

The Beatles Record Players in the '60s

by Piers Hemmingsen

Did you ever wonder what record players were actually used by The Beatles to play their own personal records during the 1960s? Well, hopefully this article will help you answer this question with a little bit of detail. During the period 1962 through 1970, there were rapid advances in the technology used to play records and the most significant advancement for The Beatles sound would be the advent of the enhanced stereo recording techniques and the availability of true stereophonic records for the teen markets across the globe. After all, there was no point in crafting superb stereo sound in the studio if the fans could not replicate that sound on their home audio equipment. Special thanks to Mark Lewisohn for his generous help with this article.



Above - John and Paul open a box of brand new American LP's during their stay at the Plaza Hotel, New York City, February 1964. Paul opens a Dylan LP and underneath that one is the Atlantic Atco LP "Don't Play That Song" by Ben E. King of The Drifters from 1962. Thanks to Mark Lewisohn for this info.

Photo Source: TBD, www.dangerousminds.net

The following article outlines the various types of record playing equipment used by The Beatles and John Lennon during their years as The Beatles. We hope you find this of interest and that further detailed information can be brought forth to fix some of the holes.

1959 - 1963 - The Dansette Era

The Dansette was the most popular portable record player in Britain during the 1950s and 60s. The British patent for the Dansette was applied for in 1952 and this included a BSR turntable. According to the makers of the Dansette...

"Many songwriters including John Lennon and Paul McCartney produced their work from listening to records on their Dansettes." (Source: www.dansettes.co.uk)

Although no pictures are presented here, it is likely that both John and Paul had one of these when they were living at their homes in Liverpool.

The Dansette pictured right is the actual Dansette record player that was purchased by Mona Best (mother of Beatles drummer Pete best) for the Casbah Coffee Club in Liverpool in 1959. It could play 33 1/3 RPM, 45 RPM and 78 RPM discs. As The Beatles played there, they would also have used this Dansette.



John listens to a demo of the new 'Twist And Shout' EP in July 1963. This small portable player was useful on their 1963 UK Tour, even as used on top of a wash basin!



Money !!!

In February 1963, The Beatles had their first number one single with 'Please Please Me' and their fortunes were made. As their financial situation improved we see the start of a period in which The Beatles could pretty much afford to buy the very best of record playing equipment.

1963/1964 - Pye G63 Stereophonic Black Box



Above Left - Photo of John Lennon that appeared in the 1964 Beatles Book Monthly Calendar. I would say that the photo source is Mr. Johnny Dean of Beat Publications. The photo was taken sometime in September or October of 1963 in The Beatles London flat at 57 Green Street, Flat L, 4th Floor, Mayfair, London W1. This was the only flat that the Beatles lived in together during their time as a group so we can assume that this was the only time that they shared a stereo record player (Source: Mark Lewisohn). In Britain, these console-type record players were called "radiograms" even though some models like the G63 did not have a radio inside.

Above right - Service sheets for the Pye G63 "Stereophonic Black Box", Pye Ltd. Cambridge.



*Ringo relaxes at the flat at Green Street (Autumn 1963) with some LPs by Stevie Wonder, The Shirelles, etc. He is sitting beside the Pye G63.
Photo source: Johnny Dean*

The Pye G63 console stereo was manufactured in Cambridge, Great Britain and the unit featured a Garrard 4-speed (16/33/45/78) automatic turntable in the centre under the centre lid. There are four control knobs inside. Horizontally from left to right they are 1. OFF=TREBLE, 2. VOLUME, 3. BALANCE, 4. BASS. The amplifier uses Mullard tubes and it usually took a minute or so for the amplifier to "warm up" so that it was ready for use. A separate large 8-inch Goodmans speaker was mounted inside the cabinet on either side of the central record playing area. A (red light bulb) lit Pye Stereophonic Black Box badge-plate was mounted at the bottom right hand corner of the front grille cloth. The mains (power supply) could be adapted for British and North American uses.



Above - Controls and turntable for the Pye G63 (Source: www.radiomuseum.org)

The whole Pye unit was finished in beautiful shiny polyester lacquered "sapele and sycamore" wood veneers and was one of the very best stereo record players available in Britain at the time. My parents purchased one for our family in Salisbury, Wiltshire in 1962 and we loved it. It was the unit that my brother used to play his 1963 stereo copy of the Parlophone "Please Please Me" LP. We brought the Pye unit back to Canada with us in August of 1963. It was used to play pretty much all of the Beatles albums and 45s as they were released in Canada during the 1960s. I enjoy the Pye G63 to this day and it retains a classic 1960s modern look that has yet to be replicated. This year it is 50 years old!

If you look closely at the picture of John on page 9, you will see that he has a US Tamla Motown copy of the early 1963 Miracles LP "The Fabulous Miracles" sitting on the top of the record player. The Beatles would cover 'You've Really Got A Hold On Me' from this album and it is highly probable that all four Beatles listened to the track on their Pye Stereophonic Black Box in order to work on that song for their "With The Beatles" LP.



Above - A page from the Pye brochure created for the "Radio TV & Electronics Exhibition" held at the Royal Festival Hall, London in August 1962.

John would only live with his band-mates at the Green Street flat from September through the end of November of 1963. John and his wife Cynthia and their son Julian moved to a new flat at 13 Emperor's Gate, Brompton, Knightsbridge, London SW7 in November 1963. By July 1964, Beatles fans had forced the family to move to a much larger home called Kenwood in Weybridge, Surrey. So the question is...where did the Pye G63 end up after The Beatles left the flat at Green Street? If anyone knows the answer to that question, please let me know.

The significance of the Pye G63 is that it is probably the only record player that was shared by all four Beatles when they were together as a performing group. Just try and find one of the 1962 Pye G63 Stereophonic Black Box units today!

1964 - Philips Automignon AG2101D (in-car 45 RPM record player)

Paul...had a Philips Automignon record player fitted to his factory fresh 1964 Aston Martin DB5.



Above Left - Paul in the Aston Martin's driver's seat, signing an autograph for a fan in London, June 1967.

Above Right - Paul beside the Aston, London April 1967.

Source: Both pictures above are by courtesy of The Daily Mail photo archives.

1964 - Philips Automignon AG2101D (in-car 45 RPM record player)

George...had a Philips Automignon record player fitted to his brand new 1964 Jaguar E-Type 3.8.



Above Left - George perched on the bonnet of his new 1964 Jaguar E-Type 3.8.

Above Right - George plays with the Philips Automignon record player in his new 1964 Jaguar E-Type 3.8

Source: Both picture above are by courtesy of The Beatles Book Monthly, Johnny Dean.

1965 - Swiss KB Discomatic Jukebox - John Lennon and Brian Epstein

It would appear that both Brian Epstein and John Lennon ordered their Swiss KB Discomatic jukebox units at about the same time in 1965. Brian's unit was used at his office while John's unit was delivered to his home Kenwood at Weybridge, Surrey. The unit could hold forty 45 RPM discs and of course this was for mono playback only as stereo 45s would not arrive on the mass market until 1969.



Above - Brian Epstein sifts through some acetates at his office. The Swiss KB Discomatic appears at the top left in the picture. Above Right - Earlier (top) and slightly later (bottom) models of the Swiss KB Discomatic jukebox.

d i s c o m a t i c i n d e x

1	WILEY - 4/21/60	9		17	WILEY - 4/21/60	25	WILEY - 4/21/60	33	HOLBY
2	WILEY - 4/21/60	10		18	WILEY - 4/21/60	26	WILEY - 4/21/60	34	WILEY - 4/21/60
3	WILEY - 4/21/60	11		19	WILEY - 4/21/60	27	WILEY - 4/21/60	35	WILEY - 4/21/60
4	WILEY - 4/21/60	12		20	WILEY - 4/21/60	28	WILEY - 4/21/60	36	WILEY - 4/21/60
5		13	WILEY - 4/21/60	21	WILEY - 4/21/60	29	WILEY - 4/21/60	37	WILEY - 4/21/60
6	WILEY - 4/21/60	14	WILEY - 4/21/60	22	WILEY - 4/21/60	30	WILEY - 4/21/60	38	WILEY - 4/21/60
7	WILEY - 4/21/60	15	WILEY - 4/21/60	23	WILEY - 4/21/60	31	WILEY - 4/21/60	39	WILEY - 4/21/60
8	WILEY - 4/21/60	16	WILEY - 4/21/60	24	WILEY - 4/21/60	32	WILEY - 4/21/60	40	WILEY - 4/21/60

Above - The index card from John Lennon's Swiss KB Discomatic clearly shows his love for the rock and roll classics (Be-Bop-Lu-La etc.)

THE DISCOMATIC RANGE

TD - ABS Complete reel turntable with an 88 section keyboard and a record rack, ready to be fitted in a drawer or a cupboard and plugged on a radio set or amplifier; may be delivered with stereo-phantom connection.

Dim.: 480 mm. in 10" 1/2 deep.
480 mm. in 10" 1/2 deep.
200 mm. in 8" 1/2 high.

TD - DCF Complete turntable identical to the one mentioned above, but set to an elegant wooden and plastic cabinet, with laboratory light indicator showing the number of the record being played, and a special device, sliding under the cabinet, for the index in which the numbers and titles of your records are listed. (Next page.)

Dim.: 480 mm. in 10" 1/2 deep.
480 mm. in 10" 1/2 deep.
200 mm. in 11" high.

DL - DCF Complete record player identical to the above mentioned but including an amplifier (separated or incorporated) and two incorporated loudspeakers (see notes).

Dim.: 480 mm. in 10" 1/2 deep.
480 mm. in 10" 1/2 deep.
200 mm. in 11" high.

DL - PDR Complete Discomatic portable, complete amplifier with internal light indicator showing the number of the record playing, total green, loudspeaker and amplifier.

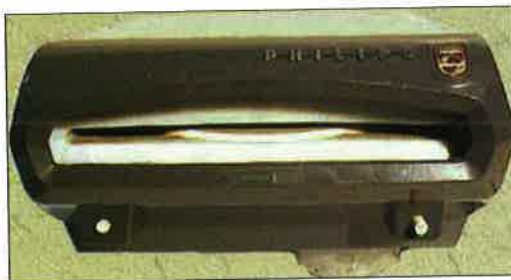
Dim.: 470 mm. in 10" 1/2 deep.
480 mm. in 10" 1/2 deep.
200 mm. in 10" 1/2 high.

(Open: 470 mm. in 10" 1/2 high)
Total weight: 17 kg. 400 (DL DL 'V) including 30 records.

Right - A page from an early 1960s Swiss KB catalogue (Source - <http://www.jukebox-world.de>)

1965 - Philips Automignon AG2101D (in-car 45 RPM record player)

This was an AC (alternating current) portable unit that had been fitted to John's 1965 Rolls Royce Phantom V in December of 1965 just as the new "Rubber Soul" LP was topping the album charts (Source: Beatology Magazine Vol. 2 No. 2). The Philips "Automignon" units were introduced in 1962 but did not really catch on. By the way, "mignon" is a French word for cute or dainty! John's portable record player could only play 45 RPM records and it was fitted into the centre console in the rear passenger area.



The pictures below were taken by Brian Schofield for the Beatology magazine published in December 1999 (who did a great issue on the history of the car), the inset photo on the left shows the Philips Automignon at the bottom of the console.



Above, top: view of graphics on roof of car. Above, left: close up view of stereo console (phono unit missing). Above: jump seat in rear passenger compartment.

The caption stating that “phono unit missing” is in fact incorrect. What is missing in the centre is in fact the Philips portable tape deck. The Philips Automignon looks a lot like a CD player doesn't it? One of John's favourite discs during the months of April and May of 1967 was the Procol Harum single 'A Whiter Shade Of Pale'. Derek Taylor has stated that John played that record many times on the Philips Automignon unit in his Rolls Royce.

1968 - Component Hi-Fi System At Flat 1, 34 Montagu Square, London



In late 1968 while the White Album was being recorded, Ringo sublet his ground floor and lower-ground floor flat (Flat 1) at 34 Montagu Square to John and Yoko. Paul had also rented the flat at one point in 1966. John and Yoko lived in the flat just prior to moving to Tittenhurst Park (Source: Mark Lewisohn). Jimi Hendrix had also lived there in late 1966 and early 1967 (when he was evicted by Ringo) and it was also here that John and Yoko took the infamous photographs for their “Two Virgins” album cover. The photo below shows Lennon listening to music and it is apparent that the main source of audio is from a component hi-fi system that has been temporarily set up on the floor - as this was a temporary living space for John and Yoko. It is my best guess that Lennon had one or two component sets in this flat and that one may have been used just for the 4 track tapes that are seen in the picture. As he is seen holding a 45 it is a good assumption that he was listening to a 45 at the moment the picture was taken by Ethan Russell. Any further information about the record player and audio equipment in this picture would be appreciated.

Above - John Lennon just listens ... at the 34 Montagu Square flat (according to Mark Lewisohn probably October 1968) just a few weeks before the White Album is launched to the world ... note that there are Muntz 4 track tapes on top of the component amplifier, a scattering of various 45s with centres punched out, and a turntable in it's case lurks above John's head. Thanks to Mark Lewisohn. Photo Source - Ethan Russell for the rock and roll newspaper Rolling Stone.

Late 1969 - WHITE Component Amplifier And Turntable In Custom White Cabinet At Tittenhurst Park, near Ascot in Berkshire.

The photo below was gleaned from an old colour video interview of John and Yoko and at one point John begins playing a copy of their brand new Apple LP "Live Peace In Toronto". It is probable that this was filmed at their home and was an out-take from the BBC documentary show "24 Hours: The World Of John And Yoko" which was filmed in early December 1969. You can see that John is hunched over the turntable and he is putting the LP on the record player. Those are his arms! The turntable was inside the cabinet. You can also see an amplifier to the right in the picture and the whole cabinet was painted white. I strongly suspect that this could have been at Tittenhurst Park and they moved there in August of 1969 and much of their interiors were painted white as part of their extensive refurbishment of the property. Any further information would be appreciated but I would suspect that the cabinet was indeed custom made with the components appearing to be "built-ins". I do not have any images of the speakers as of yet.



Source: Most probably BBC's TV show "24 Hours: The World Of John And Yoko", December 1969.

Summary

Technology played a huge role in the evolution of The Beatles music and sound by way of their choice of the newest instruments as well as the state-of-the-art equipment used to record their musical compositions. This short article has shown that the same evolution also applied to the use of technology that The Beatles used to play the recorded music that influenced them. In their early days they were hard-pressed to afford a new diamond stylus for their Dansettes, however, their financial status after the rise of Beatlemania in 1963 allowed them to cherry-pick the best record playing equipment on offer and the evidence is pretty clear that they did exactly that.