



Almost twenty years ago, (left) Harold Lindsay guided the first Ampex recording product to the marketplace—the Model 200. This month, (right) he escorted the AG-440 on her West Coast debut. The two machines are generations apart, but the family heritage of quality and unsurpassed performance has been passed down through the years.

“Someday, I’d Like to Work on That”

Twenty-one years ago, an audience of Bay Area engineers sat in the meeting of a professional society listening to music coming from a most unlikely source—a rectangular black box resembling a foot locker which bore the name magnetophon. In this audience was classical music lover Harold Lindsay. The fidelity of sound produced from this device which used magnetic tape as a recording medium stirred both his love of music and his engineering passion.

Following the demonstration, he cornered the man who had brought the magnetophon from Germany for more details on its operation and its limitations. After identifying the great potential of tape recording, once developed to a practical state, Harold’s parting remark that evening was: “Someday, I’d like to work on that.”

The memory of the magnetophon and its possibilities remained with him—just a dream. Then fate took over, Harold met Alexander M. Poniatoff, of the Ampex Electric and Manufacturing Company, who was looking for a product to replace his wartime production of radar motors. Harold introduced Mr. Poniatoff to the magnetophon; Ampex had a new product; and Harold found himself in December of 1946 in the loft of the Ampex building in San Carlos, California, in charge of the development of the tape recorder which was to become the standard of the recording industry.

A dream come true. But, in the cold light of reality developing the first saleable recorder had few traces of fantasy. A young company’s future depended on this magical music machine; a young company whose employment was to dwindle from 35 to eight during the difficult days of the product’s development.

Alexander M. Poniatoff was willing to stake his company and his future on the theory that there was a market for a quality tape recorder despite all admonitions that tape would never replace the broadcaster’s disc. Though there were never any doubts about the product itself, other influences such as necessary financing often cast shadows over the energetic and determined little team as they attempted to move closer to their objective. Then it happened. And not a moment too soon. That first all-important order came from the American Broadcasting Company for 24 units.

Harold Lindsay had realized his dream. He had worked on the development of the first quality tape recorder which was capable of meeting the demanding requirements of the broadcast industry.

This dream, Harold now realizes, is a lifelong project. After Ampex built 112 of that first model (most of which are still in operation in recording studios), design improvements resulted in the Model 300, 400, 401, 3200, 600, PR-10 and Model 350.

As Ampex grew and prospered, Harold’s talents were put to work first setting up the first Quality Control department; then designing the first sophisticated tooling for production of magnetic heads; in 1954 he organized and managed the first Industrial Design operation; in 1960 he became the Technical Assistant to Alexander M. Poniatoff, Chairman of the Board of Directors; and from 1963 to late 1965 he served as Corporate Design Consultant at Large, serving many divisions of the company.

In November 1965, he went home again to the Audio Engineering Department as its Manager.

Almost twenty years to the day that he entered that second floor lab in the tiny Ampex building in San Carlos, Harold accompanied his department’s newest “baby”—the AG-440—at its West Coast introduction. This model is a direct descendent of Ampex’s first recording product. In fact, to be technically right, the AG-440 is the great-great-great-great-great-great-granddaughter of the Model 200. And, has she developed curves (performance curves, that is. The flat kind).

The AG-440 has little physical resemblance to her ancestor. Her plug-in modular electronics are solid state—unheard of in the 200’s days; she’s accommodating as she uses either ¼ or ½ inch tape; and she’s very flexible with her ability to build up from one to four channels.

In spite of her contemporary appearance, you can still trace the family ties through her quality and performance and the spirit of the people behind her.

But when it comes time for an even higher quality professional audio recorder to be built, Harold Lindsay will “want to work on that one,” too.