



Well, what DO you do, when no-one REALLY wants your old radios?

We're revisiting a few familiar subjects this month, folks. The reader who disposed of his old radios by burying them in his backyard replies to his critics, another reader takes me to task about comments I made about HDTV, and Philips responds to the suggestion that compact fluorescent lamps might emit dangerous levels of ultra-violet radiation.

You may recall that in the August 1992 issue, I published a photo that had been sent in by Colin MacKinnon — showing some old radios that he had buried in his back garden. I couldn't resist doing this, partly because I sensed it would 'stir up' a response from incensed vintage radio enthusiasts, and partly also because I knew Colin himself was actually one of those enthusiasts, and had probably sent the pic to me out of devilment.

Not unexpectedly, there was quite a reaction from vintage radio enthusiasts, some of whose letters and faxes I presented in the November issue. Many of those who responded were pretty upset, and made a few rather unflattering comments about Colin MacKinnon himself as well as their disapproval of his action in burying the radios.

Well, I guess some of this criticism must have hurt Colin a bit, because he's sent in a reply to them. And I'm publishing it as the first item this month — not only to give him the opportunity to reply to his critics, but because I believe he makes some very interesting and thought-provoking points, about the attitudes of some of the people involved in vintage radio collecting. See for yourself:

At last I have found fame, but not fortune! Let me respond by giving some background to that infamous photo of my priceless radio dump.

Firstly, I have the utmost respect for history and preservation, as readers of my historical and preservation articles will know. I have a collection of over 400 military radios and perhaps 60 vintage domestic radios, so I did not dump that stuff lightly. I had to clear my garage in a hurry and so I rang four prominent collectors who I considered would be delighted to take the stuff. Do you know what the response was?

(a) "Can you post me a list so I can see what I might want."

(b) "It's not convenient now. Just hang on to it, and when I'm ready I'll come and look."

(c) "It's a long way to your place (25km from the centre of Sydney) — couldn't you drop it into my place one day?"; and

(d) "Yes, I'll come over but I only want a few knobs. I don't want to take the complete chassis." (He didn't turn up anyway.)

I had little option. I looked at those radio parts long and hard, trying to see what could be salvaged, and knew I couldn't keep them. The collectors' response was all one way, so they ended up dumped. I certainly did not get some perverse pleasure from doing it.

I've since heard from others who have a different attitude, and am pleased to help them. As Jim Rowe would know, having seen a small part of it, I recently advised on the disposal of a deceased estate of literally tonnes and tonnes of electronic equipment, components and books. Several collectors who showed genuine interest were able to buy at reasonable prices, things like 1930's era Beales, STC's, AWA consoles and others. Many items were donated to collectors and museums. Unfortunately the sheer volume of stuff in this house and the logistics nightmare meant that tonnes of equipment was still dumped.

I personally took at least a tonne of the best items to the WIA Trash & Treasure Sale — and couldn't GIVE it away! It is all very well to say keep things and eventually someone will want it. That deceased estate was a prime example of the ultimate fate of most such collections.

My photo is really a poignant comment on the attitude of a few radio collectors, as expressed by the lack of interest I

found. I have been told that I should have taken the stuff to a club meet or collectors' auction as, for instance, speakers that I had dumped could be re-coned for \$100 and then sold for \$200. So I asked, "Would you pay me \$5.00 to cover my petrol costs?" You would have thought I'd asked for their right arm! "But you were going to dump it, so why should I pay anything?" Incidentally I have had several phone calls expressing concern about this same attitude. I have seen collectors bring beautifully restored equipment to sales and couldn't even get scrap metal prices for it. Peter Lankshear's valuation of thousands of dollars does not apply round here.

Coming back to that deceased estate, I asked one collector if he was interested in a rare gramophone console that had turned up. He said he might go as high as \$200 if it was in pristine condition. I knew, as did he, of an identical unit in an antique shop for over \$1000. Consequently I arranged for that item to go to someone else for around \$500 — still a bargain.

So what is wrong? On the one hand I have people complaining that I should keep everything, no matter how much space it takes up and the domestic problems it causes, in the hope that somehow, somewhere, sometime, someone will want it. On the other hand there are those who are not even willing to re-imburse a postage stamp for a list, or make any effort to take stuff away.

I think NSW radio collectors are a bit spoiled and the market has yet to mature. I look at prices paid at collectors' auctions in Victoria, where the clubs and historical groups have been going much longer and I see reasonable values paid, say \$30 - \$50 compared to silly bids of \$1 or \$2 for the same items in Sydney. Yet the same bidder feels his own items are



worth hundreds of dollars. In a few years it should level out, and it will be worthwhile keeping parts, knowing that those who want them will make the effort to collect them and will appreciate those who have saved them.

I must point out that it is only a small number of self-interested collectors who influence my cynical thinking. The vast majority of fellow collectors, those I help and those who help me, can rest easy knowing that I don't include them and if I dumped stuff, it was unusable!

(PS: I hear someone is selling maps of my back yard.)

Well, there you are. I think Colin has explained why he did that 'dreaded deed' rather well, and with good humour — don't you?

It certainly seems as if some of our collectors in NSW are not as committed to vintage radio as they might have us believe, too, judging from the kind of responses Colin received when he was still trying to give the old sets a good home as opposed to the burial...

I can also vouch for what Colin says about the deceased estate. It was he who very kindly let me know about it, and as a result I was able to buy not only a car-load of lovely old reference books for the magazine (to replace some of

those we lost in our fire), but also a few old but 'classic' Australian-made test instruments for myself. All at a very reasonable price, too.

The chap who was faced with disposing of the estate was in no doubt about the help that Colin had given him in finding 'good homes' for much of the old equipment, too — despite the fact that it was all located a *lot* further away from Sydney than Colin's own modest 25km. So there really isn't any doubt in my mind about Colin's dedication to vintage radio; but by the same token his dedication is tempered with realism, as shown by that photo!