

THE MINELAB MANTICORE – A YEAR IN

Adrian Gayler



Fig.1. All ready to attack one of many fields with the Manticore.



Fig.2. The Manticore alongside the proven CTX3030 for comparison.

It was February last year when the Manticore arrived on my doorstep – it reminded me of the excitement when the Equinox was first launched. However, unlike the Equinox, I knew the Manticore (or the ‘Beast’ as it was being branded) would take time to learn, and I needed to go through as much of our seasonal weather and soil types as possible before writing this review (Fig.1). I would also need to learn all the new features, especially

after it received an update in June last year which added some real game-changer features to the machine.

I have stuck with the stock M11 11-inch Double D coil and it has been my main go-to machine for the last twelve months. I have also used other machines alongside it (Fig.2), which include the Minelab CTX 3030, XP Deus II, Equinox 800, Nokta Legend and the Rutus Versa, in order to compare a variety of aspects, including

the tones, VDI, recovery speed, and any EMI interference issues.

Construction and Ergonomics

The Manticore has travelled with me on every dig, from rallies to days out on my own permissions and the odd day on the beach. The things I liked straight away, before even turning the machine on, were its compactness, weight and balance (Fig.3). The Manticore balances extremely well – even though it’s the same weight as the old Equinox, it doesn’t feel quite as nose-heavy due to a couple of well thought out improvements in its geometry. It has some nice little touches too, for example, just below the control housing there is a little bump that protrudes over the index finger to keep your hand positioned at the proper distance from the bottom of the housing. The armrest, with its built-in elevation, brings your elbow up and positions your arm perfectly parallel with the shaft. The new coil connection, or ‘Yoke’ as Minelab like to call it, has not



Fig.3. The ergonomics of the manticore have been very well thought out.



Fig.4. The cam locks I feel could have been a bit more substantial.

shown any stress marks and, although somewhat strange looking, has survived many knocks in the field – I hope this has resolved the issue some Equinox users have reported with the plastic on their old coil connector breaking, which I have also experienced. There are a few things which I feel I could have been improved upon though. Firstly, the cam locks on the shaft (Fig.4), could be a little more substantial in design. I would have much preferred those found on the CTX 3030 or even the Vanquish range. I know the stem is round and not square like the later machines, but the clamps need tightening over time and it's a bit fiddly and very annoying when the coil spins out of alignment and really triggers me. They do the job, but a more robust option or a keyed spline in the shaft would have been nicer to keep the coil straight.

In my opinion, the shaft should have been 'keyed' so that it cannot rotate – like the XP Deus, for example. I don't like having to visually line up the coil with the control housing every time I use it. It would also have been nice to have some measurement markings on the shaft so that we could quickly extend it to our desired position without even thinking about it. I could always put them on myself with a marker, but why not do this directly from the factory? Such a small, simple thing, yet it would be extremely useful, especially on a detector with a three-piece shaft.

Minelab tend to mount the shaft in the centre of the coil on most of their detectors. This is how it should be, in my opinion. It balances better and makes it easier to keep the coil level with the ground. On the Manticore they have moved the mounting point slightly to the rear for some reason. I am unsure why manufacturers do this, but I am not a massive fan. It would have been nice if they had figured out a way to put the cable inside the shaft as they did with the CTX 3030 – given how far the shaft can collapse down,



Fig.5. The low latency ML105 headphones are clear and crisp but have room for improvement on the design.

the cable can get caught on the cam locks and be a pain to deal with. I know it would require a slightly larger shaft diameter, but that would have been fine with me.

The minor gripes I have mentioned with regards to these ergonomic issues soon disappear when you turn on the machine. It is amazingly quick to start up and this follows through when carrying out a frequency shift or manual ground balance (optional, but I recommend it). One of my favourite features is the 'Soft Key' option, one of many features from the software update in June last year, more about that later on.



Fig.6. The lovely display and interface of the Manticore is a joy to use and has lasted well over the last 12 months.

Headphones

I found the ML105 wireless headphones very comfortable, and, in my opinion, much better than the ML80's in sound quality (Fig.5). However, like some others, I have found that when windy, the design creates a lot of noise around each earpiece. I know people have 3D-printed kits to prevent this, but this entails opening the headphones, which 'could' affect your warranty and is not something I wanted to risk. Hopefully, Minelab may look at this design along with a little more protection around the earpieces as I did not feel 100% confident wearing them in heavy rain with a risk of moisture getting into the circuitry.

Originally, there was no Minelab wireless module for the Manticore – in hot weather the ML105's made my ears very warm and the option of just synchronising my low latency ear pods would have been nice. This has been resolved with the introduction of the Minelab WM09 wireless module, however at nearly £170, it's not cheap, but at least you know you are getting the best performance in sound when paired with some good headphones / ear pods.

VDI Display

The VDI display on the Manticore is quite simply outstanding (Fig.6). It's large, coloured, super easy to read and I feel the best in class. Nothing is cramped and everything is large enough that you're not straining to view it. The main focal point is the large Target ID with Target Trace below it. On the left, you can see the frequency being used, along with the sensitivity. Across the top are several icons showing the current program and the status for overload, LED Light,

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First day in the field.

tracking, wireless, headphones and battery. On the right-hand side is the depth meter. Like the Equinox, the Manticore's depth meter shows the depth with arrows or chevrons. Each one represents roughly two inches. I would have preferred a numeric depth read-out, but that's just me.

The display's brightness can be set at several levels, or it can be set to auto. When in auto mode, the light sensor on the top right automatically adjusts the brightness based on the available light around you. I kept this off for most of my detecting time except in the winter months when it came in handy for those gloomy days. In the summer sun I did not encounter any issues in reading from a multitude of angles – the large LCD display graphics help very much with this. Whilst I am on about the display, wouldn't it be lovely if all metal detector manufacturers installed screen protectors at the factory? I was on my third one before I had no bubbles or hairs underneath.

The user menu is by far the most well-thought-out, easiest-to-navigate of any detector that I've ever used. It took me less than five minutes to scroll through everything and understand where every setting is and what it does. Press the settings button and the menu comes in on the left-hand side. From there, using the arrows on the keypad to scroll through the various settings is a delight. I don't know how else to describe it other than to say that all the settings and controls are just laid out in a way that's super easy to understand and use. Other detector manufacturers could learn something from Minelab in this department. Thinking back to the days of the overly complex menus on old machines, this is such a huge improvement. Very well done Minelab!

Battery Life

The Manticore's built-in rechargeable batteries (yes there are two) are carefully hidden away in the machine's handle (Fig.7). I found that the overall battery

life varied depending on the program and features used, and of course outside temperature. I've been out on many full days detecting with the Manticore, and while it has always made it through the day, I do notice the battery charge indicator dropping more than I have been used to with other detectors, however with the Manticore being very power hungry from its super-fast processors, I suppose it is like trying to get 60mpg out of a V8 car.



Fig.7. All that power has to come from somewhere and does take its toll on battery life.

On the note of extra 'power' as advertised by Minelab, many had confused this claim with more depth in the early days. In some circumstances this is true, however, the Manticore really does have a beast of computing power in translating the data from the coil. This is where the performance comes. I found that using a variety of multi-frequency, single frequency and a selection of programmes (some more power hungry than others i.e. All Terrain High Conductor mode), I was getting on average 7.5 hours battery life from the machine with wireless headphones.

2D Map and IDs

First appearing on the CTX 3030 some ten years ago, I remember that some dismissed this feature as a novelty but over time have found it to be a valuable addition. With us continuously attempting to utilise sound, discrimination, and target identification, would this help me and others to determine whether to dig a target or not? The 2D ID map on the Manticore, I felt, was clearer and easier to grasp than the one on the CTX 3030. A well-defined circular pattern along the central axis was pretty spot-on for a compact, non-ferrous object lying flat beneath the search coil. As the target deviated from a straight alignment in the soil, a distinctive trace emerged. Vertical traces tended to be more promising finds compared to those at an angle.

While the numerical readings are highly precise for common targets like coins, they tended to be less informative for items with variable values, such as gold and silver jewellery. Different sound profiles associated with these varying numbers have helped me identify the types of metal. I do try to dig most non-ferrous targets unless the repeated number signifies a possible junk signal without any good items likely to be present based on the number, position and tone. I found that any mark detected away from the central line would be iron, which was often confirmed by the additional audio tones. A quick view at the 2D screen further confirms signals that sound positive, ensuring that signals with an underlying hint of iron are indeed just iron and can be ignored.



Fig.8. An example of changes to the Manticore's ferrous limits.



Fig.9. Example of targets on the 2D display in heavy alkaline soils.



Fig.10. Example of the 2D display in heavy iron sites or with magnetic properties.

I know all this might sound very intricate, but the Manticore target IDs proved remarkably reliable, especially after the update. The 2D map is a nice feature and with experience you can identify your target before it is dug, but I still do still prefer the tones and learning to recognise them.

Tones

The tones on the Manticore can be set in many ways using Audio Themes and Target Tones. The machine comes with Enhanced Depth and Prospecting audio themes. I found that each of these had their own unique benefits. The Normal Audio theme is a great choice for your day to day detecting. It provided a rich-sounding audio response that fluctuates in loudness and pitch. As for the Enhanced Audio Theme, this is similar to the Normal Audio, but optimised for detection in high EMI settings. The Depth Audio Theme basically improved target separation in inland areas with high levels of iron fragments (very much like the Deus II's 'Pitch' tones). The Prospecting Theme was excellent, with maximum sensitivity for weak targets when on the beach detecting for small jewellery.

Profile options for Normal, Enhanced, and Depth change the degree of modulation (Simple, Medium, and Rich), as well as threshold level and Pitch, and the target tones can be customised in a variety of ways. For the standard one tone, two tones or five tones, you can divide the ID scale and

allocate a specific pitch to each one.

Another choice is 'All Tones'. This offers Minelab's Full Tones. Each ID number has its own pitch in this mode. You can also split the ID scale into regions and specify the pitch's start and stop points to each sector. I found this useful for making specific target ranges really stand out. For both ferrous and non-ferrous targets, the volume and pitch can be easily adjusted within the settings. Even though the Manticore's tones are extremely adjustable and very pleasing to the ear, especially for an existing Minelab user, for some they might be a bit fluffy and not as detailed as the Deus II for example, while others may find them a little crisper, especially on the edge of targets.

Discrimination

Apologies if you are new to the hobby as this is a bit technical but well worth reading if you own or are looking at purchasing a Manticore. The discrimination patterns are very similar to those on the CTX 3030 where targets are allowed or rejected based on the location of their FE-CO (Ferrous and cobalt alloys) characteristics via the 2D display. Small iron targets appear at the top and bigger ones at the bottom, with Non-ferrous targets appearing on or near the centre line. The ferrous limits feature is like a visual iron bias setting and allows ferrous targets to be allowed or rejected.

Discriminating objects is simply made by blocking vertical segments

across the VDI scale like many other machines. The discrimination pattern and ferrous limitations are easily set up independently in the menu, but only in multi-frequency and not single frequency. I look at it similar to an extremely sensitive iron bias, reminiscent to that on the Equinox. I personally have chosen to detect in 'all metal' mode (after understanding the initial programs) and have only used the discrimination on very tricky sites.

Ferrous Limits

So what exactly does the Ferrous Limits feature accomplish? The basic feature is that all items that go into Limits are marked and reported to us as iron. But that's only part of what the feature can do. The upper limit is used to discriminate between nails and generally large iron objects. The lower limit is something different entirely. This allows you to control targets like bottle caps and flat metal and at the same time it acts as 'Iron Bias'. The main benefit is that you don't have to strengthen or weaken this filter, but you can create a shape in the graph that hides unwanted targets, while keeping the strength of the filter as low as possible.

This in turn has a positive effect on the range for targets that are already on the edge of identification. Shown in (Fig.8) is an example of the Ferrous limit settings. You can see at a glance, there is literally a wide-open window (unshaded area) on the left side of the graph. And it is in this section that all

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Fig.11. Me and Julian Evan Hart, one of the original field testers for the CTX3030.

low conductivity targets such as small bronze Roman and small gold coins can be discovered. At the same time, the lower limit helped me identify most of the problematic iron targets.

Why such a large open window in the example? Small targets at greater depths no longer appear as a nice little circle on the dividing line but will show in this space, either at the bottom or at the top. If your target moves from the bottom of the chart up to the line, you are in alkaline soils (Fig.9), similar to those found in Norfolk and the Cotswolds. If it is from the top to the bottom, you are in naturally occurring iron oxide soil with strong magnetic properties (Fig.10). This is a good thing to adjust your detector settings to, as you have a lot to gain. You can see that if we keep the lower limit in some high setting, you could lose out.

The result on the graph is only illustrative, and of course it depends on the object and the depth of deposition. The smaller the object and the deeper it is, the less pronounced the result on the graph. It should be noted that, depending on your soil conditions, this marking sometimes needs to be moved either more to the right or more to the left.

Iron discrimination on the Manticore is down to a combination of setting up and using the machine correctly using all the indicators available to you and learning from experience. I do feel some users have become confused by inputting somebody else's programme and then discriminating iron just by the sound (like you can with the Equinox). With this you are going to miss targets that the Manticore was designed to find, and find the things that you should be able to avoid. I would also add that some types of steel, both stainless and rusty, can give really good positive signals. Although there may be some iron sounds present too, the rusty stuff may fool you into thinking that you are digging more iron than you actually are.

Early Days Out and About

The first month out detecting with the Manticore was hard, but I refrained from changing the default settings and stuck with the 'All Terrain' mode, switching between iron on and off occasionally. I changed the sensitivity, carried out manual ground balances dependant on the terrain as well as the 'Noise Cancel' option. I initially settled for my preferred Five Regions All Tones and discriminated small iron solely on the sound (volume 3/4, tone 1), but for anything which came through the ferrous limits (upper 5/6, lower 3/4) I typically used a blend of visuals on the 2D screen and audio.



Fig.12. First day out with the Manticore and rewarded with a hammered coin – albeit rather worn and bent.

Over time, I found by using the simple medium sound profile, I got a good indication of depth of the target that was confirmed by the 2D screen. I have also spent many an hour at home in the garden playing with the ferrous

settings, recovery speed and tones on my test bed, but I wanted to see how this machine performed with the standard settings.

My first day out with the Manticore was back in mid-February 2023. On a freakishly warm day, I turned up to a club dig with over 100 people using a vast array of machines. Would the Manticore handle the other machines all fighting for the best frequency in the air? Or worse still would I get an annoyed look from other detectorists because the Manticore was causing their machines to become un-usable from the EMI emitted? I was lucky to be with my good friend Julian Evan Hart (Fig.11), who sat with me for a while, among many others who showed interest going over the Manticore. Both Jules and I recalled when Minelab originally launched the CTX 3030 for which he was a field tester back in the day. He, like me, commented on how nice the Manticore was to hold, and being a 'slight' technophobe, also commented on how easy the screen navigation was. Once everyone on the dig was given the 'off' by the marshals, I set off into the field with dozens of others, with the Minelab ML105 earphones over my ears, to see how the Manticore would perform.

Initially the machine was a bit 'sparky' as I found I was running the sensitivity too high. Over time I have discovered that running between 20-25 was just right and doesn't reduced any depth. I started finding the smallest of bits with low VDI's, like 5 for a cut quarter which I unearthed in the first hour along with foil, lead, and a few



Fig.13. A very strange and interesting lead chicken's foot that has somewhat stumped the FLO.

small buttons. All of these were found at reasonable depths for a detector. Some may moan about it finding these small items, like a .177 pellet and small bits of lead with a banging tone and ID at over six inches down, but for me it is all part and parcel of how these new powerful multi-frequency machines are performing.

I dug numerous signals during the first few hours, including a considerable amount of iron with the All-Metal mode on. In most cases, the 2D screen accurately identified the majority of iron targets, with coins, buttons, and musket balls consistently showing up along the centre line. Some seemingly promising targets initially appeared in confined areas but not precisely on the centre line. As I gained confidence in identifying the iron, I switched the All-Metal mode off. I would only look at the 2D display when I got a good signal, any non-centre line targets or ones with 'strange' shapes on the screen I would have a go at guessing but dug them anyway. No doubt some people early on with the machine will not dig a target if it doesn't appear as a tight spot on the centre line, but they will miss a lot of nice items.

As the day progressed and hours passed, I was liking this machine, especially as it had rooted out a hammered coin (Fig.12) for me in the first few hours, along with a very interesting lead chicken's foot (Fig.13) which my FLO thinks could possibly be from a tankard or similar drinking vessel. However, I knew I still had much more to learn and understand from the Manticore in the months ahead.

On the Beach

I very rarely detect on the beach, not because I don't enjoy it, but I am fortunate to have some superb permissions nearby which are still providing some great finds, as well as offering free parking. However, I did manage to take the Manticore out several times over the summer and winter months. I knew that if it was anything like the Equinox it would perform well. I found on dry sand it detected as well as it did on pasture and I could easily run the sensitivity at 22 all day. With wet sand and between the water and coastline I enabled the tracking feature to deal with the varied mineralisation and the Manticore was happy with the sensitivity at 17 for most of the time. As to be expected, I dug lot of lead, bottle tops and the odd modern coinage (£4.90 exactly, which paid for my car parking for a day). I did uncover some extremely small targets on the beach and at times even the pinpointer I was using struggled to pick them up – I would highly recommend getting yourself a good quality model that can cope with finding those minute targets. One target was a small gold stud earring which rang in with a VDI reading of just 5 at a good six inches.

This came about after I was beginning to have a quiet moment with the machine towards the less populated part of the beach. I decided to have a look at the deeper settings



Fig.14. On the beach the Manticore did well, finding lots of costume jewellery.

found in the audio on the Manticore. I alternated between the Simple and Medium profiles within the Normal Audio Theme, amplifying the sound of smaller signals. This method helped me uncover a considerable amount of costume jewellery (Fig.14), all at very low VDI's on the display but all displaying on the centre of the 2D graph. Of course, I did dig a lot of foil as well, but was impressed how the manticore was uncovering these targets even at very low VDI's. This summer I intend to take the Manticore on short breaks to the coast to discover the machine more – its compact design makes it a perfect to stow away.

Update (Fig.15)

Initially I came across a few issues with the Manticore, which Minelab addressed with a software update back in June last year. One was The Stabiliser feature for 'All Terrain' search modes. The Stabiliser feature was added to reduce falsing of the Manticore in high trash areas. I have found this has transformed the machine in reducing noise on one of my Roman sites, along

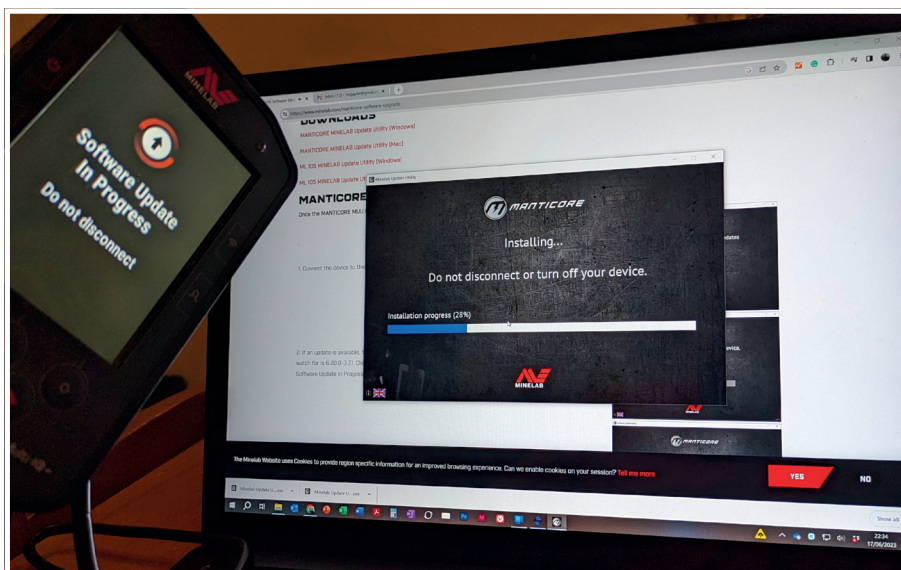


Fig.15. The Manticore software update brought some great features to the machine.

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with improving the target ID's and audio. This was a bug bear of mine prior to the update as I would have to reduce the sensitivity and look at using discrimination, which is not ideal as I would be losing out on using the maximum performance of the machine.

Once in the new Stabiliser screen, I found that with a level of 4 or 5 from within the range of 1-12 available, the machine became much more settled and enabled me to bring the sensitivity back to an acceptable level. As for the Stabiliser filter (below the stabiliser on the screen) I did have a play with this but found it reduced the clarity of the tone on some deep targets which sounded like iron but when dug were not, so have since left this setting alone. The Stabiliser option is not available in single frequency or beach modes. However, it needs to be used with a hint of caution as you can lose a lot of depth if using the higher numbers when not needed (Fig.16).

Other features like headphone boost (which boosts the volume when using underwater headphones) were also added, along with an update on the ground balance for dry sand. One of my favourite updates was the addition of 'Soft Key' functions, enabling you to create custom shortcuts accessible directly from the home screen. Other updates included Sensitivity boost (where you can quickly increase the sensitivity by 6) which is great for hearing those weaker targets, clearing of the 2D screen along with the ability to have red ferrous ID numbers in all metal mode and general stability improvements. An update was also available for the ML105 headphones which I also carried out, but have not found any noticeable difference and can only presume this must be linked to fixing some stability issues that people may have encountered.

The Manticore a Year In

After a few months using the 'All Terrain' mode on the Manticore along with

switching between All Metal Mode on / off to understand how the machine was working and learning the tones and IDs, I started to have a play. As we all know, manufacturers' default programmes are usually a little toned down. Naturally, this is to make them stable and offer a reliable experience for us detectorists



Fig.17. The newly developed and powerful coil.

of all skill levels, in all soils. I know quite a lot of people that are happy just sticking with the standard 'All Terrain' mode on the Manticore and they have had multiple finds, with some making national press.

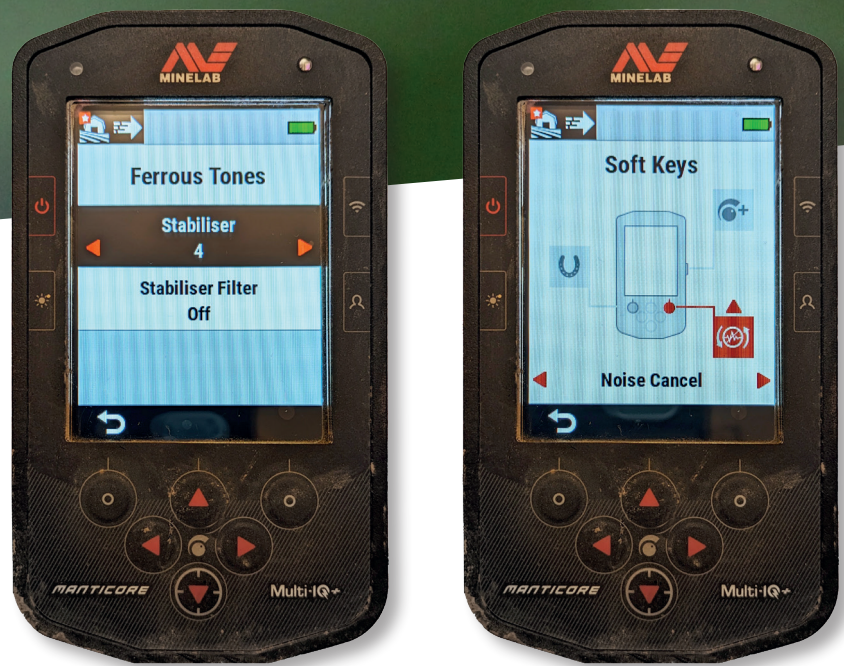


Fig.16. Two of my favourite features in the software update on the Manticore, The Stabiliser and Hot Key functions.

In regard to EMI, I have detected on many sites among groups of people, near power lines and alongside other machines when comparing features. It has performed exceptionally well and I have very rarely encountered issues. This could possibly be down to the newly designed coil on the Manticore (Fig.17), but I have not had any major issues at all. The odd drop in sensitivity has reduced any interference but that has been about it. Prior to the update I did find it a bit sparky on recently cultivated land which I found similar on the other multi-frequency machines I had at hand. Without going into technical detail, I feel this is to do with air pockets possibly trapped within the soil which I feel multi-frequency machines still struggle to understand at times.

Now, after many months, when turning on the Manticore, I will normally set the sensitivity to 25 followed by a noise cancellation procedure while holding the detector a few feet off the ground, and adjusting the Manticore's sensitivity until any electromagnetic interference (EMI) chatter disappears to make the machine very stable. This adjustment symbolises the maximum sensitivity achievable for my sites and weather conditions on the day. Finally, I employ features like the stabiliser and recovery rate, and always try to carry out a ground balance to mitigate false signals stemming from sources



Fig.18. The Manticore's processing power helped reward me with this lovely Gallo-Belgic full gold stater.



Figs.19a & b. Obverse and reverse of the Gallo-Belgic full gold stater.

like ceramics or any mineralisation. Through this process, most of the time I manage to maintain a sensitivity setting of around 25-30, ensuring peak performance while minimising any non-metallic disturbances.

The Manticore has come to be a fast and deep machine, loaded with features which I am still learning to this day. I have found that it differs significantly from the CTX 3030 and Equinox models, despite sharing some similarities. I feel it has been developed with heavily detected sites in mind, which have become more prevalent for many nowadays since the popularity of the hobby has grown in recent years. I feel it is much more assertive and aims to make you stop on uncertain targets more frequently, while offering more detailed information for you to decide whether to dig.

With the Manticore you may initially dig iron targets more frequently compared to the other machines, but with time, you will also uncover targets that they will miss. From the start, the Manticore can present a more challenging user experience once you start playing with the settings and tweaking the programmes, but once you start understanding the tones and 2D graph you will soon be rewarded on those missed targets.

I wouldn't class this as a beginner's machine, but out of the box with the default programmes you don't need to worry as the excellent interface is the simplest around and will get you out there detecting and finding those hidden treasures.

How does it Compare?

I purposely have not commented on how the Manticore compared with

an argument down the pub – that's not to say that I'm not happy to be invited to discuss this in a pub with anyone, providing that the drinks are free.

I have continually compared the Manticore to other machines in my arsenal while out in the field – some of them were very close on some targets, but when those very deep or small targets appeared, the Manticore would at times just pip them to the post. This was more noticeable with iron contaminated targets after I had played with the settings. A prime example of this was back in August last year when detecting in a field riddled with

the only machine to find gold, but the processing power and chips inside the Manticore must have been doing their job working overtime to process this. I found it also performed exceptionally well with Roman *minims* (Fig.20) compared to the other machines. These noticeable improvements were more evident in damp soil and not when the ground was dry in the summer. I think Minelab machines naturally prefer a moister soil.

Summary

I do feel that many people jump in far too early in playing with their machine (not just the Manticore) hoping to find that 'sweet' programme online that will fulfil their 'bucket list-ter'. This results in doing more harm than good and they end up getting rid of the machine and moving onto the next brand or model. Don't get me wrong, I am all for top tips offered by other users, but a select set of settings without knowing your land, the way you detect or skill level can really open up a can of worms.

Sadly, I have seen this with the Manticore within the first few months since its original launch. One minute people were queuing up to be the next one on the waiting list, then suddenly you see second hand ones popping up for sale everywhere. I am a strong believer in seeing what each setting does to YOUR machine on YOUR land. It might take a couple of weeks to understand what each function does, but once you grasp this you can easily adapt your detector to ever changing conditions and have your own programs which you will understand.

I can see the Manticore becoming that sports car you dream of using every weekend. It grows on you and once you begin to discover the deep-down power it is, like Minelab states, 'A Beast'. Okay, it might be pricey for some, but I feel it is a machine worth putting those pennies away for, especially if you are a Minelab enthusiast.



Fig.20. The Manticore excelled in finding the smallest of targets, especially Roman *minims*.

Essex flint. On a particular target, the Manticore gave a VDI reading of 33-35, whereas the other machines I had with me were struggling to get a stable reading. After spending a good 10 minutes digging down between the flint, taking care not to slice my fingers off from the sharp edges, I was delighted to recover a Celtic full gold stater (Figs.18 & 19). Not to say this is