



The Serviceman



NED KELLY — TV SERVICEMAN!

My two main stories this month are, I am sorry to say, classic examples of service tactics which, at the very least, must be regarded as highly suspect. Coming, as they do, hard on last month's experience along similar lines, they force me to wonder just how widespread are such malpractices, and whether there is some kind of resurgence.

My first story concerns a complaint about a TV set suffering from low sound output. The history of the fault, as I finally pieced it together, was quite enlightening, in view of what I subsequently discovered.

It seemed that, about two years previously, the set's sound had failed completely. The people had called in a serviceman, who, after examining the set, had diagnosed a condition which, according to the owner, would have been quite expensive to repair. Exactly what this condition was supposed to be, or whether it was ever precisely described, I was unable to determine after such a long time. Neither was I able to determine whether the serviceman simply described it as expensive, or quoted a figure but, either way, he succeeded in frightening the customer off having the job done.

Then the serviceman suggested that, if they didn't want to pay for an expensive repair right then, he could make a temporary repair which might serve them until they were ready to have the job done properly, assuming they were prepared to accept a reduced performance. So this was agreed to. The serviceman made his temporary repair, collected his fee, and went on his way.

As it turned out, the reduced performance was a marked drop in available sound level in a set which was not renowned for its reserve in this regard, even in the best circumstances. More precisely, the level now available was about sufficient under ideal conditions, i.e., a reasonable level from the transmitter and with everybody watching the program maintaining a strict silence. Even then it was sometimes a strain.

But the owner and his family tolerated this for two years, so effectively had they been frightened off by the "expensive repair." Finally, he could stand it no longer. As far as he was concerned the TV set had long since ceased to be a source of entertainment and had become simply one of irritation and annoyance. He made up his mind to have it fixed, no matter what it cost. And so he sought my aid.

I was rather intrigued by the story. I couldn't imagine what kind of sound fault could involve such a high level of expense, but was prepared to learn if it really was something unusual. On inspection, the set behaved very much as the owner had described it, although

what sound there was was perfectly clean.

The set was a fairly old model, and a little unusual in regard to the sound channel. Instead of the more conventional triode pentode valve as a complete output stage, it employed a 6AU6 and a 6AQ5. On the other hand, it used only one stage in the sound IF system.

As far as the video section was concerned, everything seemed to be working fine. There was plenty of signal, a good reserve in the contrast control, and no sign of snow. I formed the opinion that, whatever the trouble was, it was unlikely to be in the common sound and video stages, but was much more likely to be in the sound IF or audio system. Well, at least that narrowed the field considerably.

First I tried new valves throughout, but this made no difference. I withdrew the chassis to the point where I could reach the sound section and went right over all stages with a multimeter. All voltages came up within a few per cent of the figures on the circuit; no future there.

Then I probed the grid of the 6AU6 with my finger via the blade of screwdriver. The speaker blurted obligingly, but I sensed that it wasn't as loud as it should have been for a pair of

pentodes. So it looked as though the trouble was in the audio section. Thus encouraged, I went over the stage again with the voltmeter. I found nothing new as far as voltages were concerned, but I did notice that the 6AU6 screen resistor looked a bit dark on it, as though it had been overloaded at some time.

This didn't seem very relevant, because the screen voltage was normal, but it did suggest that this was the area where the previous serviceman had worked. And if the screen resistor had been overloaded it almost certainly meant that the screen bypass had broken down. So, for want of a better approach at that moment, I took a closer look at the screen bypass.

And then I spotted it. The pigtail from the bypass came close to, but did not touch, the terminal on the socket. What was more, it had clearly been left this way, rather than simply come adrift. Unfortunately, the placement of it and other components was such that the break was not readily visible until I started probing. Naturally, it didn't take a Sherlock Holmes to deduce that the capacitor would turn out to be shorted. So, in fact, it proved to be.

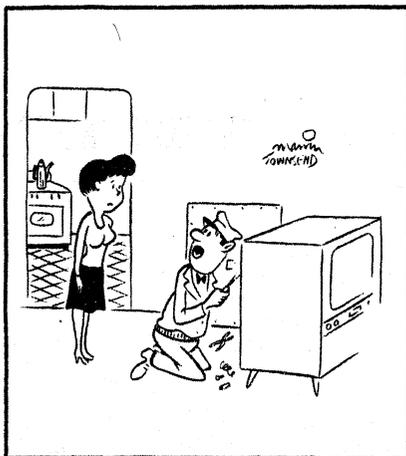
After that, it was plain sailing. It took only a few minutes to select and fit a new capacitor, whereupon the sound came through at full bore; something the owner hadn't heard for so long that he had forgotten how a proper set sounded. It wouldn't have taken much talking on my part to convince him that it was "better than ever."

But what was the story behind this story? Why had the previous serviceman acted as he did? The most generous suggestion I can put forward was that he just didn't have a suitable capacitor in his kit at that moment, and concocted the "expensive repair" story to cover up. But such a theory leaves a lot of things unexplained. For example, if the real problem was a shortage of a suitable part, he could have made almost any excuse—or even told the truth—to explain the need for delay and second trip. I doubt if the owner would have minded so long as his set was repaired at a reasonable cost.

Frankly, I just can't buy such a story. As far as I'm concerned, it was a straight out attempt to "take" the customer. The "expensive repair" was a try-on; a feeler to see how the customer reacted. Had he shrugged his shoulders and said, "Do what's necessary," the serviceman would have taken it as a go-ahead to load the job for as much as he felt it would bear. Doubtless, he would have taken the chassis away "to make it look good," and kept it for a suitable period for the same reason.

But when the owner flinched he had another trick up his sleeve. No doubt to discourage the owner from calling in another serviceman, he made a good fellow of himself with a "generous" offer to effect a temporary repair, most likely reasoning that the owner would weaken after a week or two of indifferent sound, and call him back to finish the job.

Unfortunately—for him—he overplayed his hand. So effectively did he paint the picture of an expensive repair that the owner not only waited much longer than he would have thought possible but, when he did decide to do something about it, he elected to call in someone else.



"People think us TV servicemen have it soft! Why, I've already been to two homes today where they didn't even offer me coffee or cake." ("PF Reporter").