted old

piece of ploughshare was pulled from the extremely soft soil, "That's brilliant," he shouted, "They really do work!"

Performance

As mentioned earlier, it really is an easy machine to just 'turn on and go' with no programmes to confuse a beginner. The machine runs at 15kHz with three frequency shifts to alleviate any interference you may encounter i.e. electricity pylons and other machines nearby. Adjusting the discrimination is also really simple using the + and - buttons that move the bar on the LCD display. On the first day I ran the machine with no discrimination and dug pretty much every signal just to see how things went with the VDI numbers and graphical display. Now I must say, I love the tones this machine produces, they are really clear and crisp and when

you get a good target you can really hear the tone well. I found the LCD graphical chart display to be very accurate in determining iron or trash signals.

The straighter the line, the better the target. I was digging up coins and iron items were reading 79+. The soil this day was quite dry but the machine was running really well at maximum sensitivity of 30 and no interference. As for depth, again this was good on solid objects, with musket balls coming up at just over ten inches and coins and buttons at around eight inches maximum. I spent over eight hours on this field, only stopping briefly for lunch, and by the end of the day, the detector's battery indicator was still showing 75% battery power which was very impressive. I could not see a battery level indicator for the headphones, so continued on to see how long they would last.



The trash signal on the GM15 display.

Everything was going well – there was a lot to like about this detector – until James started to head towards me with his Rutus Alter 71. At around 50 feet away, my wireless headphones were chirping like mad, driving me crazy. I thought this was a good time to try out the three frequency shifts on the GM15. A slight improvement was achieved but the machine was unusable close to James. Luckily, James was able to adjust his frequency down to 14 from 15 and all was then fine. I experienced this problem when detecting with others who

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Victorian costume jewellery.

Another coin for the GM15.



were using a variety of detectors. I did try many steps to see if I could resolve this, by turning the machine off/on, re-ground balancing and even turning off the wireless headphones, but it still suffered with interference. Not the end of the world if you detect on your own but in close proximity with other machines the GM15 did suffer.

The next week we both returned to another field opposite the first one, which had very stony hard ground and 6-8 inches of stubble, to see how sensitive the coil was on the GM15 and also how it coped with the hard, dry ground. I had not charged the machine or headphones and very much wondered if it would last the day. I detected alongside a main road which had a lot of ring pulls and discarded aluminium cans, this is where the graphical display came in very handy. Digging everything still with no discrimination, 95% of the time

when the graphical display was fragmented (showing trash), it was right.

The 5% where it was wrong was when I was behind an old bus shelter that the field backed onto. I had a reading of 42 and slightly fragmented display but after digging down around four inches and seeing the glint of what appeared to be a precious stone, I got very excited. Lifting out the clump of dry soil and breaking it apart, I thought I had found a very old stone encompassed in a lovely gold setting. But after cleaning it up, I could see it was just some Victorian costume

jewellery. However, I was pleased with it and it just goes to show you should not always rely on technology. 30 minutes later I had the same reading on the VDI and graphical display which I dug and found another costume button with plastic style stone.

The one thing I found with the GM15 is that it was very good at finding very small targets. It managed to find .22 air rifle pellets on the field a good five-six inches deep, which was very impressive – with them being so small, my pinpointer struggled to find them in the broken clod.



The tiny rose farthing.



Further examples of finds made with the GM15 including some very small targets.



Small Billingsgate token of S. Towler.

The GM15 compacted and ready for home.



Conclusion

After spending my second day out with the GM15 I was impressed based on the price. In total, I have used the GM15 for over 50 hours and only charged the headphones twice and detector batteries three times. The recovery speed is excellent, and depth is good compared to similar priced machines. I would seriously look into this machine if you are a starter or intermediate detectorist, as it really is good value for money from a well-known (but not so heavily marketed) brand. Apart from the issues with interference from other machines in close vicinity I also found the hand grip was a little short in length. After five-six hours of detecting in the hot weather, the ends of my wrist felt sore and were rubbing on the shaft and control box.

These are the only gripes I had and

feel that it is a good machine for the price, well worth looking at for a beginner or as a backup machine. I managed a wide range of finds, from musket balls to hammered coins, all reading as positive targets on the VDI and graph. I

was especially impressed at the ability to find very small targets at quite some depth. The unearthing of a tiny rose farthing at six inches and a small Billingsgate token of S. Towler at 10 inches were particularly noteworthy.

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