

# Regency TR-1 Transistor Radio

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Donated by Paul Farmer



This artifact marks a significant milestone in radio history—the introduction of the first transistor radio to American consumers. Invented at AT&T’s Bell Laboratories in the late 1940s, transistors were initially used in military applications due to their small size and low power consumption, and later as an attractive way to produce smaller hearing aids. Texas Instruments (TI), one of the first companies licensed to manufacture transistors, sought to expand into civilian markets.

In May 1954, TI's Paul Davis and his team swiftly developed a working prototype of an all-transistor AM radio, despite skepticism from larger electronics companies like RCA and Philco, who considered transistors too costly for consumer use. Partnering with the I.D.E.A. Company (Regency brand), TI launched the TR-1 in October, just in time for Christmas. Priced at \$49.95 (equivalent to \$480 today), it sold out despite its high cost. Over 100,000 units were eventually sold, prompting larger firms to hasten their own transistor radio developments.

Compact and lightweight at 3 by 5 by 1¼ inches and weighing 12 ounces, the TR-1 wasn't pocket-sized, but offered superior battery life compared to tube radios. Its popularity soared with the rise of Rock ‘n Roll, as teenagers embraced the ability to listen to artists like Elvis Presley anywhere. The success of the TR-1 signaled the end of vacuum tube radios, propelling the transistor's revolution and forever altering the electronics industry.