

# The VIDEO Reporter

by SAMUEL KAUFMAN

SOME weeks ago, the Video Reporter ran into William Schudt, manager of Station WKRC, Cincinnati, and one-time manager of CBS's old mechanical television transmitting station in New York.

Meeting Bill again brought to mind the full realization that television studio programs have not advanced greatly since 1931 despite the huge strides made in the technical end of the video art. Bill put on the same variety of songs, novelty acts, dramatizations, character bits and even boxing bouts way back in days when television was wearing diapers. Today, television is wearing long pants but it still needs a safety pin to hold them up. The video art is dolled up but there's no getting around the fact that it's still a youngster. And we don't have to look beyond the program schedule for proof of its immaturity.

Not one word of this is intended as adverse criticism of present day video program directors. But they are prone to admit that they haven't yet discovered the best manner in which television can be put to use for entertainment purposes. They're doing a good job in experimenting—but it's still experimenting. And it's the laboratory angle of their efforts that seems to register with the public rather than the general entertainment viewpoint they'd like to see sink home.

All the pioneer programs on NBC's "regular schedule" have impressed viewers as "interesting." But the sales impetus was lacking. Few persons would care to make an investment in a receiver "to participate in an experimental stage of a new art." There's a thrill to pioneering—but it's not much fun to plunk down several hundred dollars for a skimpy television schedule.

A television set can be a beautiful piece of furniture and an ingenious instrument. But it can't yield any better entertainment than the stations put on the air. Of course, schedules will grow larger and there will be more stations on the air in various zones, thus providing a choice of programs. This will undoubtedly improve the sales prospects for receivers. But the chief objective of telecasters should be to produce a few good programs rather than a flock of bad ones.

OUTDOOR events have registered exceptionally well as video program fare. NBC did an excellent job with a long series of summer remote control jobs and most of them clicked in a big way. Sporting events, particularly, scored very well. The climax of the summer sports programs was the telecasting of a double-header baseball bill from Ebbets Field, Brooklyn. This was the first attempt to televise a big league ball game and the result was very pleasing, indeed.

There's no doubt that remote control telecasts are greatly instrumental in selling sets. But the studio presentations which get the least publicity are the things buyers must and do consider. Most outdoor programs—except where special lights are available—must occur in the daytime. And that, of course, is the poorest look-and-listening time. The double-header ball program happened to take place on a Saturday afternoon and was available to a larger audience than a weekday bill. But the big potential nighttime audience can't be ignored and it seems that studio presentations are the only way to attract real masses to the new art.

TELEVISION'S first summer season revealed that there was a staff replacement shortage on both the technical and program

sides of telecasting. An NBC spokesman explained that due to the unavailability of substitutes for various studio and transmitter jobs it was necessary to eliminate studio transmissions for several weeks while the staff "regulars" went on vacation. The schedule was filled by special event and motion picture productions.

The special event programs went off quite smoothly, as we said before. But the choice—or rather the lack of choice—of film material was sad, indeed. Foreign-made films and antique American celluloid offerings came into use. It's always been said that movies will play an important part in television. Technically, they can. Practically, they cannot. The good new films just are not available. Television stations can't afford to pay big prices for them and theatre exhibitors would object to their video use under any conditions. This is one of the big problems telecasters are facing and it is the guess of many that, unless some outlet for television is made by the big movie companies, telecasters will launch their own film production units. If this occurs, the movie companies will face a double loss. They'd pass up the chance of collecting sizable rental fees from telecasters and they'd face the possibility of a new competition arising from the placing of television-produced reels in theatres.

TWO applications have been made for television licenses for New York and Newark department stores. It is interesting to note that retail establishments are on the alert in recognizing the commercial possibilities of telecasting. All indications point towards the sale of time being a strictly local proposition with dealers rather than manufacturers paying the video program bill. This condition is brought about by the technical limitations of signals, restricting reception to little more than the metropolitan zone in which the transmitter is located. Hence, only those dealers in the strong reception areas will benefit by the sale of television-ballyhooed wares. There's little justice in making the rural and small town dealer—and, in turn, the rural and small town consumer—pay for entertainment he doesn't receive. And there are no bones about the fact that the advertising cost of nationally-advertised products is contained in the list price of the wares themselves. It's the local dealer in the television area who stands to make the greatest profit out of a commercial telecast and the Eastern department store television transmitter applications suggest the likelihood that the bulk of commercial video shows will be dealer-sponsored.

MOST department store executives the Video Reporter met are clever fellows indeed. And when television popped up on regular schedule in the New York area they weren't caught napping. They were quick to recognize its promotional value as well as its merchandising importance. The American Television Corporation is one of the firms that pioneered in the use of wired television for large stores and the RCA "Jeep" can fill the bill for the same purpose.

Undoubtedly, the thought of demonstrating and displaying general merchandise over such self-contained video systems in large retail establishments is excellent promotion. But we wonder whether the store executives are giving thought to the harm they can do to television receiver sales through the use of the method. Of course, it all depends on

the way the demonstration apparatus is used.

Confining the demonstration to displays of merchandise and sales spiels will give many store visitors the idea that that's the kind of home entertainment they can expect if they buy a receiver. Many shoppers won't grasp the fact that the images are confined to the store proper and that the 100 per cent commercial programs they witness are different than the kind of sight-and-sound entertainment available for the home.

THERE are indications that television program listings in newspapers may come under the heading of paid advertisements. Some papers are listing the video schedules in editorial columns, but it is anticipated that as the schedules grow larger, newspapers will be reluctant to contribute added space. A sizable amount of television receiver advertising, though, may strengthen the hold on free program listings.

RCA Victor has already bought good-sized newspaper space to ballyhoo such outstanding telecasts as the British royal couple's American visit, the Cincinnati Reds-Brooklyn Dodgers double-header ball game and the Max Baer-Lou Nova fight. RCA's angle was to attract prospect to dealer's stores. It is likely that other manufacturers, too, will follow this technique for a while. The big potential advertisers are the firms that will sponsor the hit television shows.

NBC's long head start in television means that CBS will have considerable catching-up to do. The Radio City video lads have registered a great many "firsts". And still they spring added surprises from week to week.

Football seems quite definitely "in the picture" this season but it is believed that rights to the real big games will be difficult to obtain inasmuch as granting permission to televise a gridiron clash might conflict with broadcasting contracts let to radio stations or networks.

Sports played an important part in the summer video schedule and this heading will necessarily be curtailed during the fall and winter. There just aren't enough outdoor events to draw from. There's a possibility that W2XBS may televise such winter sports as skiing, ice-skating and tobogganing. Even though the scenes of such activities are a considerable distance from New York, NBC has great faith in its mobile television transmitter's ability to span long distances. Last summer, the distance record of twenty-four miles was set for the video relay station when it covered the Eastern Grass Court Tennis Championships at the Westchester Country Club. Still greater distances were effectively spanned in experiments that were not rebroadcast to home audiences. One NBC spokesman claims the unit can cover a fifty-mile radius. Hence, for winter sports, such a snow resort as Bear Mountain may be the scene of television pickups.

ONE of the biggest drawbacks to television receiver sales is the cost of the cathode-ray tube. Dealers, manufacturers and all persons concerned in the new industry must agree on this point.

The replacement cost, even on the very smallest types, is pretty stiff. And this is especially true when there is no guaranty covering a specified term. In England, where television has been public-participating for a considerable time, the industry not only recognized this detriment to sales but decided to do something about it.

And, as we write these lines, we hear that the British television tube makers will place a one-year guaranty on their cathode-ray units. If a picture tube fails in less than that period a free replacement will be made. But the replacement will be insured only for the remainder of the original guaranty period. In other words, if a tube fails after nine months of use, the replacement will be guaranteed for only three months.

Just how practical the plan will be remains to be seen. Anyway it should boost television receiver sales.

SPEAKING of British television brings to mind the imposing array of receivers (*Televise further on page 62*)



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### Video Reporter (Continued from page 33)

introduced for the new season at the Radiolympia show in London. The video sets are much cheaper than comparative American models and the lines are backed by intelligent merchandising campaigns. There's no use kidding ourselves about the fact that England is showing more trade initiative than America on video matters.

British prices are lower, merchandising plans are more consistent and programs are kept on a high plane. There's no disputing the equality in efficiency of American television products. As a matter of fact, some trade observers claim the American television models are much better. But American prices must come down. Set sales would be multiplied considerably if receivers were offered in the U. S. A. at price marks established in London.

It's hard for many to understand why England can undersell the U. S. A. in television after this country was able to undersell British manufacturers in radio for more than a decade.

### Bench Notes (Continued from page 25)

there's something!

In the old days, a set was designed around a few of the dozen or so tube types on the market. But today, when a quickie manufacturer feels set production coming on, he assembles the hired help and says: "Boys, check over our parts inventory and design our next model to use it up." During production tube engineers develop new types to fit in with the warmed-over components, and a clip of new tubes hit the retailer's inventory.

Last month, when Mars brushed so

closely to the south of us, I moved my tube stock to the north end of the bin as a precautionary measure, and counted exactly 219 types.

### Portable Cathode Ray (Continued from page 32)

in a rubber bushing where it projects into the front panel to avoid shocks to the glass. The number and arrangement of control knobs on the front panel, will, of course, depend upon the circuit employed for the amplifier.

### Electioneering a la Mode (Continued from page 39)

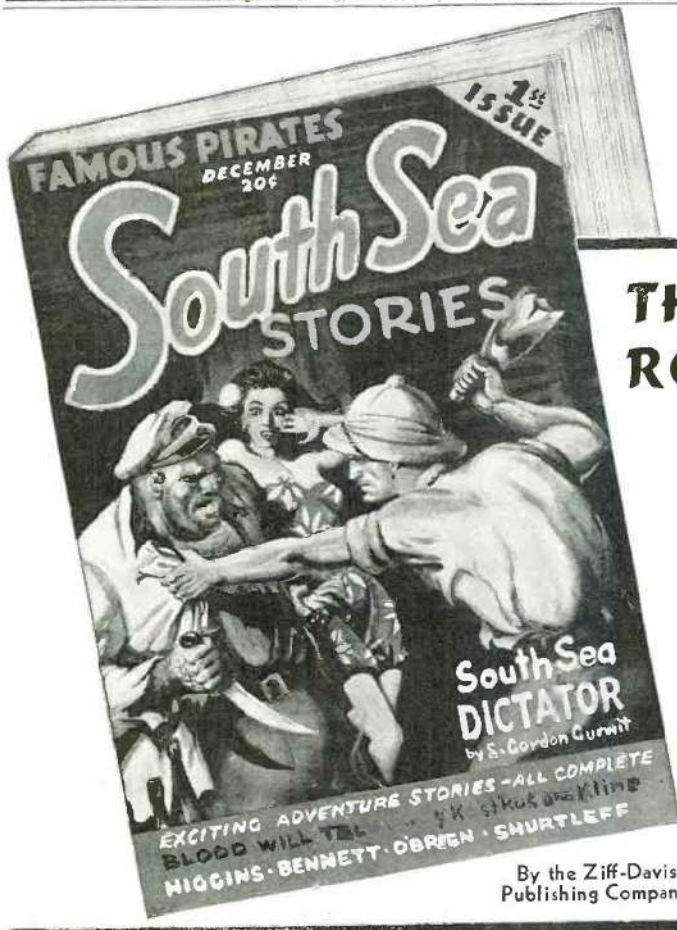
another section, the phonograph playing en route, and holds another short meeting. And so on until shortly before the hour of the big meeting, when he heads for the meeting place, the phonograph still going so as not to miss a single prospect.

When he arrives at the hall the P. A. System is removed from the car, carried into the hall and there almost in less time than it takes to tell, is set up for operation, with output ample to cover even a large audience.

### As I See It! (Continued from page 8)

Correction

SO THAT some of the members of the R.T.A. in Canada will not form the wrong impression concerning Machim Bros., whose price list was published in a recent issue of RADIO NEWS,



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