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Editorial

THE VIDEO DISC COMETH

After many false starts, manufacturers seem to be closing in on marketing of videodisc playback systems for consumers. Should it materialize, we'll all be winners when you consider that one could own a copy of the latest motion picture for the price of two theatre admissions plus babysitter fee. It would likely cost less to have a videodisc of a set of golf lessons, step-by-step TV cooking recipes, guitar lessons, still pictures of priceless paintings in your living room, and so on. Doubtlessly, some enterprising dealers will spring up to rent and exchange programs for even lower costs.

Naturally, there are a host of competing systems, including: Philips/MCA, with an optical laser sensor; Zenith (in collaboration with France's CSF Thomas), with a similar though incompatible system; Teldec (Germany's Telefunken and Britain's Decca), with a diamond-in-a-groove mechanical approach; RCA's capacitive pickup; Bogen-Rabe's magnetic system; and I/O Metrics' optical-photo system.

Playing a simple disc to produce color or B&W motion pictures with synchronized sound on a conventional TV receiver is a most appealing concept. You can view and listen to what you want when you want to. What's more, it has great potential for relatively low cost and fast access time (two challenges not yet met by videotape). So I was attracted to the first videodisc drumbeat in the East today—a presentation by Philips/MCA. I wasn't disappointed.

The Philips/MCA machine looks like a sleek waffle maker. One simply connects wires to a TV set's antenna terminals, positions what appears to be an aluminum-coated polyethylene LP disc on a turntable, closes the top, and presses a "play" button. The program appears on your TV screen—in beautiful color. Other pushbuttons control slow motion, frame freeze, reverse, and frame selection (with digital index readout on the screen). Two discrete audio channels with a 20-kHz top end are available, plus a technological opportunity for 4-channel sound. Turntable speed is 1800 rpm. With no physical contact between the optical pickup and the disc, the disc doesn't "wear out." Videodisc programs will retail for \$2 to \$10, depending on program content and length. (Each disc has an uninterrupted 30-minute play time at present.) Anticipated videodisc player price is \$500 and target date for market entry is the fall of '76.

Gone is MCA's pre-merger entry of an optical laser system that used a floppy disc and a top-mounted pickup, giving way to Philips' 0.2 mm-thick rigid disc and bottom-mounted sensor. Philips, in turn, secures MCA's vast programming resources (Universal Pictures, for example), while MCA also garners Magnavox's manufacturing and sales resources. (Philips owns 84% of Magnavox.) So Philips/MCA is a videodisc power to be reckoned with! And since some Zenith TV

consoles and videodiscs were displayed, I'd speculate that Zenith will be a Philips/MCA licensee.

Will Philips/MCA win all the videodisc marbles? I think not. Judging from the past, there will probably be two or three incompatible systems. Perhaps they will all vie for the same broad mass market. Or maybe, one will eventually dominate the affluent, adult market, while others will capture the remaining market with lower-priced systems.

In any event, I believe that videodiscs will be the next truly big family-entertainment product in the United States, though still a few years away. All the ingredients are there.

Philips/MCA Videodisc System



Art Salsberg