

# A Consumer's Guide To Video Recorders

As the holiday season approaches, many Stark Countians will be looking into the new home video tape systems as a possible Christmas gift for the whole family. The video cassette recorder (VCR), despite its cost, has been well received. In 1977, Americans purchased more than 250,000 home video units, and projected estimates for 1978 run as high as 750,000 sales.

If you've decided to invest in one of these tele-procrastination aids, here's a crash course on VCR's that should help make you a wiser shopper and ultimately a happier owner.

**Lesson 1 — Indecision:** Will prices on VCR's come down in a couple years like the pocket calculators? Probably not. Most of the cost-reducing electronic innovations have already been instituted. If new machines start cropping up with lower prices, count on them being of lower quality and offering fewer features.

**Lesson 2 — The Gamut:** Below is a chart of the 15 VCR models on the home video market.

**Lesson 3 — Formats:** All but one of these 15 VCR's accept either the Beta or else the Video Home System (VHS) format tapes. The two formats are not interchangeable. They both utilize 1/2 inch tape, but the Beta cassette is smaller than the VHS cassette, and feeds through the tape heads differently.

The VHS 2/4 hour units manufactured by Matsushita feature two tape speeds. At normal speed (1 5/16 i.p.s.) they will produce tapes compatible with the JVC and Hitachi VHS models. However, tapes can be recorded at a special slow speed (5/8 i.p.s.). These slower recordings cannot be played back on non-Matsushita VHS units, and the quality of the picture produced will be a bit less distinct, but the recording time of a tape will be more than doubled.

A regular one-hour tape will run two hours, four minutes on slow, and a two hour tape will yield four hours, twelve minutes. This has been Matsushita's main selling feature over the Beta format which offers only one- or two-hour tapes, though with the Beta format, you can get a tape changer which will allow you to stack two tapes, and a three-hour Beta tape should be released soon.

The only recorder using neither the VHS nor Beta formats is the Quasar VR1000 which operates with a bulky one- or two-hour cartridge Quasar calls the VX2000. It is not compatible with anything else on the

market. I feel sorry for people who invest in this recorder, as its inconvenient odd-ball format can't compete with the versatile and established VHS and Beta opposition. The machine will probably be obsolete before its warranty expires.

**Lesson 4 — Comparison:** The VCR chart shows who actually manufactures each company's machine. Recorders inside a certain format, made by the same manufacturer will be identical down to the diode, differing only slightly in exterior design. This should make comparison shopping easier.

All of the models shown have list prices of between \$985 and \$1,100, but expect to find them retailing anywhere down to \$750. Retailers are competitive, and we are currently at the end of the 1978 model year. The '79s are making their debuts, some with modified features, and a '78 close-out could be a good deal.

Be sure to compare gadgetry carefully. The Sony-made units are reputed to be the best-engineered, but many buyers are bothered by the external timer. Too, Sony still utilizes mechanical timers, whereas most other brands have gone with the more precise and trouble-free electronic types.

Also look for pause controls. Most machines have a pause button on the deck, but an additional remote pause switch with a long cord will allow you to edit commercials from your easy chair. A few machines (Magnavox, GTE Sylvania, Sanyo Beta cord and Quasar VH5000) come equipped with remote pause; with other units, it is an additional expense.

Dealers may offer free tapes with your VCR purchase, usually \$100 worth. One-hour tapes cost about \$17, and the two-hour variety go for around \$25. You're going to need tapes eventually, so be sure to consider these bonuses while comparing prices of machines.

**Lesson 5 — Functions:** Once you get it home, what will your VCR do?

First of all, you can connect it up to any TV set and any existing antenna or TV cable—no special attachments or modifications needed.

You are now ready to tape shows directly off the air and start a library of movies and programs you want to keep. There are tape clubs which offer pre-recorded feature films for both Beta and VHS. These movies sell for between \$24 and \$65.

With a black and white TV camera selling for around \$300, or a color camera for about \$1,700, you can make your own sound home movies. Pick up a Telecine Converter for \$100, and you can transfer your 8mm films to video tape.

Best of all, the VCR actually contains a TV receiver of its own, so you can record one show while watching another on your TV set, or, utilizing the timer, set the VCR to automatically record programming while you are away.

This affords you the luxury of putting off till tomorrow what you could have viewed today. Procrastination with style — technology marches on . . . ■

## VHS 2/4 HOUR FORMAT

UNIT	MANUFACTURER
Curtis Mathes	Matsushita
GTE Sylvania	Matsushita
Magnavox	Matsushita
Panasonic Omnivision	Matsushita
RCA Selecta Vision	Matsushita
Quasar VH5000	Matsushita

## VHS 2 HOUR FORMAT

UNIT	MANUFACTURER
Hitachi	Hitachi
JVC Vidstar	JVC
Mitsubishi (MGA)	JVC

## BETA FORMAT

UNIT	MANUFACTURER
Sanyo Betacord	Sanyo
Sears 5303 Betavision	Sanyo
Sony Betamax	Sony
Zenith JR9000W Betatape	Sony
Toshiba Betaformat V-5310	Toshiba

## VX2000 FORMAT

UNIT	MANUFACTURER
Quasar VR1000	Matsushita