

PRESS INFORMATION

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THE ROYAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR THE BLIND

224, GREAT PORTLAND STREET, LONDON, W.1.

:: Telephone: EUSton 5251

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NEW TAPE RECORDING AND PLAY-BACK TECHNIQUES TO BENEFIT THE BLIND OF BRITAIN

Britain's blind will have the world's most
advanced talking book machine

A British development in tape recording and play-back techniques will give the blind of this country the most advanced talking book machines in the world.

Talking books - books read aloud by specially selected readers recorded on long-playing gramophone records - have for many years played an important role in the lives of the blind, especially the elderly and the bed-ridden. The current membership of the library is in excess of 6,500 and the circulation figure for the last financial year was well over two million individual discs.

Now the service is to be radically improved by the introduction of tape recording and a revolutionary type of play-back machine which possesses a number of basic advantages over the present disc reproducer.

The result of almost twenty-five years' research and development by the R.N.I.B. and St. Dunstan's, this machine has been designed to be, in operation, the very essence of simplicity. Amplifier, loudspeaker and drive mechanism are housed in one compact case, controls have been reduced to one ON/OFF - VOLUME switch and one START/STOP lever and facilities have been incorporated for headphone listening when required.

Further details and photographs may be obtained from the PRESS OFFICER, who may also be reached outside normal office hours by Telephone—BRENTWOOD 1619.

The truly unique feature of the machine, however, is the tape cassette. Little larger in size than an average letterpress novel, this can contain up to twenty hours recorded speech. This has been achieved by the use of half-inch tape and recording on it not two tracks, as on domestic machines, but no fewer than eighteen tracks.

The play-back head is housed within the cassette and the whole assembly, tape, tape guide and replay head, is thus completely enclosed, so reducing to a minimum the possibility of damage due to mishandling or incorrect loading.

Track change is extremely simple. At the end of each track an appropriate announcement is recorded, whereupon the listener has only to turn over the cassette and press a button. The next track then automatically begins to play.

Two safety devices guard against accidental damage to the tape, should the listener's attention be distracted when the end of a track is reached. Firstly, a high-pitched note recorded after the announcement brings into operation a circuit which automatically switches off the drive. Secondly, in the unlikely event of this circuit failing, a "slipping clutch" comes into play at the end of the spool, so preventing the tape from being pulled off.

High speed copying machines, also designed in the research workshops of the Talking Book Department will provide the many thousands of 'books' required. Thus the entire system, from original recording to final copies on the library shelves, will be under our own control. Thus copies can be made as and when required, so slashing time lag in providing 'readers' with their choice.

Naturally, the two systems, disc and tape, must for some time be run in parallel, but gradually the new will replace the old. It is anticipated that the change-over will be completed in approximately five years. However, we do earnestly implore those who, understandably, are directly interested in Talking Book development not to make unnecessary enquiries about the new tape library during what will undoubtedly be for the library and Sound Recording Studios a very busy time, but to accept the assurance that present members will be offered the new machines as soon as their turn comes (in order of seniority of membership) and that those on the waiting list will, similarly, be offered machines as soon as possible.

In the past, invaluable help has been given by members of the Radio Society of Great Britain, and the British Sound Recording Association, who have voluntarily given their assistance in the installation of new machines and in helping blind readers in the use of these machines. It is hoped that this generous help will continue and indeed grow in the future as the new scheme develops and expands.

We are also indebted to the Publishers' Association for the generous concession they have granted us for the recording of copyright material, and it should be clearly understood that these concessions have been granted solely on the understanding that, to protect copyright, our talking book tapes cannot be played on any commercially available reproducer.

TECHNICAL INFORMATION

PLAY-BACK MACHINE

Dimensions: 15" x 13" x 10"

CASSETTE

Dimensions: $8\frac{3}{4}$ " x $10\frac{1}{4}$ " x 2"
Weight loaded: $6\frac{3}{4}$ lb.
(Weight of equivalent
book on disc): $9\frac{1}{2}$ lb.

TAPE

Width: $\frac{1}{2}$ "
No. of tracks: 18
Width of track: .015"
Width between tracks: .012"

SPEED OF TAPE

Varies. A non-linear system is used; the bottom spool is always the take-up spool, the drive mechanism causing it to revolve, so pulling tape off top spool past play-back head. Speed of take-off therefore varies according to amount of tape on bottom spool in relation to that on top.

ADVANTAGES OF SYSTEM

Quality of recording maintained indefinitely.
Extreme simplicity of operation.
Damage to recording almost entirely eliminated.
Much lighter than equivalent disc recording.
More robust.
Recording can be erased when no longer required and tape re-used.
Reduction of delay in getting 'books' into the library.