

Tube of the Month

212D

When I was a kid about 60 years ago, I was messing around a shed in my back yard. We were always afraid of going inside as it looked like a hotel for black widow spiders. The walls were falling in and there was a deep pile of trash all over the floor. Through a crack in the wall I saw something interesting and had to have it. After I braved the spiders and hauled it off, it turned out to be a Western Electric 212D tube. My father told me that it came from radio KMJ in Fresno. He had acquired it before WWII and has considering making an amplifier with it. The tube was over a foot in length and had 4 pins arranged in an odd pattern. About ten years later when I became a ham the tube has always been displayed in my shack.

I eventually learned more about these tubes and the history of this one. The McClatchy Company, who owned the Sacramento and Fresno Bee newspapers, also owned the AM radio stations KFBK and KMJ. In 1928 they upgraded their transmitters to larger units made by Western Electric. Previous equipment was mostly "homebrew". A Sacramento ham was in charge of installing the new rigs that used the 212D tubes as amplifiers. The 212D was an excellent audio amplifier and could be used in the RF section, but only to 1.5 MHz. Each tube had a number on the glass that indicated the range of impedance. Tubes could be matched to evenly share the load. By 1936 they were considered obsolete although the 212E was used through the 1940s.

Like the old 211 tubes, the audio capabilities and the 250 watts of power made them highly desirable to audio amplifier builders. They quickly went from junk to gold. Recent prices for a good working 212D or E have risen to over \$1000. I'm glad I was able to find all my 212s when they were still considered junk. My 212D now has many friends, but it was the first.

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