

What's My Old Radio Worth?

The actual value of any 'vintage' or 'antique' radio (usually thought of as being pre-1950, but could be stretched a bit, say through to the late-1950's for very early-transistor sets which are now becoming collectible) is difficult to assess with any precision. There are several guides on the market, eg. '*Collector's Guide to Antique Radios*' by John Slusler that can be consulted, however, the cited prices are only a guide and seem to rarely reflect reality. If you do not have such a guide or your model is not listed in the one you have, consider these factors:



- is it a desirable model? (does it appear to be a 'high-end' or 'rare' model) - do a search on Ebay and do a Google search for the make and model
- is there a demand? There is indeed a general demand for vintage radios - however, this varies across the vast range of makes, models and formats. For example, there is not a huge demand for large (console) radios as they take up lots of space, so folks cannot have too many in a collection unless you live in mansion. Table top styles (eg. 'cathedral' and 'tombstone') therefore tend to fetch higher prices unless the larger radio is rare or high-end. Some types of plastic-cased sets (eg. 'Catalin') are extremely collectible and can fetch many thousands of dollars for ones in first class condition or that are in rare colours (though defects in the plastic can detract considerably from the price)
- are there many of that make/model for sale? - again, check on Ebay and 'Google it' to get an idea - but see comments below regarding Ebay
- does it work? - sets are usually worth more if they do, but surprisingly it is not that critical, especially to a collector or restorer (almost anything can be made to work again in the right hands and most common tubes and electronic parts can be sourced at reasonable cost). For tube or early discrete semiconductor sets, cosmetics, completeness and originality (no modifications or bodged repairs) are the biggest price-determining factors related to the condition of the set itself:

- completeness: are there parts missing? - particularly major uniquely manufactured parts, eg. knobs, scale, dial mechanism, tuning dial, gears, transformers and tuning capacitor. The more complete the set is, the better of course; and
- physical condition: eg. is there severe rust on the chassis/cabinet, dented panels, rot, scratches/scuffs, broken dial/escutcheon, signs of internal modifications, damage, burning or melted tar, components or wires?, holes drilled in the chassis/fingerplate/cabinet, etc. The more original the better.
- market forces: if you have someone locally interested in the set, that persons 'best offer' will usually determine price unless you are willing to sell the set on the internet (eg. Ebay), where prices realized tend to be significantly higher than for sets sold locally (eg. on garage sale, Craigslist or newspaper advert, or even a local collector). However, there is a 'luck of the draw' element present in such auctions - some sets that look fine and even with a reasonable starting price do not sell for some unexplainable reason. One thing that puts potential buyers off Ebay sales, especially if an item is located outside of your home country, or for a large, bulky item such as a console radio, is the cost of packing and shipping such a heavy/bulky item and the perceived (and often very real) risks involved with shipping the radio long distance (they are often poorly-packed by the seller). This can be a big factor as it can limit the potential market for the seller.
- timing of a sale and even geographical location (seller relative to the buyer) are also random factors affecting sale price (...'buyer must collect' caveats in the sale conditions, etc), as is good old-fashioned luck that a potential buyer actually comes across your advert or auction in the narrow window of time when you decide to place the set on the market. Then again, there is the Ebay 'adrenalin rush' last-minute bidding factor.....
good news for the seller.

Of course, as noted above, you can monitor Ebay to see what similar sets to yours are fetching (can be very time-consuming waiting for a particular model though).



Gerry O'Hara, Vancouver, February, 2010