National Capital Radio & Television Museum

Artifact of the Week:

1935 Kadette "Jewel" Model 43



Today so much of what we buy is made of plastic. Radios of the 1920s were generally housed in wood, or sometimes metal, cabinets, but in the early 1930s, radio manufacturers began to experiment with molded plastic. A relatively new material at the time, plastic allowed for interesting new design approaches as well as bright and varied colors. But to utilize it, companies had to learn how to develop low-cost, reproducible plastic molding technology.

Bakelite was the first plastic to be used for radio cabinets, and it continued to be common for decades. Generally either brown or black, Bakelite is what is called a molded "thermoset" plastic, formed under heat and pressure. Chemically, it is composed of formaldehyde, phenol, and a varying filler, such as sawdust or asbestos.

This small radio (about four by six inches), called the "Jewel," is made of off-white Plaskon. Similar to Bakelite, Plaskon contains cellulose fiber fillers and urea-formaldehyde resin rather than phenol-formaldehyde. The grille insert is of a different type of plastic.

Kadette was the brand name of the International Radio Corporation of Ann Arbor, Michigan. Introduced in 1934 as a "New 1935 Model," the "Jewel" is a good example of an early attempt to mold then-new types of plastic for radio cabinets. While the cabinet is attractive, and this model is popular among radio collectors, the radio inside is about as minimalist as can be had. With only three vacuum tubes, it performs rather poorly.

We appreciate your support of the museum so that historical artifacts like this one, and the stories that go with them, can be preserved for future generations. THANKS!