Field Test **Quest Q30**

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Fig.1. Unboxing the Q30 with free XPointer – it took only minutes to assemble.

Fig.2. The Q30 with the interchangeable 11 x 9.5 Raptor X Turbo DD coil.

Introduction

I first saw the new Q30 and the Q30+ at the last 'Detectival', way back in 2019. Having had a Quest Pro many years back, I was intrigued and wanted to get my hands on one to see how it faired. We have recently seen a fair few new machines launched for the beginner, several of which I have been fortunate enough to test, but somehow the Q30 had so far slipped through the net. Late last year Joan Allen kindly sent me the Q30 to review (Fig.1) – I had heard a lot of people talking about it and seen it frequently appearing up on YouTube, so I was very keen to see how well it performed (Fig.2).

So, who are Quest? They were originally formed in the early 2000s in Los Angeles, California. This is where the initial design of the machine is compiled and developed, before the manufacture is carried out in China. (A similar set-up to a very popular mobile phone brand which many of us have in our pockets!)

Quest Q30 Specifications

Frequency: VLF single 14 kHz.
Audio output: 15 level speaker / vibration / 3.5mm wired headphones.
Smartphone compatibility and built-in Bluetooth module / QuestGo App
Water-proofing: IP68 to 16 feet (5 metres).
Shaft: square fast release cam-locks from 80cm to 130cm.
Battery: built-in 300mAh Li-Po battery with 14hrs of operating time.
Charging: corrosion-resistant magnetic USB system.
Coil: 11 x 9.5 inch Raptor X Turbo DD.
Display: LED / backlight.
ID: 0/99 metal ID.
Programs: Park / Field / Beach / Gold. Vibration mode, two levels of selectable vibration.
Telescopic shaft: with cam-locks, top aluminium, bottom plastic from 80cm to 130cm.
Weight: 1.2Kg.
Headphones: 3.5mm jack supplied with Quest wired headphones.
Warranty: two years.

First Impressions

For this review I had the Q30, which comes without a built-in wireless facility for headphones, something the Q30+ does have – apart from this the machines are identical. Removing the machine from the box, the first thing that you notice is just how well it is manufactured, with excellent build quality, sturdy and with minimal assembly. One of the leaflets supplied caught my eye, as it concerned the QuestGo free App which enables you to connect, track and update your machine from your phone. You can use it to track your detecting activity and generate unique pictures to show off your finds on Quest's own social network. This is a nice touch as you don't need to plug into your PC to update the machine – with so many newcomers into the hobby I feel that having an App is a very good feature and certainly worth mentioning. A Quest XPointer and pouch are also part of the package offered by Joan Allen with every new Q30 – a great little extra, especially for any newbies (Fig.3).

Fig.3. The very handy arm cuff mount with sleeve for the XPointer on the Q30.

All Assembled

The strong and easy to use cam-locks holding the adjustable aluminium top and lower plastic stem in place make assembly easy. I also liked the ability to quickly change the height of the handgrip from the arm cuff, a very nice touch. The machine felt extremely light, with no 'stem wobble' from the compact 11 x 9.5 Raptor X Turbo DD search coil held in place with extremely strong coil bolts.

The Q30 felt very robust and certainly looked the part, with its warm orange and black livery, almost like it was ready to go into battle. The protective rubber shield around the control box will protect against mud and dirt as well as providing a shield from the sun. The unobtrusive

Fig.4. A very compact and light-weight machine.

soft-touch buttons on the left-hand side of the control box allow you to easily adjust the volume as you go. Alternatively, you can select the vibration mode – great if you are searching underwater without water-proof headphones or are hard of hearing. The right-hand side buttons allow you to select the backlight for the LCD display which has two levels of brightness. As for power, the Q30 has a built-in Lithium-Ion battery which can be charged via the USB port on your computer with the magnetic adaptor charging lead, or via the supplied plug directly underneath the control box.

Fig.5. 'Coke' seemed to be a slight issue with the Q30 at times.

Access to the 3.5mm headphone jack is made by unscrewing the plastic screw next to the coil.

First Day Out

There's certainly no problem of fitting the Q30 into any car – it is so compact when collapsed that it could easily fit it into a standard sized backpack (Fig.4). On arrival at my permission along with my colleague James, I took the Q30 out and with a few clicks from two cam-locks I was ready to go.

I carried out the manual ground balance on the machine in the Field mode setting and headed off.

I chose Field mode from the search modes available (I'll come back to these later). The standard sensitivity for the Field mode is set at 85 which, after a few minutes, I found a little 'chattery', so knocked it down a little to 82. It was now handling the soil

Fig.7. No problems with sensitivity on rough plough or stubble with the Q30.

Figs.6a & b. A beginner's mistake! The 1674 dated Charles II threepence stuck on the spade and the coin after cleaning.

conditions perfectly, nice and silent and a pleasure to hold after being able to get my grip from the adjustable armrest just right.

I knew from previous visits that this field contained a lot of lead and Victorian copper fragments as it had been used as a fairground in the early 1900s, so hopefully it should reveal a few interesting bits. I got a solid 40 reading and after digging down around six inches I pulled out the plug and put the Xpointer into action. (It's worth noting that the pinpointer holding sleeve can be mounted on the arm cuff of the Q30 without affecting the balance of the machine). Wiggling it around the thick clay and compressed soil, I located the target and broke the soil apart but couldn't see anything. Then I spotted a dark grey, hard lump of 'coke' (Fig.5). Running it over the coil, revealed that is was the culprit of the signal and possibly something that I need to be aware of with the Q30.

I carried on around the edge of the field and within minutes had a clearly defined two-way signal registering in at 68 on the VDI. After digging and rummaging around with the Xpointer, nothing was evident – was the machine playing up on its first day out? I then took a look at my spade, rolled my eyes and realised that I had just made a real beginner's mistake – there, stuck firmly on the blade was a lovely 1674 dated Charles II three pence (Figs.6a & b). I had suspected that there might be

Fig.8. Changing programmes requires two hands.

an old footpath route in the area, and it seems this was the case, as four more coins came up, all being copper-alloy. Most were found around 5-6 inches down and came in between 71-80 and again gave off very good signals – the Q30 was fast becoming a 'coin monster'.

In the past, like others, I had experienced issues with extreme sensitivity on the original Quest Q40 coil. I had a Q40 where only the slightest of knocks on the coil would set the machine off – detecting in stubble was a no go for sure. This, however, is definitely not the case with the Q30, detecting in stubble or any rough surfaced plough (Fig.7) was not a problem at all after knocking the sensitivity down a couple of notches.

Park Mode and Pinpointing

Approaching the side of a road, things became a little 'chattery', which I suspected was due to there being a lot of junk, drinks cans, nails and bottle tops present. Time to try out the Park mode. Now, this is where I have a slight issue with the Q30. To change programmes you have to hold down the bottom right-hand button on the control box with one hand, followed by using the up/down buttons too with the other to select the desired programme – this was a bit of a fiddle, but not a massive issue and I succeeded even with muddy gloves (Fig.8).

I carried on detecting with what felt like half the field's clay soil on my boots and was rewarded with a clear two-tone 40 reading on the VDI. Using the detector's pin-pointing function, which I found very accurate and a pleasure to use, I dug down, hoping for a hammered or something similar. But alas, no – there it was again – blinkin' coke. It seems the Q30 has issues here, like many models, as this was not the last time I dug it that day but at least all were at a consistent reading of 40, so that number has been notched out for sure.

Fig.9. A Roman spring was used to check out the Q30's waterproof rating.

The Power of Positive Thinking

I took a break near an original Roman spring (Fig.9). This has proved invaluable over the centuries for a refreshing drink and cool down in the summer months – allegedly is has special health benefits. But for me it was just what I needed to wash the mud off my boots, clean my spade and to check out the IP rating on the Q30. Having been held down underwater for a good clean, I was delighted when the machine turned back on just fine! I continued detecting along one side of the field – even though there were the odd trashy areas, I felt sure that, hundreds of years back, someone must have dropped a coin or two along here. I find that positive thinking whilst detecting can lead to positive things – it's probably just me being daft but I recommend you try it sometime, it often works.

Fig.10. A nice, but battered hammered and a Roman too.

After digging some lead and a lovely Cariba Crush can from the 1970s, I then had a rather scratchy signal of 48-51 with the VDI often disappearing from the display along with the depth indicator. "Must be deep," I thought, "maybe it's iron." Removing a clay lump and then running the Xpointer over it, the target was located. I broke the clod open to reveal a lovely hammered coin on its side, possibly being why the Q30 had produced a scratchy signal. Being a single frequency VLF detector, the Q30 runs at 14 kHz, which is a good compromise in finding those small targets as well as retaining good depth, as confirmed by this find.

I felt even more positive now, as you might imagine. I continued along the side of the road for another hour, the Q30 doing a very good job of filtering through the trash. A lovely two-tone signal boomed through my headphones, registering at 69-71. "Must be a coin," I thought, and sure enough it was, a Roman one too – it was very worn but a Roman nonetheless which I was very pleased with. Both the hammered and the Roman coin can be seen in Fig.10.

Fig.11. Small Bronze Age axe-head section.

Fig.12. Hammered in the clod, thank you Q30.

Bronze Age Find

I waved at James across the field, indicating that I was heading back to the car, he waved back and when back at the car we both examined our finds. The Q30 had done exceptionally well, a hammered, a Roman, buttons and some worn coins. "Not bad," said James, as he emptied his pouch with a similar array of finds, including a hammered but no Roman. I then remembered another find from earlier and played my trump card, producing a stunning little fragment of Bronze Age axe-head (Fig.11). How I had forgotten about it, heaven only knows. It is a very small one but a real 'bucket-lister' and came up whilst I was in Field mode just before lunchtime, not deep, being only three inches down.

I was exceptionally happy with how the Q30 performed and I know 'You have to walk over it' and all that, but these finds were very pleasing. Overall a great day out, with a lovely hammered coin to boot (Fig.12).

After detecting for eight hours, the Q30 had only dropped two bars on the LCD battery display – according to Quest it should last 14 hours which I feel is probably conservative, considering that I was using it both with and without headphones throughout the day. As we returned our finds to our respective pockets, we were chatting about the Q30 and I showed James some of the many VDI screen controls and features that the machine comes with (Fig.13).

Controls and Features

This brings me to the range of features within the settings of the Q30, which as a beginner you can leave, but over time, if you are like me you can have a little play around with.

Tones

The Q30 comes with 1 to 4 tones plus pitch, which produces a linear tone for all accepted targets and varies in pitch based on the strength of the signal. I mainly ran the Q30 with 3 tones as my preferred option.

Tone Break

You can change the point at which each tone starts when either the 2, 3 or 4 Tone audio option has been selected. The adjustment starts from low tone to higher tones setting – an interesting function to have.

FESEN

This is basically terminology for setting your iron volume and runs from 0-5 and amplifies iron in trashy areas (0 = off, 5 = high trash areas). I feel this is possibly more of an option for our fellow detectorists 'over the water' in my eyes. With the FESEN on, I found it does identify iron well, but can leave you missing small targets close to the iron due to the heavy iron tone sounding. I tested this with a small thimble next to a piece of iron – with the FESEN off I had a tone, albeit scratchy but you would dig it; with FESEN on, the iron tone almost cancelled out the thimble, to a level where most of us wouldn't dig.

Frequency Shift

As the name says, this is for minor shifts in the operating frequency of a few Hz from the static 14Hz frequency. I tested the Q30 next to other machines, both VLF and Multi-Frequency. I found traditional static VLF frequency machines were not an issue, but I did have to use the frequency shift whilst detecting within 10 feet of Multi-Frequency machines. It worked well in cancelling the interference and the same applied to electrical interference, which I did experience once whilst testing.

Ground Tracking

The ground tracking allows the Q30 to automatically adjust the ground balance as you detect and helps mitigate the changing effects of mineralisation. I did try this out but feel it is for more heavily contaminated soils and trashy areas. After digging a target and laying the machine on its side and then picking it back up to detect found it would go silent for a few seconds. This is probably it re-calibrating the soil after being laid down. I stuck with manual ground balancing as I like to know the readings for the soil conditions when I detect.

All Metal Mode

After speaking with a few Q30 users, I found an All Metal Mode called AM STATIC. This is achieved by pressing and holding the pinpoint button and at the same time pressing the up button on the left of the control panel and then letting go of the pinpoint button. In this mode, pressing the power / settings button once gives you Disc ID, Threshold and AM Sens. To escape this mode, you press and hold the pinpoint button again and the up-arrow button. The AM STATIC is a non-motion mode and not officially documented in the Q30 manual. Those of us who

Fig.13. The Q30's stylish display with rubber mud / sun guard.

were detecting back in the early days will remember that non-motion detectors were the only types available at the time, which this option is very similar to.

Search Modes

The Q30 comes with six detecting modes: Park, Field, Wet Sand, Salt Water and Gold 1 and Gold 2. These modes offer you varied levels of adjustment with the tones, sensitivity, iron volume and discrimination notching. The Gold modes I feel are not particularly relevant here in the UK – they enable the Q30 to operate silently until a target is detected, a background threshold can be heard as you sweep the coil. On larger targets or those just under the surface, you will be alerted by an audio 'beep', much the way you would in one of the other search modes.

SEARCH MODE	REJECTED TARGET IDs	ACCEPTED TARGET IDs
PARK	01 to 4	05 to 99
FIELD	01 to 8	09 to 99
WET SAND	01 to 16	17 to 99
SALT WATER	01 to 16	17 to 99
GOLD 1	NONE	ALL
GOLD 2	NONE	ALL

On the Beach

Wet Sand

With the Q30 being IP68 rated and submersible to five metres, and with its built-in vibration mode (once the volume is set to zero), it would be silly not to try the machine out on the beach. It was a very cold morning and I admit that I didn't want to leave my comfy car and nicely heated seats, but eventually I picked up my spade and my backpack with the compact Q30 with Xpointer attached and headed off onto the beach.

I felt quite smug as normally I either forget my spade or pin-pointer but not this time. Turning on the Q30 I selected Wet Sand and carried out the ground balance a couple of times – after a few swings the machine was very stable (Quest advise that either the Park or Field modes are preferable on dry sand). I did find a slight design issue which I have not encountered with other detectors within this budget, not a big issue but something which did start to annoy me after a few minutes. The Velcro strap on the armrest seems a little too short if you are wearing a thick 'Puffa' style jacket or lots of layers. It kept coming loose and was not able to cover the circumference of my arm with my coat on. I ended up pulling my sleeve up to keep the machine close to my arm. After a few hours, I had the usual selection of pound coins, five and twopence coins, as well as a fair few lead weights – for these the Q30 gave a little 'grunt' after the tone, enabling me to identify them quickly.

Dry Sand

With the sun now making a brief appearance, I headed onto the dry sand and set the Q30 in Park mode after finding this was more stable than Field mode. I found I had to re-ground balance a little more than on the wet sand and the machine was okay but a little more 'chattery', even after dropping the sensitivity down to 68 from the standard 70 setting. I continued along the beach, surprisingly not digging too many ring-pulls which could either be due to the discrimination of the Q30 or the beach having been 'cleansed' by all the other mad keen detectorists around me, desperate to get their fix.

I was approached by quite a few others detecting who were interested to see how I was getting on with the Q30. They ranged from beginners, to a guy called Ted, who has been detecting this stretch of the beach for years with his trusty Whites Spectrum XLT and was looking for a lighter machine. We chatted and I let him have a go with the Q30, a very different machine in many ways compared what he is used to. After a short while, Ted came back with a 50p and two 20p coins. "Not bad for an old-timer with new technology. I look forward to reading your field test in *Treasure Hunting* magazine," he said. Hello there Ted, thank you for your time. The one aspect that he didn't like about the Q30 and which I agree with, are the standard lightweight wired headphones that come with the machine. "They don't fit over my ears or barnet properly," he said. It seems almost as if they are an afterthought, however an aftermarket pair can be purchased reasonably cheaply to replace them.

In the Sea

Whilst listening to Ted praise the rest of the machine, I carried out my final 'laboratory-style' IP rating test by throwing it into the sea in front of him. What came out of his mouth I cannot publish, but it was along the lines of me being a fool. I explained to Ted that it was fully water-proof, and then, as he was the only one wearing wellies I had to ask him to get it out the sea for me. After saying goodbye to Ted I headed back to the car – it had been a successful day on the beach, not so much with finds but I'd enjoyed using the machine and chatting with fellow hobbyists.

QuestGo App

The QuestGo App is something I mentioned earlier and was very keen to try out. Quest have designed an App for your phone, either Apple iOS or Android, which allows you to track where you have searched using your phone's GPS function, log finds you have made and update the Q30's internal firmware. One registered, you connected to your detector following the instructions and a large 'Q' will appear in the upper area of the LCD screen, you are then connected. As well as the ability to photograph and

record your finds, you gain access to a Facebook-style platform to share your finds and discuss settings, updates and more (Figs.14 & 15). This is not the first time a detector has come with an App and I did find it had a few issues, which Quest have admitted they are aware of and working hard to improve. However, one area that did work fine was a firmware update for the Q30 and Q60 that was launched on Christmas day. (Yes, a strange time to launch an update you might think!) One of the updates was to fix situations where you would receive a good steady signal but nothing would be displayed on the VDI screen or depth indicator. This was something I had experienced a couple of times but since the update has been rectified.

Conclusion

I have been using the Q30 for a few months now and apart from a few niggles I am very impressed with the machine overall. Yes, there are other machines out there with the same or similar features and price tag, but if you fancy something different, or are looking for a back-up detector, I highly recommend you take a look at the Q30. The supplied Xpointer performed well and I feel the QuestGo App will become a real asset as it develops.

I was very impressed with the selection of finds that I made using the Q30 (Fig.16). Since the original launch of the Q20 and Q40/Pro, Quest has come a long way in offering a range of machines that have good features, price and usability for the beginner and intermediate detectorist. I am now testing the Q30's big brother, the Q60, also kindly provided by Joan Allen and looking forward to reporting back on how that performs. If you wish to follow its progress and finds from other machines I have reviewed, feel most welcome to check out my Instagram page 'field_tester_thm'.

The Quest 30 costs for £299 and the Quest 30+ for £359, both including Xpointer probe, available from Joan Allen.

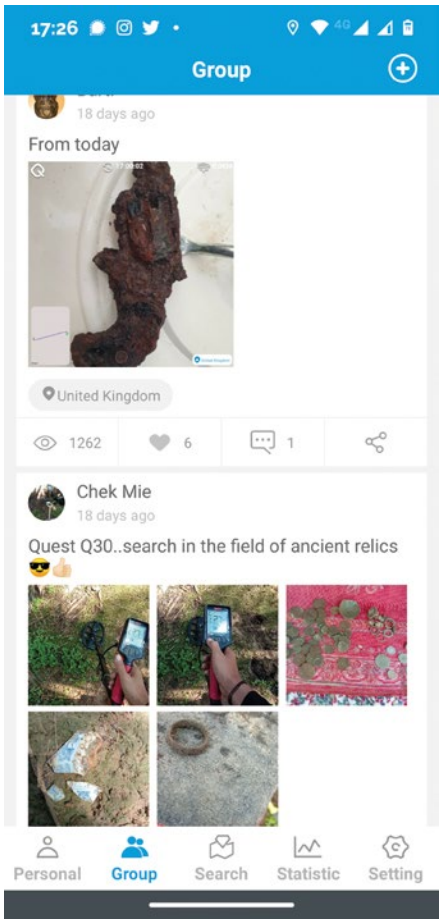

Fig.14. QuestGo App's unique online user forum.

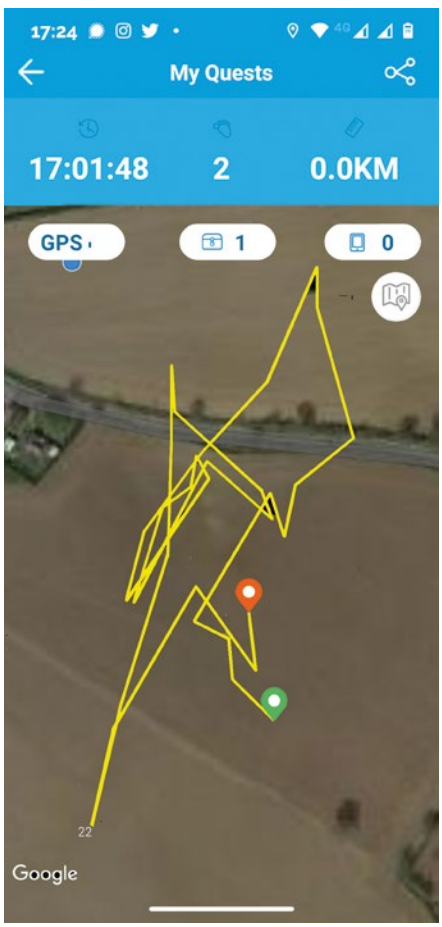

Fig.15. QuestGo App, showing land covered and start / finish point.

Fig.16. A selection of finds made using the Q30.