

## Virgin Radio Launch

Virgin Radio, then known as Virgin 1215, was launched at 12:15 on Friday 30th April 1993, following extensive test transmissions for nearly 2 months as the transmitters were brought into service. The Virgin tests were unique in that the recorded music loops were gradually phased out in favour of live tests as the presenters rehearsed live on air. Charity messages were broadcast in place of commercials. Originally, Virgin broadcast a specialist adult orientated rock format, divided three ways between new, recent and classic tracks and programmed by Richard Skinner. Over the first couple of years, the music gradually became more and more mainstream, though Virgin has always had a rock bias. Virgin Radio became Absolute Radio on 29 September 2008.

### Programming

The Virgin 1215 launch schedule was as follows:

#### Saturday

06:00 Graham Dene  
10:00 Chris Evans - Music and chat  
13:00 Emperor Rosko - The Great American Music Show  
16:00 Dave Fanning  
20:00 Kevin Greening  
23:00 Tommy Rivers  
02:00-06:00 Sandy Beech

#### Sunday

06:00 Graham Dene  
10:00 Classic Tracks with Kevin Greening  
16:00 Album Chart with Russ Williams  
19:00 Jonathan Coleman  
22:00 Nick Abbott - Music and Phone-in  
02:00-06:00 Sandy Beech

#### Monday to Friday

06:00 Russ Williams  
10:00 Richard Skinner  
13:00 Mitch Johnson  
16:00 Tommy Vance

#### Monday to Thursday

19:00 Jonathan Coleman  
22:00 Nick Abbott - Music and Phone-in  
02:00-06:00 Wendy Lloyd

#### Friday

19:00 Emperor Rosko  
22:00 Kevin Greening  
02:00-06:00 Sandy Beech

After the first three months on air, there were major schedule changes with Jonathan Coleman joining Russ Williams at breakfast, Kevin Greening taking over the afternoon slot and Mitch Johnson demoted to early evenings. Meanwhile, The Album Chart show moved to Saturdays at 13:00, Paul Ross replaced Chris Evans on Saturday Mornings and Paul Coyte joined.

### Transmission

The coverage of the medium wave network inherited from Radio 3 on 1215 kHz was poor, with only 87% daytime and 38% nighttime coverage and a number of major cities unable to obtain a clear signal. To resolve this problem a number of frequencies were reallocated from BBC local radio, with Radios Cleveland, Gloucestershire, Northampton, Nottingham and Oxford closing down on AM just before the 1215 license was advertised in 1992. However, in the event, these frequencies were not used and the relays for these areas opened on old Radio 3 filler frequency of 11197 kHz and on 1242 kHz for Cleveland. Further new transmitters were opened to improve reception in the Dundee, Ipswich, Liverpool and Thames Estuary areas, with Stoke and Gatwick transmitters

following in July. In addition, new transmitters were commissioned at the high power sites. However, the BBC transmitters serving Derry, Fermanagh & South Tyrone, Cardigan Bay, North Scotland and West Cornwall were not taken up by Virgin, though the Cornwall transmitter was re-opened in 1999.

The original frequencies allocated to Virgin's relays were 1197, 1224 and 1242 kHz. However, use of 1224 was limited by adjacent channel interference with transmitters on the main 1215 frequency. There was also co-channel interference between some of the relays. So, in November of 1993, the station was allocated 1233 kHz, plus limited use of 1260 kHz in the South East (where 1242 was not available) and a number of transmitters changed frequency:

- Brighton from 1215 to 1997
- Gatwick from 1197 to 1233
- Manningtree for Ipswich and Colchester from 1224 to 1233
- Northampton Kings Heath from 1197 to 1233

New transmitters were then opened to serve the Reading, Swindon and Guildford areas. The last two AM transmitters were opened at Boston for Lincolnshire, Peterborough and Kings Lynn in September 1994 and Lydd for East Kent and East Sussex in April 1995. Also in April 1995, Virgin started broadcasting on FM in the London area.

*Paul Groves 2004 (reformatted 2015)*