

19 September 1972

Dear Harold:

This replies to your note of 9/3/72 asking about inexpensive cassette recorders. As far as I know this is a hopeless question, with the cards irreparably stacked. Each dealer MAY know something about his own machines, but naturally doesn't bother to find out -- even if he easily might do so -- how they stack up with others, whether the impedances and other factors involved in dubbing are compatible, the quality of the components, and so on. Most of these jobs, I suspect, are inexpensive because corners have been cut somewhere along the line. This increases the probability of defective switches or other elements which can conk out and leave you with a useless machine because repair, if at all possible, will cost nearly as much as a new machine. This is no accident, of course, and businessmen have no incentive to change the situation. Nor does this mean corners haven't been cut in better-known brands, but these have at least a theoretical incentive to skimp less because of the reputation they have paid for through their advertising investment.

For these reasons, I felt our dealer was unlikely to shed much light on your question, which, as it happened, provided us with an opportunity to indulge in something we've wanted for more than a year and at the same time solve part of your problem. We understand this to be mainly the need for a recorder with which you can tape radio programs on the spot of the moment without robbing your telephone set-up, the importance of which we fully appreciate.

First, some background. Four years ago Concord came on the market with the first cassette radio-recorder, which we snapped up because we were doing so much recording from radio, both AM and FM. We still do a lot, and rely more and more on the radio-recorder cassette combination because it's so much more quickly started than the big 7-inch reel-to-reel recorder we have hooked up to the hi-fi in the living room.

For two years, Concord had this smaller cassette recorder-radio combination market all to itself, but around two years ago other brands began appearing. These included the Craig, a new Japanese line marketed out of LA, which was ruggedly built, better designed and had the tremendous improvement (for our kind of recording) of an automatic input volume control (which the Concord lacked) along with more convenient controls and switches.

We traded the Concord in on a Craig (the dealer could allow very little for it) and used it for a year or so until the motor gave out. During the six weeks it took to get a new motor installed, we found we were missing so much that we got a second machine, a Sony CF300 which by now had appeared. For by this time we realized that we needed two machines -- one for each end of the house, with one to fall back on as a spare in case either broke down. And we have found since then that there are surprisingly many times when it's just safer to tape two different stations at once.

In the year since that happened (and since the Craig came back like new) we have found that while the two machines are roughly the same in capability, their controls are different enough that we often lost precious seconds in starting to tape a news item, simply because we were using the Sony most of the time and when we rushed to the Craig we'd find we had forgotten exactly what to do in a hurry. So for this past year we have been trying to figure a way to get another Sony, but ~~were~~ weren't willing to trade it in because of the small allowance that would be made for the Craig, a still perfectly good machine.

The Sony has some improvements, mainly the end-of-reel warning you have on your TC40, and more easily operated controls, especially with hands wet with dishwasher and in a hurry. So when your letter came, we greeted it as the answer to our problem and to what we hope is a good part of yours. We got a duplicate Sony CF300, and shipped the Craig to you last Friday, Sept 15, in its original packing with its instruction sheet.

It has an AM-FM radio, automatic input volume control, and an on-off exterior mike. In other words, it should provide you with another cassette recorder, bigger than your TC40 of course, but with roughly the same performance, still portable in a pinch, and operating either off power cord or battery. The radio is quite good, better if anything than the ones in our Sonys. The motor has had very little use, and as far as we know the whole machine is in good shape. I forgot to clean the heads before shipping it, but this you can do easily with a Q-tip and alcohol.

It will accept your phone pickup if your TC40 does.

Since our Sonys appear to have much the same innards as your TC40, I did some testing with dubbing between a Sony and the Craig.

I found the Craig will record the Sony's signal fairly well if you turn the sending Sony down to very low volume and let the Craig's own input volume control do the amplifying. Because of a lack of time I wasn't able to get nearly as good result sending from the Craig to the Sony. Apparently there is some difference in impedance or something, or I may, in haste, have made some stupid mistake in plugging in the patch cord at one end or the other.

The Craig, when recording a signal from either its own radio or from an outside source, will govern its own input. This means you can turn the speaker volume off entirely while recording if you like.

It has its own unique wrinkle I've never seen on any other machine. If you're taping from the radio, you can plug in the mike and record your own commentary on the same tape. Think what you could do with a speech by our GL. Or by Kleindienst. We look forward, etc.

In the Craig is a tape we dubbed on it from the Sony, a KPFA program on the Vietnam war. Enclosed in the same package we also return two of your tapes, the CBS program on the Watergate and your telephone interview with Bill Malik of KPPK. We enjoyed both. As you say, you don't say anything you haven't written, but it was still good to hear you in action.

By the way, do you have a patchcord with a miniplug at one end (to fit your TC40) and a pair of insulated alligator clips at the other? If not, let us know. We have an extra, and you might be able to hook the alligator clips to the speaker terminals on your TV set -- if they're accessible and if you can make the connection without electrocuting yourself. I did not think about this in time to include it in the package. It may not work, but the patchcord is here if you need it.

No, we did not consider your inquiry a hint. Anything but that. We did regard it as a way to get something we have wanted very badly but didn't want to waste the Craig. In case you're interested, we debated at least two minutes whether to consult you or confront you with a fait accompli. And when we got to the dealer we found our second Sony CF300 was the last one the dealer had in stock and that the next lot would be higher in price, so look, man, you're saving us MONEY. And for another thing, this makes a present to ourselves we really want and find most useful, and one we couldn't go for after I retire at the end of the year.

So it worked out very nicely for us, anyway, and perhaps it will let you breathe a little easier about your phone setup. Again, no one realizes better than we how important that must be, and it's worth a great deal to us to be able to feel you'll have that protection.

Best,
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