

Tech Talk

Navigating the world of technology one gadget at a time
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Used Stereo Bargains

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Why would I buy used stereo equipment?

There are two basic reasons to buy used equipment: low prices and high quality. The fact that you can save a truckload of money by buying gadgets used is probably not news, but you may be surprised to learn that vintage electronic equipment may perform significantly better than items on the shelf at retail chains.

Isn't it risky to buy used?

This is the biggest caveat in buying through the used market. It's difficult to predict when something will develop a problem, and an item you buy new may be less likely to break down in the near term than a used one. That said, equipment produced before the advent of integrated circuits and computer chips may be easier and less expensive to repair than electronic equipment that recently went out-of-warranty. For example, you may find that it's cheaper to replace a fifteen-month old receiver than to have it repaired.



Vintage Pioneer receivers from the late 1970s still produce great sound, especially the 81 pound SX-1980 at the bottom. Photo credit: www.stereomanuals.com.

What equipment is a good bet on the used market?

You can find some fantastic deals on vintage audio equipment. In particular, Japanese stereo gear built in the mid-to-late 1970s is often of high quality. Within a manufacturer's product line, the best used values can typically be found one or two steps below the top (e.g., instead of the Pioneer SX-1980 receiver, try an SX-1280 or SX-1080), as a brand's top-of-the-line receiver or amplifier may still fetch several hundred dollars. Some of the specific stereo items you might consider are:

Stereo Receivers

A vintage receiver consists of a two-channel power amplifier (to power your right and left speakers), a tuner (to play radio stations) and various knobs and switches to control stereo settings (called the preamplifier section, or "preamp"). Today's receivers follow the same basic mold but add extra channels of sound to accommodate surround sound setups. If you want a second system for your den or have no need for surround sound in your main listening room, a receiver from the mid to late 1970s may provide your path to audio bliss.



Marantz receivers from the 1970s, like this model 2265B, are praised for their cosmetics and sound quality.

- **Consider brands like:**

Pioneer, Technics, Marantz, Yamaha or Sansui from the mid-to-late 70s.

Separate components

You can find most of the parts of a receiver available individually as "components," like amplifiers, preamplifiers and tuners. As a general rule, within a given manufacturer's product line, separate components will provide better sound quality than receivers. This is due to a combination of improved signal isolation, independent power supplies and higher-quality parts.

In addition to stereo gear from major manufacturers, open up your search to include medium to high-end equipment makers.

Consider the following brands:

- **Amplifiers, Preamplifiers and Integrated Amplifiers (a combination of the two):** Harmon Kardon, Naim Audio, NAD, Proton, SAE, Classe Audio, Bryston, Threshold, Adcom, MacIntosh, Athena and Krell
- **Tuners:** Sansui, Kenwood and Magnum Dynalab
- **Cassette Tape Decks:** Nakamichi, Luxman, Akai and Tandberg
- **Turntables:** Acoustic Research (AR), Dual, Technics, Denon, Sony, Pioneer and Marantz



The mid-1970s vintage Sansui TU-9900 is regarded by some audiophiles as one of the top tuners ever made.

Loudspeakers

Speakers can serve for decades without problems, and some vintage models are in high demand on the used market.

- **Bookshelf speakers** (sometimes called mini monitors) refer to short speakers which need to be placed on a shelf, table or stand to be at the correct height. These can work well in a surround sound system, in a small room, or in conjunction with a subwoofer to provide more bass.
- **Floor Standing speakers** (sometimes called "tower" speakers) provide the full spectrum of sound including bass.
- **Consider brands like:** Acoustic Research (AR), Advent, B&W, KLH, Polk, Klipsch and Allison Acoustics. If you're looking for something unique with detailed sound, try a panel speaker from a company like Martin Logan, Acoustat or Magnepan.



Martin Logan's SL3 electrostatic hybrid speakers from the early 1990s stand about five feet tall and provide great sound quality for between \$1,000 and \$2,000 used.

Where to Buy Used Audiovisual Gear

- **Online classifieds:** *Audiogon.com* is a popular classifieds service for new and used audio gear. You'll find mostly mid-to-high level gear on Audiogon, but good mass-market vintage equipment shows up here too. Also consider using Craigslist (*Chicago.craigslist.com*), which lets you find local products for sale by individuals. This Website is ideal for stereo buyers because you can request a demonstration of the product by the seller before you commit to buying it.
- **Online auctions:** *eBay.com* is a good source for used AV equipment. You'll get the full spectrum of used audio equipment on eBay; be selective in your choices.
- **Independent Stereo Stores:** Some independent and boutique stereo shops have vintage equipment for sale. Buying from a reputable dealer usually provides you with some degree of protection against getting a lemon.
- **Pawn shops:** Some good equipment ends up in pawn shops as owners are forced by circumstance to unload their beloved stereo systems. You're unlikely to find an incredible deal, as pawn shops usually refer to some sort of a price guide for used AV equipment in making lending and sales decisions.
- **Estate and garage sales:** If you have patience and don't mind waking up early on Saturday morning, you can find audio bargains locally at estate and garage sales. The potential for an amazing bargain is high here, especially for a mid-high level receiver from the late 1970s. Happy hunting!

If you have questions, comments or suggestions, you can visit me at the Reference Desk, contact me via email (moetting@hinsdalelibrary.info), or call me at 630-986-1976x225.

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