

one of these things and start using it, and discover they can make connections, set up crisscross and zigzag switching patterns back and forth across the world. They hardly talk to the people they finally reach. They say hello and start thinking of what kind of call to make next. They go a little crazy." He looks down at the neat little package in his palm. His fingers are still dancing, tapping out beeper patterns.

"I think it's something to do with how small my models are. There are lots of blue boxes around, but mine are the smallest and most sophisticated electronically. I wish I could show you the prototype we made for our big syndicate order."

He sighs. "We had this order for a thousand beeper boxes from a syndicate front man in Las Vegas. They use them to place bets coast to coast, keep lines open for hours, all of which can get expensive if you have to pay. The deal was a thousand blue boxes for \$300 apiece. Before then we retailed them for \$1500 apiece, but \$300,000 in one lump was hard to turn down. We had a manufacturing deal worked out in the Philippines. Everything ready to go. Anyway, the model I had ready for limited mass production was small enough to fit inside a flip-top Marlboro box. It had flush touch panels for a keyboard, rather than these unsightly buttons, sticking out. Looked just like a tiny portable radio. In fact, I had designed it with a tiny transistor receiver to get one AM channel, so in case the law became suspicious the owner could switch on the radio part, start snapping his fingers, and no one could tell anything illegal was going on. I thought of everything for this model -- I had it lined with a band of thermite which could be ignited by radio signal from a tiny button transmitter on your belt, so it could be burned to ashes instantly in case of a bust. It was beautiful. A beautiful little machine. You should've seen the faces on these syndicate guys when they came back after trying it out. They'd hold it in their palm like they never wanted to let it go, and they'd say, 'I can't believe it. I can't believe it.' You probably won't believe it until you try it."

#### The Blue Box Is Tested: Certain Connections Are Made

About eleven o'clock two nights later Fraser Lucey has a blue box in the palm of his left hand and a phone in the palm of his right. He is standing inside a phone booth next to an isolated shut-down motel off Highway 1. I am standing outside the phone booth.

Fraser likes to show off his blue box for people. Until a few weeks ago when Pacific Telephone made a few arrests in his city, Fraser Lucey liked to bring his blue box (This particular blue box, like most blue boxes, is not blue. Blue boxes have come to be called "blue boxes" either because 1) The first blue box ever confiscated by phone-company security men happened to be blue, or 2) To distinguish them from "black boxes." Black boxes are devices, usually a resistor in series, which, when attached to home phones, allow all incoming calls to be made without charge to one's caller.) to parties. It never failed: A few cheeps from his device and Fraser became the center of attention at the very hippest of gatherings, playing phone tricks and doing request numbers for hours. He began to take orders for his manufacturer in Mexico. He became a dealer.

Fraser is cautious now about where he shows off his blue box. But he never gets tired of playing with it. "It's like the first time every time," he tells me.

Fraser puts a dime in the slot. He listens for a tone and holds the receiver up to my ear. I hear the tone. Fraser begins describing, with a certain practiced air, what he does while he does it. "I'm dialing an 800 number now. Any 800 number will do. It's toll free. Tonight I think I'll use the ---- - (he names a well-know rent-a-car company) 800 number. Listen, it's ringing. Here, you hear it? Now watch." He places the blue box over the mouthpiece of the phone so that the one silver and twelve black push buttons are facing up toward me. He presses the silver button -- the one at the top -- and I hear that high-pitched beep. "That's 2600 cycles per second to be exact," says Lucey. "Now, quick. Listen." He shoves the earpiece at me. The ringing has vanished. The line gives a slight hiccup, there is a sharp buzz, and then nothing but soft white noise.

"We're home free now," Lucey tells me, taking back the phone and applying the blue box to its mouthpiece once again. "We're up on a tandem, into a long-lines trunk. Once you're up on a tandem, you can send yourself anywhere you want to go." He decides to check out London first. He chooses a certain pay phone located in Waterloo Station. This particular pay phone is popular with the phone-phreaks network because there are usually people walking by at all hours who will pick it up and talk for a while.

He presses the lower left-hand corner button which is marked "KP" on the face of the box. "That's Key Pulse. It tells the tandem we're ready to give it instructions. First I'll punch out KP 182 START, which will slide us into the overseas sender in White Plains." I hear a neat clunk-cheep. "I think we'll head over to England by satellite. Cable is actually faster and the connection is somewhat better, but I like going by satellite. So I just punch out KP Zero 44. The Zero is supposed to guarantee a satellite connection and 44 is the country code for England. Okay... we're there. In Liverpool actually. Now all I have to do is punch out the London area code which is 1, and dial up the pay phone. Here, listen, I've got a ring now."

I hear the soft quick purr-purr of a London ring. Then someone picks up the phone.

"Hello," says the London voice.

"Hello. Who's this?" Fraser asks.

"Hello. There's actually nobody here. I just picked this up while I was passing by. This is a public phone. There's no one here to answer actually."

"Hello. Don't hang up. I'm calling from the United States."

"Oh. What is the purpose of the call? This is a public phone you know."