

VINTAGE RADIO

By JOHN HILL



Obtaining the right spare parts

Collecting usable valve radio spares is an essential aspect of vintage radio restoration. For this reason, you should make every attempt to obtain old receivers in any condition.

Now I'm fairly reluctant to admit this but I have just paid \$30 for a totally derelict 54-year old console model Radiola. To make matters worse, it is a near useless battery set, thus making my purchase even less of a bargain. This wreck of a radio has been neglected for so long that its rightful place is at the rubbish tip and it is truly remarkable that it has survived for so long.

I found this treasure in an antique shop and the dealer had the gall to have a \$40 price tag on it. After a lengthy barter, the dealer simply told me that the set had cost him \$25 and that he really couldn't afford to sell it for less than \$30.

While \$30 was an outrageous price for such a pile of junk, I bought it because it contained a part for which I had been searching for nearly three years — the dial escutcheon.

Now while \$30 may seem a lot to pay for a small rectangular moulding of black Bakelite, the price is not as bad as it may appear to be. The set that required the escutcheon was purchased for only \$5 so, all things considered, I still bought a reasonably cheap console radio.

Incidentally, the above price differences are a good indication of the increasing value of old valve

radios. Even so, I am quite sure that this battery Radiola would have stayed in the corner of that antique shop for a long time if I had not bought it. It was not worth \$30.

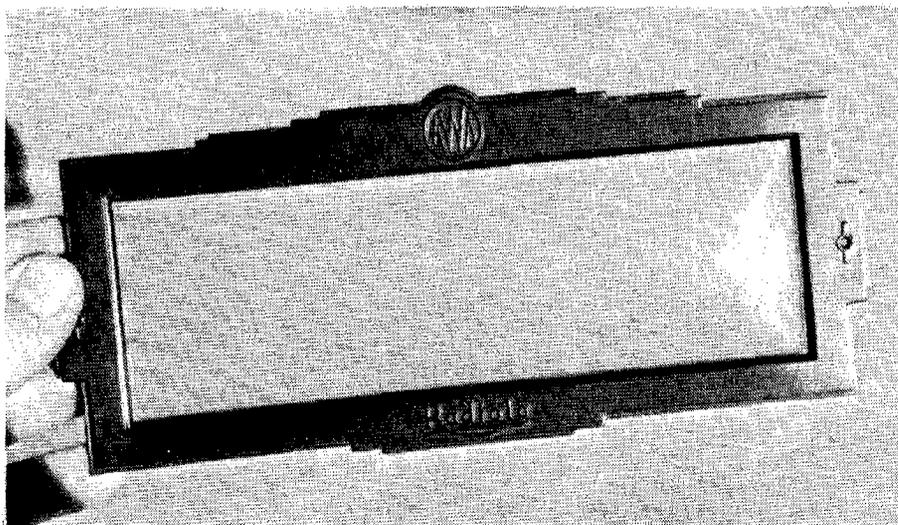
Other parts

Apart from supplying the much needed escutcheon, the old Radiola will also supply a number of other useful spare parts. Items such as the dial, dial drive mechanism, knobs, tuning capacitor, etc are all common with the mains-powered version and will be stored away for some day in the future when, once again, a mid-1930s Radiola will require some bits and pieces.

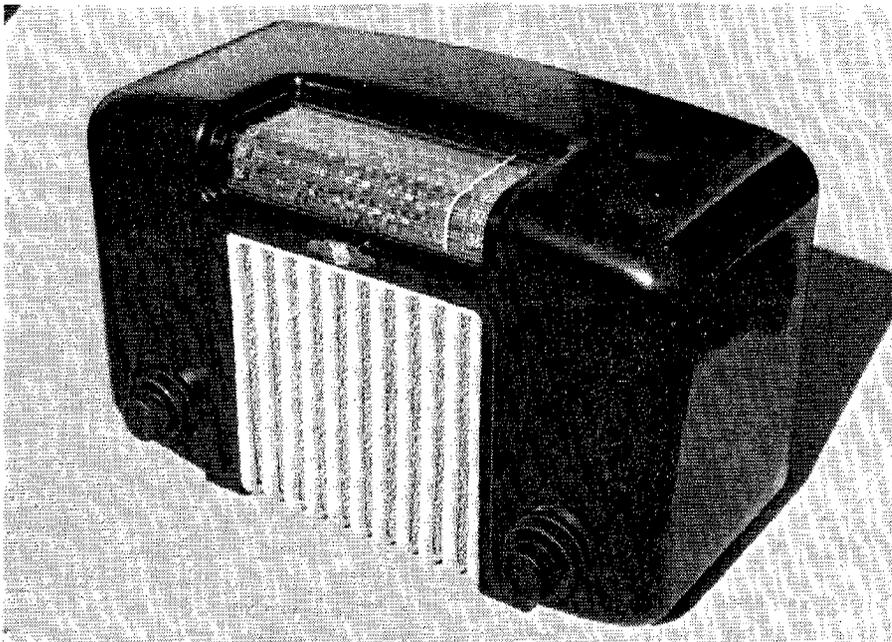
The cabinet on this old battery receiver is also worth a mention for I have never seen one in such a poor state. It had been wet for so long it was starting to rot away. Someone had even nailed a tomato stake to it to prevent the base from separating from the rest of the cabinet. It was one of those repairs that can best be described as "untidy but strong".

However, while such a cabinet may be totally unrestorable, the loose veneer was removed and put aside for cabinet repairs. Often a cabinet requires a small patch of veneer, particularly along edges where it sometimes chips away.

I especially wanted to restore one of these old Radiolas for it was this model radio that lived in our lounge room at home when I was a lad. It was on one of these stylish consoles that I listened to "Superman", so you can imagine the nostalgic feelings I would have for this particular make and model. Finding a suitable escutcheon after looking for so long was indeed



This is the \$30 escutcheon from the old Radiola mentioned in the text. The lack of this particular part delayed restoration of an old receiver for three years.



This 5-valve Healing is the product of three individual radios. Although all three were different models, the parts needed to complete the restoration (ie, the cabinet and speaker grille) were interchangeable.

pleasing for the restoration can now be completed.

Vintage radio collectors who are at all serious about restoring old radios must try to gather up as much radio "junk" as they can lay their hands on. Many a restoration is impossible without the correct replacement parts. Just one missing component (such as an escutcheon) will prevent the job from being completed.

Of course, after many years of scrounging an acute storage problem arises. But if you are going to collect old radios, then collecting

usable bits and pieces is part of the fun.

My opening story about the Radiola that waited three years for a suitable escutcheon is just one of many similar stories that can be told about some of the receivers in my collection.

This lesson was learnt early on when several incomplete radios were wrecked only to find out later that they could have been restored when another radio of the same make and model was found. After this realisation, one becomes more careful in choosing which sets are

to be wrecked and which are to be put aside for possible future restoration.

5-valve Healing

One particular example that comes to mind is a Healing mantel model that was given to me. There were two problems regarding its restoration. First, someone had drilled three holes in the front of the cabinet so that extra volume controls could be added (these controls directed the audio output to a network of extension speakers).

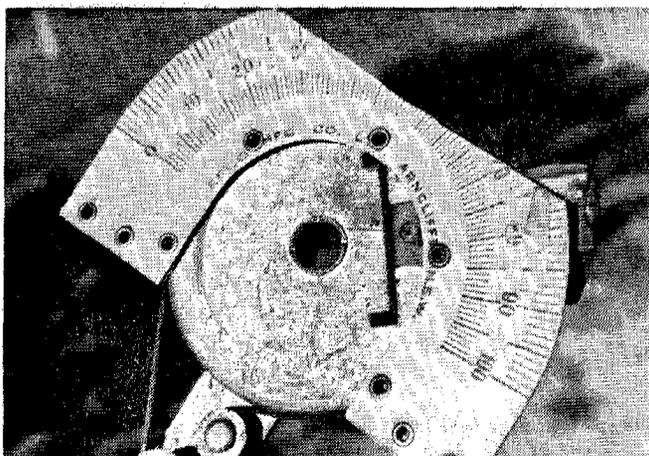
Second, the white plastic speaker grille had been badly damaged and several of the vertical bars were missing.

While such a set sounds like a logical one to wreck, I was reluctant to do so because I could see distinct possibilities in it and I thought it would be a good one to restore. My reasons for liking the old Healing were: its excellent 5-valve performance, its Bakelite cabinet, and its unusually large 8-inch loudspeaker which gave the set a remarkably good tone.

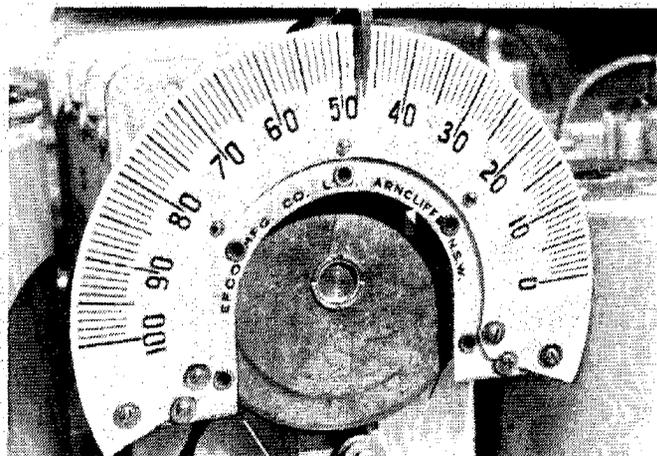
So the set was put aside in the hope that something would come along — and come along it did!

Some time later I had the opportunity of buying up a whole heap of radios and amongst them were not just one of the previously mentioned Healings, but two of them. Although one had a smashed cabinet, I felt confident that my search was over.

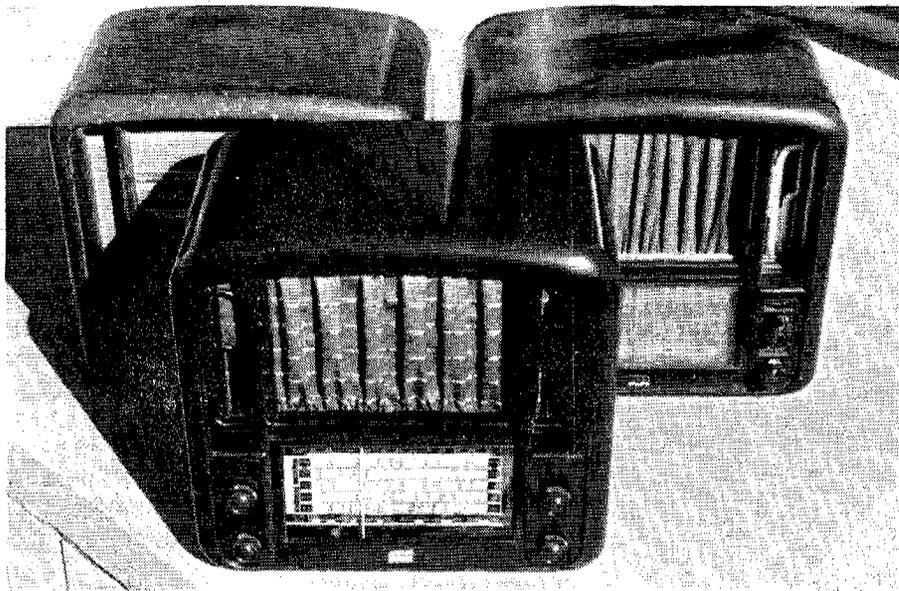
Once I got them all on the workbench, what originally ap-



A problem of this nature cannot be solved without the right spare part. The lack of such a spare can prevent the restoration of an otherwise complete and working receiver.



Although not quite the same as the original dial (left), this dial can be used as a replacement. An extensive range of radio spares is essential for the vintage radio enthusiast.



In contrast to the Healing, these three Airzones can all be restored without having to scrounge parts from other sets. The one in front has already been restored.

peared to be three identical receivers turned out to be three entirely different models. The original set was a broadcast band 240V mains operated set, while the other two sets were battery models. One was a straight battery set while the other had a vibrator unit. Both battery receivers were dual-wave types.

Fortunately, the bits required to complete the restoration (a cabinet and a speaker grille) were interchangeable on all three models and a nicely restored receiver eventual-

ly emerged from a substantial pile of unrelated bits and pieces.

A fourth set of this type came along some time later and although it was a 240V version in going order, it also had a smashed cabinet. It's strange that of four similar radios there was only one cabinet that could be used. The reason is probably purely coincidental because the cabinets were quite sturdy Bakelite types.

Also among the aforementioned "heap of radios" was a 5-valve Airzone. Unlike the Healings, the Air-

zone was complete and in restorable condition without scrounging parts from other sets. This particular receiver polished up quite well and while it took a considerable time to repair the dial mechanism, the finished result was very pleasing. It is shown in one of the accompanying photographs.

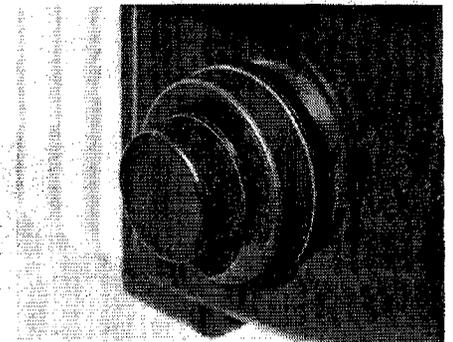
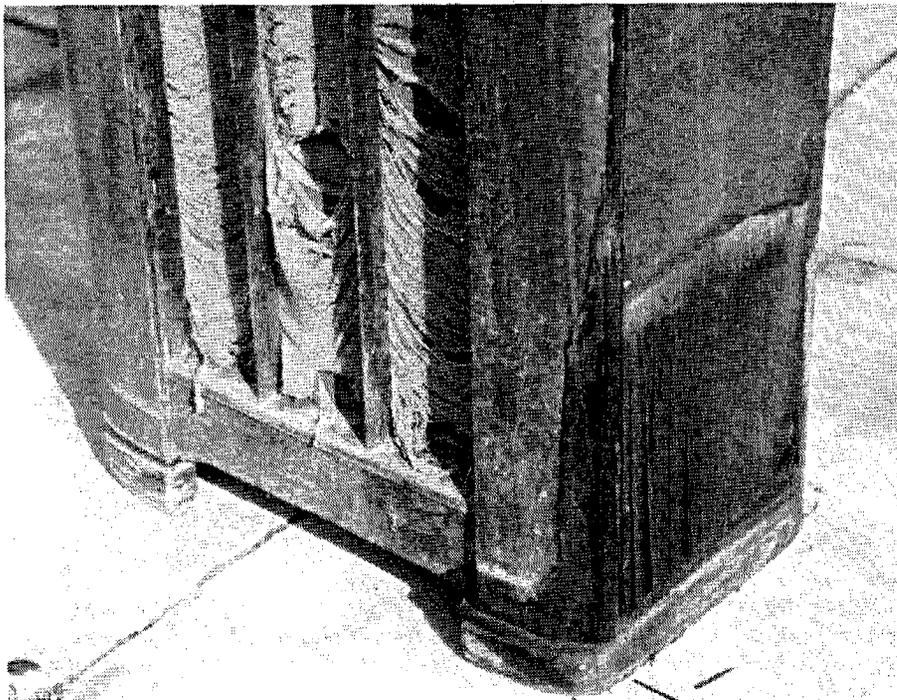
No sooner had that old Airzone been placed on the shelf when two other similar sets arrived on my doorstep. Once again, these two are also restorable and should not be a problem to repair.

The three Airzones are a complete contrast to the Healing in that the Healing was the product of three different receivers. It's feast or famine; one has either an abundance of one thing or a shortage of something else.

Missing knobs

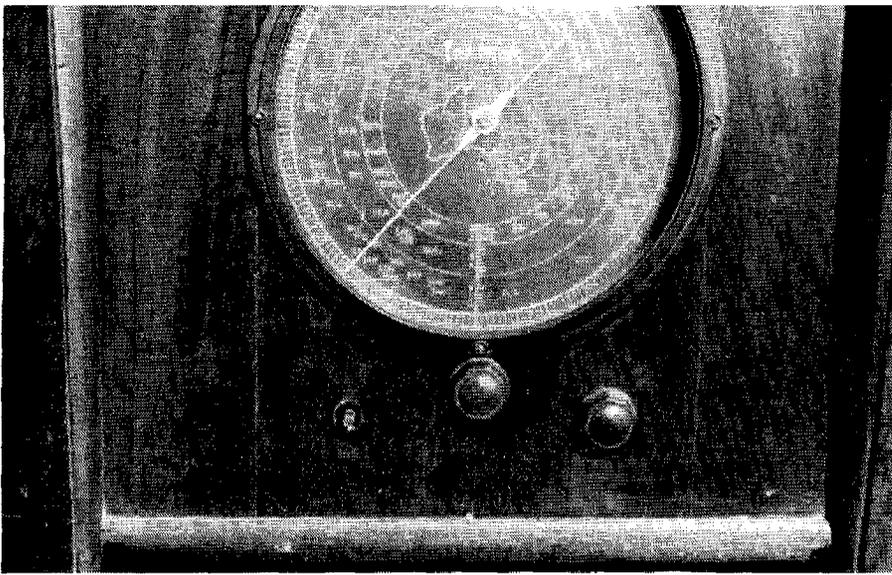
All too often a restoration cannot be completed because of a part that is either broken or missing. Perhaps the most common and the least troublesome missing component is a lost control knob. However, in some instances a missing knob is a major loss because there are odd sets that use special purpose knobs and only the correct replacement will solve the problem.

One easy way out of a missing knob problem is to fit a complete set



Special knobs, such as the dual control type shown here, can make restoration work difficult. The large knob is the on/off switch while the smaller one controls the tuning.

◀ **Left: the somewhat derelict Radiola cabinet mentioned in the story. It had been badly water damaged and some of the timber was beginning to rot. No wonder the author was reluctant to admit paying \$30 for it.**



A missing knob? If only that's all it was. The real problem with this Lekmek receiver is the cabinet. Someone has had a go at it before and has sanded through the veneer in at least half a dozen places.

of a different type. A complete set of knobs of the same style always looks better than an odd assortment. However, to do this one needs to keep a comprehensive collection of control knobs.

While there are many styles of knob that may suit a particular receiver, most collectors will immediately pick up the fact that the

receiver has the wrong knobs on it. Therefore, it is important that one has a good range of spare knobs so that the right part can be supplied to maintain the set's originality.

Many of the old sets, especially those from the 1930-40 era, had rather appealing knobs that came in many fancy shapes and designs. It would not be difficult to make an interesting display for there are many varieties and a complete collection would have many hundreds of knobs in it.

Unfortunately, when it comes to finding the right knob, Murphy's law prevails and the knob you want is always the one you haven't got — no matter how many knobs you may have.

Missing, broken or worn parts are always a problem for any vintage radio collector. Often a set can be missing quite major components such as loudspeakers, power transformers or a few hard to get valves. One of the "in waiting" sets in my garage is not really a set but an empty cabinet. Whether that cabinet ever becomes a working radio again depends on finding suitable innards.

But as this particular cabinet is one of those elegant types with turned legs and ornate fret work around the speaker opening, I am keen to see it working again — even with a non-original chassis and speaker.



Wanted: a complete set of innards for this old cabinet. It will probably end up with a non-genuine mismatched receiver and hardly anyone will ever know the difference.