

You can take it with you Porta-music eases daily doldrums

By Marian Green
Of the Emerald

With black cords hanging from their necks and headphones perched on their heads, music lovers have found a way to be wired for incessant sound.

Miniature tapedecks that will fit in a coat pocket, and headphone sets so light you hardly notice them are popping up all over campus. And they're selling out faster than dealers can stock them.

"It's really been quite the fad," says Steve Springston, who sells several models in the Meier & Frank electronics department.

"During the holidays, we could not keep up with the demand," Springston says. Right now the store stocks the Sony Walkman I and II and the Panasonic brands, but several other brands are on the market, including Aiwa, Akai, Infinity and Sanyo, he says. Prices vary, ranging from under \$100 to more than \$250.

"You get what you pay for" in sound quality, he says.

At Eugene's Good Guys Stereo Discount Center, employee Roger Kauble says the stereos are among his hottest selling items.

"We bought all we could from the manufacturers. If we could've bought more, we could've sold more," Kauble says.

The Aiwa sells best among the several brands Good Guys stocks, he says. "They're the company that started it all."

Who buys the tapedecks?

"It's probably the post-war generation — ages 15-30," Springston says.

But Kauble says "everybody — old people, young people, middle-aged people, joggers, skiers" — buys them.

"Just about everyone who walks in here looks at them, and about half of them buy," he says.

Good Guys carries the Aiwa, Sony and Sanyo models, which also sell within the \$100 to more than \$250 for the top-of-the-line, AM-FM, Aiwa cassette model. But because of heavy demand, not all brands are in stock.

Kauble says the stereos are not dangerous.

"I use one on my motorcycle. I wear the pair of headphones under my helmet, and I don't have problems hearing traffic or anything," he says.

Sgt. Rick Allison, of the Eugene Police Department, however, has mixed feelings about the stereos.

"You're limiting one of your senses. You can't hear the car beeping, you can't hear the sirens or someone running up behind you," Allison says.

Although Allison has not heard of a University-area accident involving the small stereos, the headphone sets could become a "real problem in some of the assault and sexual harassment cases on campus," he says.

"You can be much more easily victimized," he says. A female jogger, for instance, could be listening to a stereo while running along the bike path and never hear an attacker approaching, he says.

The ideal set would allow one free ear for hearing external sounds; the other could be "tuned into whatever," he says.



Many owners of the small stereos believe there is a law restricting use of the devices while driving. But no law directly restricting that use exists, although the Legislature did consider such a law last year, according to Dave Cotting, senior trooper of the Oregon State Highway Patrol office in Eugene.

"We don't recommend it, but it's legal."

Jim Baughman, another senior trooper with the patrol, says the only related law is one stating that anything constricting "free, unhampered operation" of a motor vehicle is a Class C traffic infraction, carrying a maximum \$100 penalty.

Asked if that law could be used against drivers wearing the stereo headphones, Baughman says, "that depends."

"If you get to jiving to the music while you're diddly-bopping all over the road, then yes, definitely."

University freshman Lane Rude bends over his notebook at a small table outside the EMU Fishbowl. On his head rests a pair of the music-making headphones.

The music is "good to have around," he says. Rude listens to the stereo radio "between classes or when I'm just sitting here at the EMU."

"It makes it a lot easier just to sit and look at books with music in the background."



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He says he has to be more aware of traffic while riding a bike or jogging if he is listening to the stereo, but that the music makes it worthwhile.

"It really makes running a joy."

"I like to have music with me," says Rude, who has stereos in his car and home. "You get an energy from it."

Meg Metz, a University junior, bought her cassette stereo with "leftover" Christmas money.

An art major, Metz says she can listen to her tapes — Neil Young and The Police, among others, — in her drawing and oil painting classes because everyone is silent anyway.

Metz says she was "very tempted just to turn my music on" when slides were being shown in a class, but decided against it.

Although Metz says her parents would rather see the money spent on food or other necessities, she justified the expense because of a recent soccer injury, which tore some leg ligaments and left her on crutches.

"I figured if I have to go around campus as slow as I do, I might as well be listening to music," she says. Recovery therapy could take up to six months and she'll probably be on crutches for at least a year, but she's not dreading the long wait.

"If I listen to that thing, it'll make it go fast."



Photos by Brian Bubak

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