

Tube of the Month

THE GOLDEN VT

The First Legal Triode

Before World War I, the only triode that was legally available to the amateur radio operator was the de Forest Audion. This ended in 1916 when the Marconi Company sued de Forest for patent infringement of the diode Fleming valve. Marconi couldn't make the triode as it infringed on de Forest's patent. Other tubes such as the Cunningham Audiotron were in circulation but they weren't legal due to patent infringement. Nothing was legal for amateur use. Private use of radio stopped when the war began. Later production for the military produced some much better tubes.

When the war ended all the patent judgments went back into effect and commercial production again stopped. This insanity was finally ended in 1919 when Marconi made de Forest and the Moorhead Company of San Francisco an offer they couldn't refuse. Moorhead had been making the SE-1444 triode for the military that was very successful. They were used in the Navy flying boats used in the first trans-Atlantic flight in 1919. Moorhead teamed with de Forest to use his triode patent and Marconi extended them the Fleming patent to make receiving tubes. Marconi would handle the sales for the coalition. The resulting tube was called the Marconi VT. The glass they used gave the tubes a golden color and they are still referred to as the Golden VT. The Golden VT had both de Forest and Marconi markings and the note: "Licensed for amateur and experimental use only". We were finally legal.

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