

Consumer electronics

Walk-around radio market crowded

Lightweight stereos with headphones have attracted 30 or more manufacturers to a market that was opened by Sony in 1979

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Much to the surprise of audio equipment manufacturers and industry observers alike, the new genre of portable mini-micro stereo cassette decks has become one of the hottest audio consumer items going. Sales are going nowhere but up. And the products themselves are going everywhere with buyers, from jogging to shopping to commuting.

"When we first introduced these, we were asking ourselves who was going to want a \$200 tape player that didn't even record," admits one official at Sony Corp., where a brainstorm by board chairman Akio Morita is said to have been the genesis of the Sony Walkman introduced two years ago in Japan.

Since the Walkman was brought to America in December 1979, 30 to 50 competitors have jumped in with similar products. The most optimistic forecasters are expecting a 6.5-million-unit worldwide market for the product type this year. Sony is

believed to have 50% of the market.

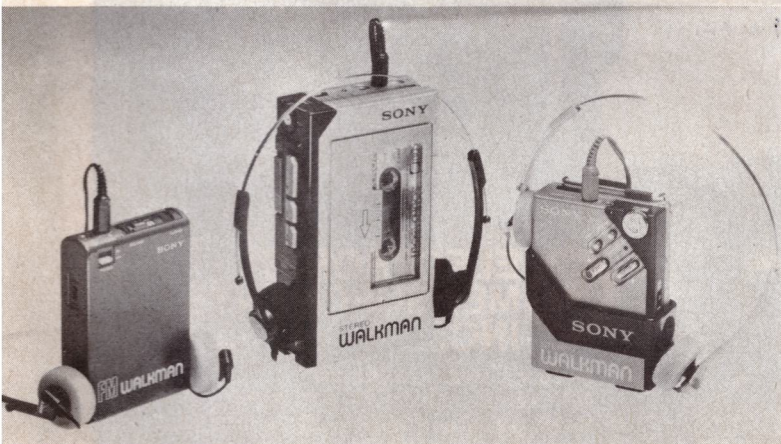
The key to the miniaturization and sound quality is a samarium cobalt magnet in the headphones. It produces a very high flux density and hence more sound from less energy. Also important is the Mylar drive element, which is small and lightweight. It is housed in a tuned cavity, open-air enclosure, which also bolsters sound quality.

The portable, "personal" machines—now available in a variety of iterations, including a-m and stereo fm radio as well as record-playback cassette—are the next step in a natural progression for consumers who have been conditioned to high-quality stereo music, figures Mark Friedman, national sales manager for Onkyo USA Corp. of New York. Or as Yao Hwong, president of Simon Electronics Corp. of Taiwan puts it: "People will expect their hi-fi equipment to be as compact or convenient as their calculators and cameras."

Setting up shop at this month's Summer Consumer Electronics Show in Chicago, a year-old Houston firm known as Technidyne Corp. was one of the splashiest among the multitudes showing personal portable stereo products. The Technidyne booth featured young women wearing the firm's new model 140 hip pocket stereo while riding a bucking mechanical bull. Nearby, company officials touted the benefits of the \$139.95 unit's built-in dynamic noise-reduction chip supplied by National Semiconductor Corp., Santa Clara, Calif.

Toshiba, Panasonic, and General Electric were among industry heavyweights showing off their personal stereo product lines at the show. And Sony Corp., not resting on its laurels, brought out three new Walkman family members. The SRF-40W, an fm stereo receiver version, comes with a suggested \$89.95 retail price. The new Walkman II, priced at

Sound moves. With the burgeoning success of the market for portable cassette players, Sony is coming out with three new models (below). Also in the field are such firms as Technidyne (right).



Probing the news

\$179.95, will replace the original Walkman. The play-only cassette machine offers soft-touch controls and an improved counter-inertial fly-wheel system that Sony says enhances sound quality. In addition, Sony says it is actually smaller than a typical plastic cassette holder. The third new machine, known as the Walkman I, is a larger, cassette-play unit priced at a more economical \$99.95 in a move designed to appeal to the teenage market with a limited disposable income.

The future. While the world is seemingly rushing to standard cassette-size products, a few firms at CES were giving a glimpse of what may be the size and shape of things to come. Panasonic Co., Secaucus, N. J. demonstrated its GZ-7, a playback-only unit that uses smaller microcassette tapes. Currently being sold in Japan, the GZ-7 is not yet available in the U. S.

Fisher Corp. of Chatsworth, Calif., has been offering since January the PH M20, a \$199.95 play-only microcassette personal portable. And at the Chicago show, the firm unveiled a combination unit known as the Micro Kangaroo. That system consists of a 13-by-3.66-by-2-inch a-m-fm stereo receiver "mother" unit with two 3-in. speakers that also houses a drop-in microcassette record-playback "baby" unit. Measuring 5.25 by 2.5 by 1 in., the baby has its own set of headphones and can be used by itself as a portable unit to play radio programming recorded from the mother. The Micro Kangaroo carries a suggested selling price of \$399.95.

Interestingly, the new personal stereo products seem to be creating their own market. They are not cutting into sales of the larger, heavier, portable chrome-laden boxes. According to Michael Koss, an official with Koss Corp. of Milwaukee, the trend bodes well for the portable audio industry. Koss expects a \$2 billion annual U. S. market to emerge by 1985 for mini-micro personal stereo and boom box type products combined. And that, he points out, is nearly equal to the entire U. S. hi-fi market today. □