

Tube of the Month

UNIVERSAL TRIODE

Many years ago, I was attending a swap meet and ran into a ham that I had bought tubes from before. His tale was that he had a very old tube that he thought was a DeForest. Naturally he had forgotten to bring it, but promised to have it the next month. I was dubious, but made sure I found him the next swap. He unpacked a wire lead triode that looked almost homemade. I purchased the tube and in the coming days, tried to research it. I was having no luck, so I wrote a letter to Bro. Pat Dowd, W2GK, in New Jersey for his opinion. He responded that it was made by Universal Wireless, who was an early competitor to Western Union.

The Universal Wireless Communication Co. was licensed to conduct short wave experiments between New York and Chicago starting in 1928. The American Radio Relay League had been passing telegrams or “radiograms” since 1914, but the short waves offered a potential commercial means of spanning greater distances without several relays and endless miles of wire and poles. High frequency tubes like the RCA UX- 852 were available, but RCA had been known to refuse tubes to customers who weren’t using RCA equipment. A similar issue was with Henitz & Kaufman who had to develop their “gammatrons” so as not to violate RCA’s patents. This Universal triode seemed to be based on the 852 but with only 3 pins.

I have no information on how successful the company was, but this obvious patent infringement was soon discovered by RCA and by mid-1930 the company was liquidated. Only a few of these tubes have been found.

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