

Vintage Radio

by PETER LANKSHEAR



A really fine collection!

One of the finest collections of vintage radios I've seen has been assembled by pioneer collector Ray Knowles of Hastings, New Zealand. Recently, on behalf of EA readers, I was privileged to be able to photograph and discuss with Ray some of his treasures.

Some vintage radio collections emphasise a particular theme — concentrating on an era, a type of receiver, on one manufacturer, or even one country. Ray Knowles' interests have been described as 'eclectic' and consequently there is plenty of interest for everyone.

First off, I asked Ray how he came to start collecting. Like many who grew up in the austerity of the late depression and World War II period, he was, as a youngster, restricted in pursuing his radio listening interests. One longstanding ambition had been to own a really good shortwave receiver, with reasonable audio quality.

Eventually, in 1976, he purchased a multiband radio — but found its performance disappointing. Then in a second-hand shop he discovered a loctal valve receiver, made by AKRAD about 25 years previously. Here at last was a radio that met his expectations.

With the realisation that older receivers could be superior to their more modern counterparts, and that he could now afford some of the radios that he had admired as a boy, Ray became interested in early radio equipment. This was the era when colour TV and solid state home electronics were becoming established, and the repair of valve radios was discouraged by an industry eager to sell the new technology.

Radios given away

Fifteen years ago 'old radios' could often be had for the asking. They were in little demand, and even the simplest of repairs cost more than a receiver was worth. Faced with the alternative of dumping them, owners were only too happy to give their radios to a good home, and Ray soon found that he had the genesis of a radio collection.

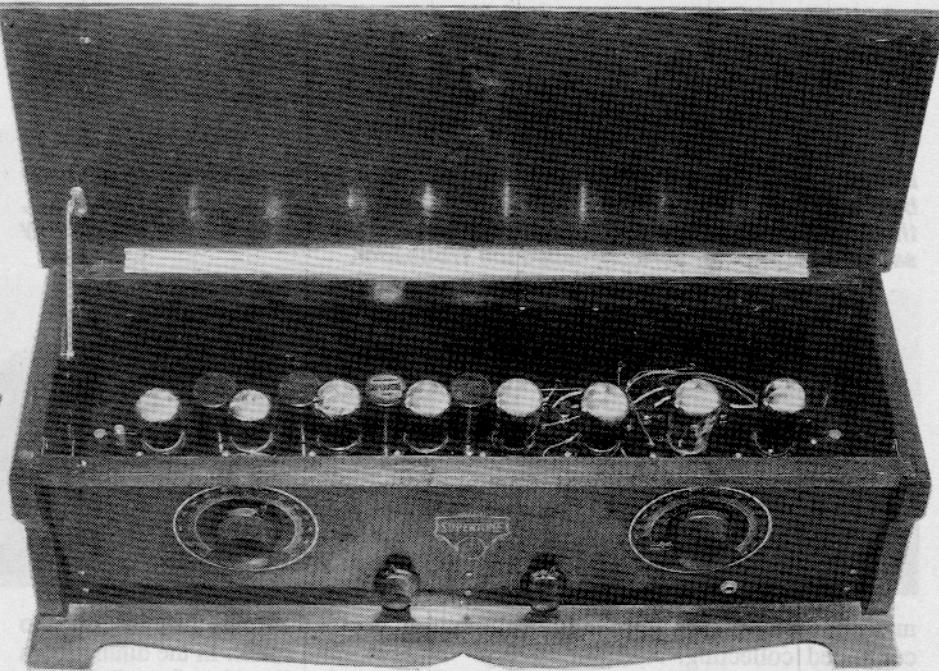
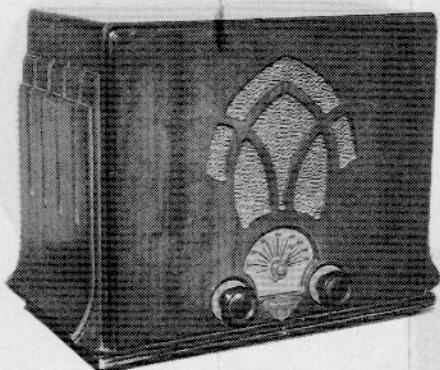
Visits to auction sales and second hand



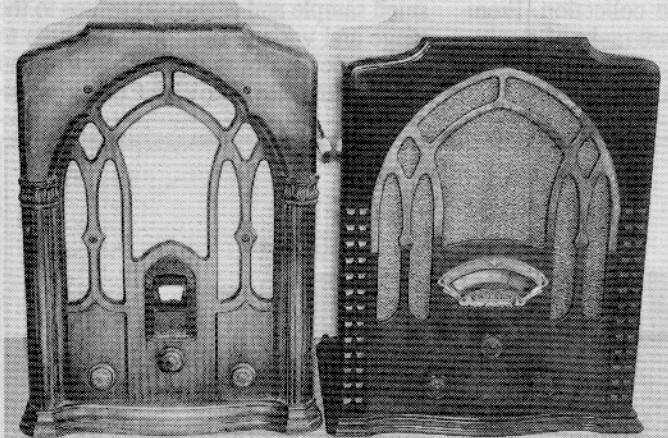
The oldest radio in Ray's collection: a British General Electric 'No.1' crystal set, dating from 1922.



The shot at left shows just one corner of Ray Knowles' magnificent collection. At right is an Atwater Kent model 447, a high performance seven-valve four band mantel set which is one of Ray's favourites, and represents AK designs at their best.



Above left: a fine example of an AWA model 24 Radiolette mantel set of 1934. Along with the model 27, it was the first in this well-known series of reflexed superheterodynes. There is no dial light; the pointer moves in front of the dial scale. **Above right:** is a very rare Supertone eight-valve battery superhet of the 1920's, made by the Buckwalter Corporation and with double-acting Remler tuning capacitors with brass vanes that open like the wings of a butterfly.



The two similar-looking sets at left cover four countries: the one on the left is an American RCA with a British HMV label, which almost certainly inspired its companion — a Pacific made in New Zealand in 1934, but with a cabinet made by Australian firm Ricketts and Thorpe in Sydney! At right is an impressive-looking five-valve TRF set of 1925 which carries what was then a prestige brand name: the De Forest F5 Radiophone.

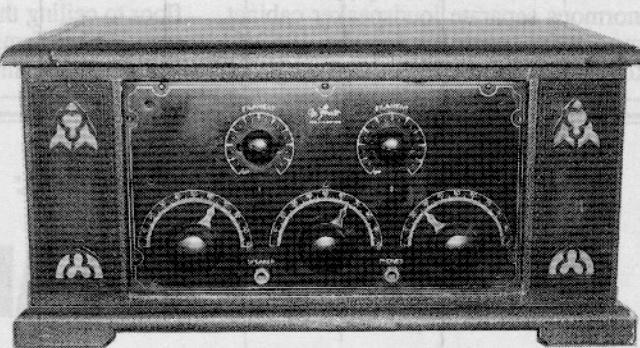
shops provided further additions, many of them classics. Others were obtained by approaching and negotiating with their owners. Now, 15 dedicated years later, the impressive Knowles collection contains many rare, interesting and historic receivers.

Although the days of easy pickings are gone, Ray still uses the same methods for locating additions; but generally he has to work harder and pay more. One simple method still works occasionally and appeals to me. His house has a verandah visible from the street, and some obviously old but not too valuable equipment

is left on view. He says that it is remarkable how often new contributions are quietly added!

Space at a premium

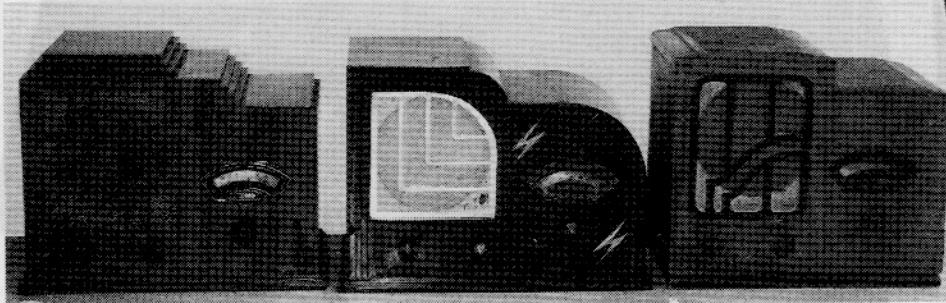
Wisely, Ray did not overfill his house with receivers, and before long there was the inevitable lack of space. A disused workshop on the property was adapted to house and display the bulk of the collection. Now it, an annex, the garage and a shed are all bursting at the seams. It is clear that Ray will soon have to be embarking on another building expansion programme.



Inevitably the question is asked — how many radios are there in the collection? As any collector will know, this is hard to answer. As well as the prime display radios, there are always duplicates, swaps, chassis without cabinets, cabinets without chassis and the inevitable 'junkers' — incomplete radios to be cannibalised or repaired when and if the missing parts turn up. Ray estimates that his collection of complete radios stands at around one thousand and growing!

Has Ray an ultimate goal? Not really. He considers that his collection will never be finished, and in common with

Below: Three different versions of the same basic five-valve superhet, all made by Radio Corporation (NZ) Ltd in 1934. From the left they are the Courtenay 205, the Pacific (with an Art Deco chromed grille) and the Philips 5H. Ray is currently seeking yet another version, called the Troubador.

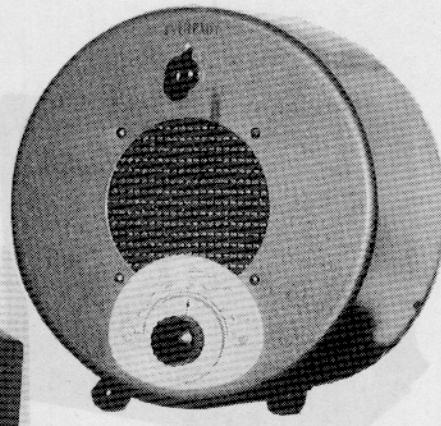


many collectors, finds that the fun is in continued collecting. And not having specialised, he acquires serendipitously.

There are many quite unique receivers. On entering Ray's home one is confronted with a handsome and rare 'Ariel' grandfather clock radio. Around the corner in the lounge is a magnificent English made HMV record player with an enormous separate loudspeaker cabinet, imported especially for the 1953/54 Royal Tour of New Zealand to be on

hand in case the Royal visitors wished to relax to some music. In the dining room for everyday listening is a Columbus model 91, a large mantel receiver with bandspread shortwave, push-pull output and a 10" loudspeaker.

However, it is upon entering the main display building that the visitor receives the full impact of the collection. From floor to ceiling there are ranks of receivers — some familiar, others unusual — and many rare and exciting.



Above: The Eveready four valve 'Saucepans' radio of 1949, made for use in remote African villages.

The main display contains radios that any collector would love to own. But then you are shown into a sort of 'Holy of Holies', a side room where many of Ray's real treasures are kept: Atwater Kents, a Browning Drake, RCA's and more — they are all there.

The photographs here only capture a small sample and cannot do justice to the range and variety. But they may help to give some idea of the quality, extent and scope of the Ray Knowles Collection. ♦

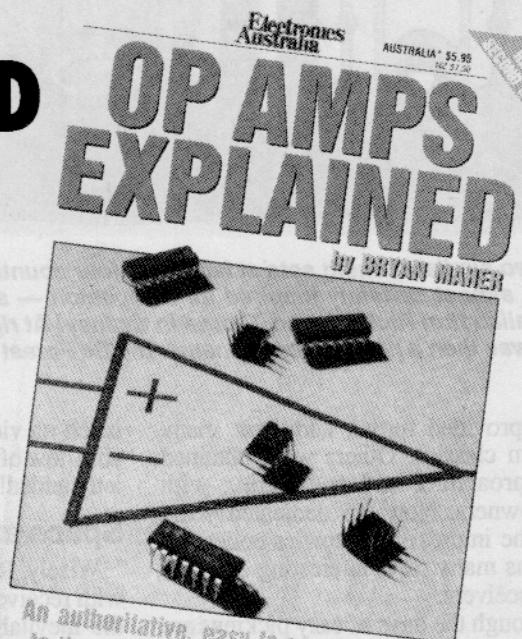
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