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QST Issue: Aug 2005

Title: The Catalog Years

Author: John H. Dilks III, K2TQN

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OLD RADIO

The Catalog Years

It was the time before shopping centers, malls and (now) the Internet. Prior to World War II a great percentage of Americans lived in rural areas. Many families lived on farms and in small towns and did not have regular transportation. They did most of their shopping from home through mail order catalogs.

One of the largest companies, Sears (they were "Sears, Roebuck and Company" back then) sold most of their products through mail order catalogs, and they were very successful. They had a very

large, 2-inch thick, catalog that came out about four times a year, filled with illustrations and a large selection of everything they sold. Shown on the pages with many products was a notice that told the reader they could request a specialty catalog. Examples of these catalogs were: Farm Tools and Supplies, Automotive Parts, Sporting Equipment, Homes (yes, Sears also sold homes—both kit and finished homes), Electrical Supplies, Radio Equipment and Parts, and they also had "Radio Amateur" Catalogs.

SILVERTONE 9-Tube Communications Receiver

\$39.95 Cash
Less Speaker, Crystal

Terms:
\$4 Down
See Page 2

These receivers originally sold for \$59.95. We have drastically reduced the price to clear them out quickly. Less than fifty left. First come, first served.

We guarantee that this receiver will hold its own in competition with others now selling for about one-third more. It has everything: 40 M.C. to 550 K.C. in 5 bands . . . Good quality vane type "R" meter . . . Direct Tuning . . . Electrical band spread . . . Variable beat frequency oscillator on all bands . . . An R.F. stage on all bands . . . Edge lighted twin dials . . . Headphone jack cuts out speaker when phones are plugged in . . . Connections for doublet or single wire antenna . . . Improved High "C" coil assembly . . . Iron Core I.F. transformers . . . Variable Selectivity . . . Copper plated chassis steel cabinet, gray crackled finish. This receiver will deliver everything that most amateurs demand. The R.F. end is so designed that all leads between coils and tuning condensers are entirely eliminated. 465 K.C. I.F. frequency is used for high sensitivity.



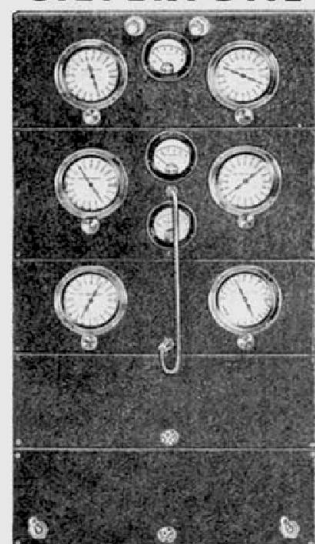
Band spread in dial divisions is as follows: 28 to 30 M.C., 88; 14 to 14.4 M.C., 45; 7 to 7.3 M.C., 270; 3.5 to 4 M.C., 370; 1.7 to 2 M.C., 290. There are 12 controls as follows: BFO Injection, Power Switch and R.F. Gain, Main Tuning, Band Selector, Band Spread Tuning, Audio Gain, Tone Crystal Phase, BFO On-off, Send-Receive, AVC On-off, and Crystal In-out. Sensitivity comparable with that of the Precision Series Three. Selectivity 12, 19, or 38 K.C. at 1000 times down. Size, 17½x11½x11 in. For 105-130 volt, 50-60 cycle A.C. only. Shipping weight, 39 pounds.
57 PT 08419—Complete with tubes, less Speaker and Crystal. . . . Cash Price \$39.95
57 PT 08420—As above, with factory-installed crystal. . . . Cash Price \$42.95
57 PT 8421—10-inch P.M. Speaker in cabinet to Match. Shipping wt. 9 lbs. . . \$3.95
For Easy Payments, See Page 2.

From the 1940 Sears catalog.



From K2TQN's Mobile Old Radio Museum display.

SILVERTONE



Complete Transmitter

Silvertone 120-watt transmitter consisting of Antenna Unit, Amplifier Unit, Oscillator Unit, Modulator Unit, Power Supply Unit and one set of plug-in coils for the 160, 80, 40 or 20-meter band. State band wanted. Tubes required; one 56, one 57, one 59, two RK 20's, one 2A5, 4-83's, one 80. Tubes, crystal or holder not included. See page 34 for crystals. Panel size overall, 19x44 inches. Shipping weight, 150 lbs.

57 PM 8104 **\$155.00**
Cash Price
Easy Payment Price, (\$34.50 Down, \$34.00 Monthly) **\$170.50**
57 P 8241—Tubes, listed above. Shpg. wt., 6 lbs. Complete **\$34.59**

1935 Silvertone transmitter.

I have some copies of the early Sears radio catalogs from the 1920s, where most of the illustrations were radio parts and the radio kits were made from these same parts. Back then many youngsters found out about ham radio through the catalogs and their inexpensive kits. Sears also had a great selection of books available to ham radio operators.

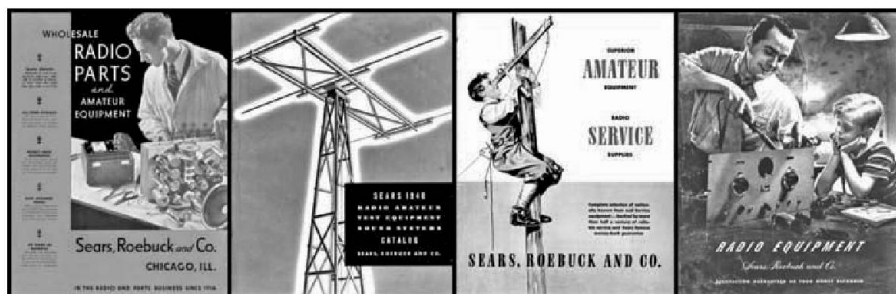
As a kid I can remember reading Sears catalogs cover to cover in the late 1940s, and I remember seeing Hallicrafters radios being sold in there. I don't think I ever had a radio specialty catalog and I don't know for sure if they had them then. But I was lucky enough to find several Sears radio catalogs from 1935 through 1941; this was the time frame when radio was being perfected and most of the companies started producing really good radios. Sears sold most of the popular brands. They also sold parts and accessories such as microphones, keys, tubes, crystals, antennas, and even beam antennas, rotators, and a wooden tower starting in 1940.

Silvertone

Sears also had their own brand-named



From the 1940 Sears catalog.



Sears catalogs, from left: 1935, early 1940, late 1940, late 1941 (printed on October 15, 1941).

radios, "Silvertone." This covered every area from home-broadcast radios to ham radios. They had several manufacturers make and label them with the Sears brand, and then sold them through their catalogs. I am only aware of two Silvertone models that were popular with hams, but I'm sure there were more. I have one of them and I have the catalog it was ordered from.

The Silvertone Standby 9-Tube Communications Receiver

Evidently this radio was first offered in 1938 or 1939. The catalog I have shows it as a close-out item, in the "Sears 1940 Radio Amateur, Test Equipment, Sound System Catalog." The description is interesting, it says:

These receivers originally sold for \$59.95. We have drastically reduced the price to 39.95 to clear them out quickly. Less than fifty left. First come, first served. Terms: \$4 down, see page 2.

We guarantee that this receiver will hold its own in competition with others now selling for about one-third more. It has everything: 40 M.C. to 550 K.C. in 5 bands, Good quality vane type "R" meter, Direct Tuning, Electrical band spread, Variable beat fre-

quency oscillator on all bands, An RF stage on all bands, Edge lighted twin dials, Head-phone jack cuts out speaker when phones are plugged in, Connections for doublet or single wire antenna, Improved High "C" coil assembly, Iron Core I.F. transformers, Variable Selectivity, Copper plated chassis steel cabinet, gray crackled finish.

This receiver will deliver everything that most amateurs demand. The R.F. end is so-designed that all leads between coils and tuning condensers are entirely eliminated. 465 K.C. I.F. frequency is used for high sensitivity.

Band spread in dial divisions is as follows: 28 to 30 M.C., 88; 14 to 14.4 M.C., 45; 7 to 7.3 M.C., 270; 3.5 to 4 M.C., 370; 1.7 to 2 M.C., 290. There are 12 controls as follows: BFO Injection, Power Switch and R.F. Gain, Main Tuning, Band Selector, Band Spread Tuning, Audio Gain, Tone Crystal Phase, BFO On-off, Send-receive, AVC On-off, and Crystal In-out. Sensitivity comparable with that of the Precision Series Three. Selectivity 12, 19, or 38 K.C. at 1000 times down. Size, 17½ x 11½ x 11 inches. For 105-130, volt, 50-60 Cycle A.C. only. Shipping weight; 39 pounds.

Complete with tubes, less Speaker and Crystal, Cash Price \$39.95. With factory-

installed crystal, Cash Price \$42.95.

10-inch P.M. Speaker in cabinet to Match. Shipping wt., 9 lbs, \$3.95.

My Silvertone Standby has been in the K2TQN Mobile Radio Museum since I built it. Almost everyone who has gone through the museum, over 10,000 so far, has remarked about this radio. Most were unaware that Sears made ham radios. A couple of knowledgeable collectors have filled in some missing information.

As you can see from the photo, it has a strong resemblance to the RME-69 ham receiver, a very popular model. It only resembled the RME-69 in appearance, not in performance. The two radios are totally different. I think that some of the buyers thought it would be the same radio, and I'm sure they were disappointed.

It is strongly thought the builder of this radio was the Howard Radio Company. It is known that they were one of Sears chosen manufacturers of radios over a period of several years. In the 1941 catalog, after the Standby receivers were sold out, Sears introduced two Howard models, the 436A for \$41.75 and the 437A for \$61.95. Also new to the 1941 catalog were two RME models, the RME-99 for \$160.78, and the RME-43 for \$129.12.

It is my feeling that RME must have complained about the obvious knock-off. That along with the poor sales of the Standby motivated Sears to drop the Standby from the Sears catalog. Then seeing both the Howard, with the cheaper models, and RME, with the better and more expensive radios in the 1941 catalog, helps support my theory.

Today the Silvertone Standby appears to be a rare radio. One ham visiting my museum told me he has one, and that's the only other I know about.

The 1937 Silvertone 8A Receiver

Sears made an earlier receiver that was popular with hams, the model 8A in 1937. I found an interesting Web site with a great story and photos about one of these radios, and how it helped save the flooded communities of Wheelersburg, Allen Township and Sciotovalle, Ohio in 1937. Two ham operators provided the only contact for the communities cut off for a full week after the flood crisis. This was reported in a nine-page article in the April 1937 issue of QST. To see the 1937 photos of the 8A and to read about the story provided by Richard Post, KB8TAD, please visit my Web page for a link: www.eht.com/oldradio/arrl/index.html.

I'll see you at the hamfests. Look for the call letters on my hat and say hello. —K2TQN

QST