

The Beatles Lost Formats

POCKET DISCS - Lost Format #1

The **Pocket Discs** (called by Philco-Ford "hip pocket discs") were flexi discs, intended to be carried around in your pocket (!) and played when you got to a record player (at your friend's house, or wherever). There were certain players that were designed to be used with both Pocket Discs and standard 45's. (shown at right: an article from the May 25, 1968, issue of *Billboard*)

The Pocket Disc was manufactured by Americom, Inc. from 1966 to 1969. A former president of RCA, Lawrence Kanaga, came up with the idea for the Pocket Disc. Americom, which had previously pressed records for use in communications, pioneered the format, marketing it to the record companies as an alternative single. Since some record companies were testing the waters to see if they could stop pressing singles, the Pocket Disc offered them an opportunity, also allowing singles to be offered cheaply to folks who did not wish to purchase the more expensive LP. Americom giant Fred Hyman reports having explained to record company bigwigs the usefulness of a format that could be played "on the go."

After approximately two years piloting the format and arranging for record company partners, Americom formally began test marketing the discs in the Seattle area in Fall, 1968. Capitol/Apple was among several record companies which made an arrangement with Americom to release certain of its latest hit singles in the Pocket Disc format. These carry crude Capitol and Apple labels, with some of the Apple discs having the Capitol logo (just as the singles did). In the listings, the Americom catalog number is listed, along with the Capitol/Apple number. Americom's discs ran 33 1/3 RPM and were 3.75" in diameter. If a song ran over three and one half minutes, it was edited in order for the format to accommodate it. Apparently the editing was done at the record company level, and not by Americom. The discs were available via Americom vending machines -- with the idea being that the instance of theft would be reduced. Each came in a generic (red or blue) Pocket Disc sleeve.



Pocket Disc to Debut Sept. 15 —Simulrelease Pacts Set Up

By PAUL ACKERMAN

NEW YORK—The Pocket Disc, a 3 1/8-inch diameter flexible vinyl record with current pop hit material provided by key labels, will be introduced by the Americom Corp. on Sept. 15.

The company, on that date, will also introduce a two-speed player, a transistor radio-phonograph combination which will be manufactured by Toshiba of Japan. One month after its introduction in the United States, the Pocket Disc system will be unveiled in France, with the promotion and planning spearheaded by Eddy Barclay, French record executive. In the Far East, Toshiba is aiming for a starting date of spring, 1969. Meanwhile, plans are being set to introduce the system. (Continued on page 74)

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In all key music markets of the world, including Great Britain, Germany, Spain and Australia. The disk spins at 33 1/3 r.p.m. and will be priced at 49 cents. While all details have not yet been revealed, it is known that Americom executives have already secured agreements with several leading American manufacturers providing for simultaneous release of pop material—that is, release of both 45 r.p.m. singles of the various labels and on the Pocket Disc. The Disc, a scratch-resistant product, meets RIAA specifications and is compatible with an estimated 5 million players already on the market under such brand names as General Electric, Philco, Singer, Zenith, Motorola and a player to be introduced by RCA.

Execs Responsible

The Americom executives responsible for the introduction of the Pocket Disc System on a world level are Fred Hyman, president, and Larry Kanaga, member of the board of directors. Their planning extends back over a period of six years, when they concluded that the music use habit was changing, and that the pop music industry was plagued with high returns, high shipping costs, pilferage, display and other problems.

Hyman and Kanaga said: "We felt a mass merchandising concept entailing savings in costs of manufacturing, shipping, etc., built around a product of a size and type which could be introduced in many new outlets, would be welcomed by the industry. Our idea was not to replace the 45, but to broaden the base of sales by providing an alternative configuration which could be displayed on racks taking up very little space. This thinking is part of the basic sales theory which holds that the more forms in which you can deliver a product, the greater will be the total sales. Therefore, this system would benefit record manufacturers, distributors, rack jobbers, artists, publishers, writers and every segment of the industry."

Special Drive

The planning for the debut of the system in the United States calls for a special drive in the Pacific Northwest market, where Americom has arranged for the Pocket Disc to be distributed by

Consolidated Record Distributors, headed by Lou Lavittthal. The initial release is likely to comprise 50 disks, picked from the Hot 100 chart. Distribution is being arranged for other areas, too, but Americom and Consolidated are giving extra initial emphasis to one market in order to scientifically glean basic information on sales patterns. In the initial stages, rack jobbers are expected to be responsible for most sales. A special small rack has been designed, 1 1/2 square feet, capable of displaying \$300 worth of Pocket Disc merchandise. Even smaller racks are on the drawing boards, with the idea of introducing the Disc into thousands of outlets which currently cannot devote shelf space to records of conventional size.

Distribution of the player will be handled by Symphonic Electronics. The player will also get a big promotional drive during the Pacific Northwest campaign starting Sept. 15.

Americom also is exploring the potential of selling the Pocket Disc via vending machines. Contacts have been made with manufacturers for the production of prototypes.

9,000 Per Hour

Hyman, who recently returned from a trip to Japan where he secured complete co-operation of the record companies on the principal of simultaneous release, said that the Pocket Disc can be produced at the rate of 9,000 records per hour per press. He added, "A hit can sometimes be lost because of time problems—but not with us." His company has 12 licenses around the world and is the oldest and leading producer of flexible vinyl records. In 1961, Americom became associated with Librairie Hachette of Paris, Europe's largest publisher and distributor. One of Americom's products is Ameridisc, a "vinyl page" for printing sound just as a press prints the silent word—on which sound can be printed in magazines, brochures, mailing pieces, etc.

Kanaga is well known in the record business. He joined the Radio Corporation of America in 1947 after 10 years with Montgomery Ward. He became vice-president of the distributing operation, general manager of the Detroit branch and ultimately vice-president and general manager of the record division. He left RCA Victor to become president of GAC.

Yellow Submarine/Eleanor Rigby	The Beatles	A-1603 5715
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The vinyl is either light blue or red on this early issue, which was made for testing purposes only.

Value: \$2000 to \$3000



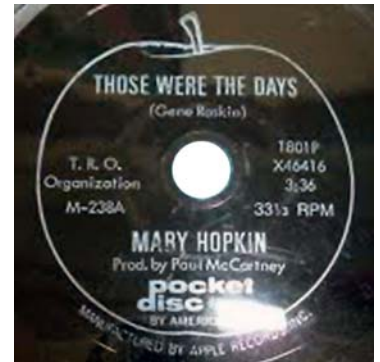
Hey Jude/Revolution	The Beatles	M-221 2276P
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The a-side is edited to 3:25, instead of the usual 7:11.

Value: \$200

Those Were the Days/Turn Turn Turn	Mary Hopkin	M-238 1801P
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Value: \$250



Maybe Tomorrow/Daddy's a Millionaire	The Iveys	M-301 1803P
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Value: \$300

Goodbye/Sparrow	Mary Hopkin	M-315 1198P
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Value: \$500



Get Back/Don't Let Me Down	The Beatles	M-335 2490P
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Value: \$600

Ballad of John and Yoko/Old Brown Shoe	The Beatles	M-382 2531P
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value: \$600



That's the Way God Planned It/What About You?	Billy Preston	M-433 1808P
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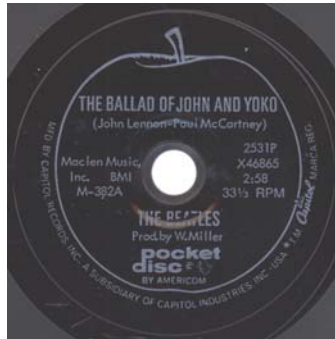
Value: \$400

Give Peace a Chance/Remember Love	John Lennon/Yoko Ono	M-435 1809P
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A-side publisher listed incorrectly. value: \$750



It also appears that most Apple records in the period may have been released as a Pocket Disc. I have listed the known ones. If there are any others that you have, drop me a note.



Since Americom had a license with Capitol, none of the "Hip Pocket Discs" released by Philco-Ford are connected with the Beatles. Philco's releases, too, were not new hit singles but rather "oldies." (shown at right: headline from *Billboard*, April 19, 1969)

Pocket Disc to Cover U. S.

NEW YORK—Pocket Disc, which recently completed a test run of several months in the Seattle market, has its first market introduction May 15 in Detroit, and by fall of this year will be distributed in 35 per cent of the total U. S. market.

By this time next year, Pocket Disc expects to have complete national distribution. This is the timetable worked out by Fred Hyman, chief of Americom Corp., parent of Pocket Disc. Larry Kanaga, of the Americom board, is in Detroit setting up the advertising and promotional campaign tying in with the May 15 kickoff.

Americom's manufacture of Pocket Discs ended abruptly in 1969, essentially when the company was sold. According to Fred Hyman, the sale of Americom was supposed to facilitate the format being offered nationally to a wider audience. However, that company (Nova Corp) found the fluctuations of the 1969 stock market problematic -- not enough money was flowing in. At that time, and without a few major record companies' participation (Columbia and RCA), they abandoned any ventures that were not solid money-makers -- including the Pocket Disc. Hyman estimated that it would have taken about two million dollars to make Pocket Discs national, but Nova Corp didn't have that to spend. Winding up as a fad, the format lasted less than two years, although other forms of flexi-discs (mostly by Evatone) have continued to exist to the present day.

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[Frank Daniels](#)

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