

Video recorder war, phase I like old LP record battles

At one time, after 78 rpm records came on the scene, there was a quest for more playing time and a more lightweight disc.

RCA succeeded with a lower-speed disc, bringing out the 45 revolutions per minute record in 1948. The 12-inch record manufactured in the same year by Columbia went a step further. It turned at 33 1/3 rpm, giving even more playing time to the customer.

Both record speeds were met with enthusiasm and brought about one of the biggest battles in the entertainment industry: the war between 33 1/3 rpm and 45 rpm records.

The 78 was still in vogue so record players were now being produced incorporating all three speeds, signalling the beginning of the knock 'em down, slug it out battle for audio supremacy.

The success of Columbia's and RCA's records gave rise to competitors who sensed the potential of this expanding market. Not long after technology was ready to take another giant leap into the future as a new concept caught the music world by surprise: stereo. Stereo components were manufactured en masse, cutting down on mono sales, which all but faded from the scene in the early '70s. Ask teenagers today what a monaural record is, and they are sure to give you a puzzled look.

People in local record shops can remember the days of the 45 vs. 33 1/3. Albums apparently have won the battle, as their sales have grown steadily over the last decade. The

45s are consistent sellers, but the true audiophile prefers listening to an album, not having to walk to his stereo every three minutes to change a seven-inch disc.

Although 45s and 33 1/3s seemed the final fight in audio, sound companies in their never-ending battle to change the face of entertainment have unleashed upon the buying public the video cassette recorder (VCR). They have seen the future and it seems to lie with home video equipment. Today, it has turned into a yearly \$2-billion business, with new concepts replacing older ones regularly.

VCRs are giving the public choice in the same manner records *ones* did. "Which machine is the best? Which one will suit my viewing needs?" the customer ponders. Shoppers today are looking for quality and durability.

Customers are also contemplating whether to purchase Beta or VHS design recorders. Beta is sold by companies such as Sony, Sanyo, Zenith, Sears and Toshiba, while VHS can be found on RCA, JVC, Hitachi, Panasonic, Quasar and Magnavox models, to name a few. While the numbers are always changing, there are now 18 companies putting out 50 different VCR models.

Beta and VHS allow the customer a personal preference. The systems are different in concept and so are not compatible in each other's machines. Beta and VHS differ slightly in the way they are manufactured. Beta's "omega wrap" tape is stronger, therefore resistant to twisting. VHS cassettes have an "M-wrap" design, which Bob Stallard of Stallard's TV in London sees as a simpler system. Authorities, though, have noted it causes more stress to the tape.

When you stop a VHS machine, a problem occurs. The machine cannot be started at exactly the same spot. This does not seem to deter Canadian customers as VHS outsells Beta in this country.

Paul Avis of the Video House in London prefers the VHS model, "because of its fully celluloid switching operation," while Steve Scruton of Videodeon, sees "little difference between the two." It seems a lot has to do with personal taste.

"Some people are more interested in longer recording time," adds Jeff Ariss of Great West Audio in London. The longer format gives people greater flexibility with their viewing and recording. VHS machines have recording times of two, four and six hours, while on the drawing board is a tape that has a nine-hour recording capability. Beta's running times are three, 4 1/2 or five hours. Beta machines will always have less recording time because they have a larger head wheel, which limits the recording time, and a smaller tape cartridge shell, limiting the amount of tape.

The ability to program the machine is another extra VCR customers look for. Some machines can be programmed from one to 14 days. The best-selling types in London

stores are those with shorter programming times.

If you were going to be out of town for a week, for example, and you wanted to record a football game on the weekend or a movie one evening at 11:30, you might prefer the longer programming time. All you do is set the timer on your VCR that is hooked up to your TV, and the set is automatically switched on at the time designated. When it is finished recording, it switches the TV off again.

The more frills you prefer, the larger the price tag will be. Prices can range from \$1,000 to \$2,000. If you like watching football, you can record the game, play it back, then freeze frame, slow motion, seven-day timer, and is the only model at present that comes with a wireless remote control. In recording, these machines represent the true battle to tape the network stars.

A Mitsubishi model at Hi-Fi Express in London gives many of these features, such as audio overdub, freeze frame, slow motion, seven-day timer, and is the only model at present that comes with a wireless remote control. In recording, these machines represent the true battle to tape the network stars.

Round 2 of the VCR fight for supremacy may be in recorded movies, which is another industry in itself. You can now purchase top-quality movies that played only months ago at your local theatre. Elephant Man, 9 to 5, Caddyshack, My Bloody Valentine and Popeye are but a few of the current films for sale with prices ranging from \$75 to \$125, depending on store and film purchased. Video stores are doing a booming business, but an even more impressive business is movie rentals.

Video movies can be rented from one to seven days. A sample price is \$3.50 for one night or \$16 a week.

You can choose from a vast selection of old or new titles. Some video stores have a membership fee that gives you unlimited borrowing privileges. The most popular rentals in London are Caddyshack, Superman, All That Jazz, From Night and Alien. You are able to rent out or buy X-rated video movies like The Joys Of A Woman, but keep in mind they are not in-cut versions, as the Ontario censor board (as always) has the final say in the matter.

Avis, of the Video House, says in the future you will see simultaneous releases, meaning a new movie may be at the theatre on Monday, and you can buy it from a video store the same day.

The market is constantly growing as more people learn about it. Steve Scruton believes 50 per cent of the population doesn't realize VCRs exist, but the numbers continue dwindling on a daily basis. The potential for video cassettes may keep network programmers on their toes because if the quality of television declines, the general public has several alternatives for entertainment right on the television screen.

Paul Sutter



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