

## TELEVISION

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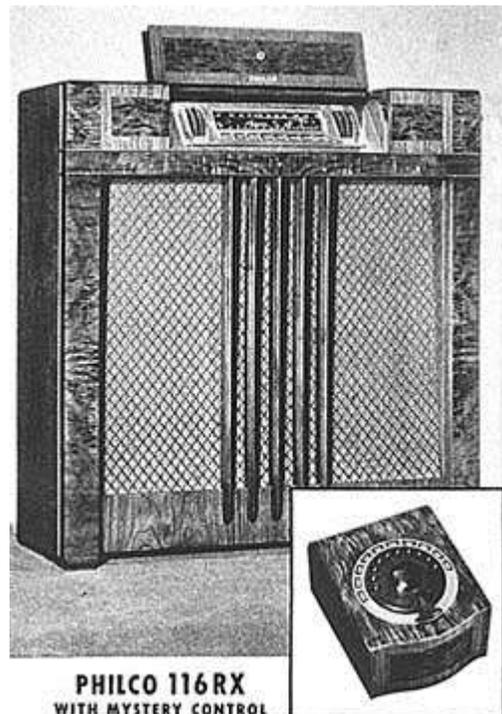
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### ***The Philco Mystery Control: Forerunner of the TV Wireless Remote***

*As you are reading this, I am back on board the all-volunteer-crewed M/V Anastasis hospital ship on the way to deliver relief supplies to Liberia, West Africa. Then we will return to Sierra Leone where the Mercy Ship will be docked until next June, serving the medical and humanitarian needs of the people of that country. I'll be busy in the Engineering department, helping to maintain the electronic systems of the ship. As editor of the TV column, I am always looking for contributions and can be contacted via email, [brewster@mercyships.org](mailto:brewster@mercyships.org) -- rb*

**W**ho would buy a tv without a wireless remote control? But long before the "remote" was commonly available on television sets, it showed up on a radio. In 1939, Philco began marketing a console radio with a wireless remote called the "Mystery Control."

Then why wasn't wireless remote standard on tv sets till much later in the tv revolution? Actually Zenith had a remote control system called "space command" in the 1950s. It utilized a light beam and photocell (later an ultrasonic signal) with the tones generated by a handheld mechanical clicker. It worked well as I recall. But I believe that it wasn't popular for several reasons.



Families typically watched the same channel for the whole evening - imagine that! - and presumably commercials weren't nearly as annoying then as they are now, so even the mute was not considered necessary. And there were only a few channels.



Some folks only got just one or two. Growing up in the New York City area, we were privileged to receive seven channels even as early as 1949 when we got our first set. But I believe that the real reason for the resurgence of interest in the tv wireless remote was cable tv. With so many channels available, there is the strong tendency to want to "channel surf." In addition, infra-red solid state controls have become very inexpensive.

Back in 1969, when I worked for Westinghouse, a small group at my location was developing an infra-red

remote control system using LEDs. That, of course, is the preferred system for most of the wireless remotes now in use. Lately rf is sometimes used, echoing the system chosen by Philco in 1939.

Strangely, a Philco remote control transmitter was one of the very first items in my collection, having been saved from my childhood junk picking! Many years later I acquired and restored the Philco 116RX which it controlled. The Philco 116RX is a really neat set. The one I restored in the early 70's worked so well that I could go out into the yard, at least 100 feet away from the set, and still control the volume, change preset stations and even turn the radio off. But once off, it could not be turned back on except at the set.

The 9"x 7"x 6" remote unit uses a type 30 tube with 3-volt and 45-volt batteries in a simple oscillator circuit. The oscillator is pulsed by a telephone-type dial. These rf pulses are picked up by a loop antenna in the cabinet base and processed by an auxiliary 5 tube short-wave receiver on the main radio chassis. A stepping relay (enclosed in a large sound-insulated container) which selects the stations, is controlled by a 2A4G thyratron tube, surely unique for a home radio!

Those guys at Philco were pretty clever. Later, they came out with two of our favorite collectibles: the first battery operated tv in 1959 and the famous Predicta.

Unfortunately, I disposed of the 116RX due to lack of space. I did save the original remote unit and a few years ago acquired another Philco 116RX that I plan to restore someday! It shall remain an unusual part of my eclectic tv collection.