

The War Time Civilian Receiver

At the beginning of the war the catalogues of 40 different radio manufacturers offered over 400 models for the public to choose from. However as the war progressed and the manufacturers were forced to turn to war production, providing equipment for the Armed Forces, then the choice available to the home market was drastically reduced. The situation was made worse by a growing shortage of components such as valves and the timber from which many radio cabinets were made.

Some manufacturers, such as Ekco based at Southend on Sea and HMV, produced sets using fewer components, less decoration and alternative materials. Hence the 'round' Ekco, first released in 1934 and made of Bakelite, was produced in 1940 one-fifth smaller in size using less Bakelite and no chrome ornamentation. HMV produced a battery-powered set using a cheap plywood cabinet covered in Rexine (sticky backed plastic) priced at £11 11s 0d.

However by 1943 the shortage in available materials to manufacture radios and the lack of available radio engineers to service/repair them made the situation very difficult. The Government realised that it was important that every household had access to a radio in order to chart the progress of the war and to receive Government announcements. Yet it was estimated that by the end of 1942 10% of all domestic radios were not working, that is some 1 million radios nationally. It was a situation that would only get worse, as by now no new radios were being manufactured or imported. The government had to intervene.

In 1943 the Government streamlined all the organisations governing the radio industry and ordered the industry to design a War Time Civilian Receiver. It was a project involving all 40 manufacturers, thus a final design did not come out until November of that year. Production did not start until the spring of 1944 and radios were not released for sale until the June.

Although radio constructors could buy kits and build their own receiver (they had to make their own cabinets) most people would buy a completed War Time Civilian Receiver. They were of two types - an AC mains model in an upright plywood cabinet or a battery-powered model in a horizontal wooden cabinet. Both could receive medium wave

transmissions only. The mains receiver was sold for £12 3s 4d and the battery version was sold for £10 19s 0d.

Many commentators thought the radios were cheap and nasty in design and expensive for what they were. Yet they had been designed to use what components and materials were available. Despite these criticisms over 175,000 War Time Civilian Radios were made. They meant that those people unable previously to listen to a radio could now do so.