

Product Review: Radio Dust Covers



by Gary Halverson, K6GLH
503 Jessica Ct.,
Mokelumne Hill CA 95245
k6glh@volcano.net

By 1999, dedicated radio collector Stan LaPointe, K7NUU, had accumulated a substantial collection containing several very rare and pristine pieces. However, Stan began to notice the fading of certain color paints on the front panel meter scales and dials (particularly reds) along with progressive dust accumulation on the chassis'. He realized that it was necessary to come up with a means of protecting these units from further deterioration when they weren't being used. So Stan began experimenting with various covering materials. While clear plastic seemed like a good choice, the downside was that it would eventually stick to the cabinet paint in contact with it, and cause moisture condensation (and ultimately rust) on the enclosed chassis. Vinyl was a better choice but it didn't hold embroidered logos as well. Ultimately, a heavy woolen felt material won out as the most cost-effective solution. As Stan began producing his custom covers, fellow ham friends also wanted them, and hence Radio Dust Covers was born.

Since then, Radio Dust Covers has earned a reputation for high quality covers and exceptional customer service. Although the company recently changed hands, the new owners have assumed operation without missing a beat. Their new website, www.radiodustcovers.com shows an expanded product line that now includes covers for not only current and vintage ham gear, but also high-end A/V components. Stan Clewett, W6ON, the new owner, has added new state-of-the-art automation equipment to ensure the highest possible quality while helping shorten the turn-around time to meet the growing demand.

The felt used in making the covers has a 50% wool content and is heavier than the common craft-type felt to better hold the shape of the cover and provide protection of equipment from scratches, dings, dust, and UV bleaching of the front panel paint and lettering. At the same time, the felt allows "breathing" to avoid moisture condensation from occurring on the radio. All seams are professionally sewn, steam pressed, and inspected twice before shipment.

In the event there is concern about spilled liquids or scratches from cat claws, colored vinyl is an option. The vinyl material Stan uses is cloth lined so that the protective vinyl itself doesn't actually con-

tact the painted surfaces of the radio. While the vinyl can be embroidered, the rule of thumb is "simpler is better on vinyl". The plain text embroidery is more suited to vinyl surfaces than the fancy logos with their thousands of stitches. Vinyl is available in several different colors.

During the phone call to place my order, Stan mentioned some of the more unusual covers he's made for his customers. For example, he recently made a custom cover for a Collins 30K-1, a 42-inch flat-panel TV and various computer monitors, and some very "personalized" boatanchor rig covers including some made from denim. Stan then asked me a few questions about my cover requirements. First was the unit I wanted to cover, which was a Collins 75A-4. Stan pointed out that the particular equipment not only determines the amount of material used, but also helps define some of the other cover requirements, such as the rear panel and front microphone connector cutout, if necessary.

Next was the color. The choices were black, gray or royal blue. I chose gray. Next was the logo and lettering. I went with a winged Collins logo (appropriate to the vintage of the 75A-4) with Collins orange thread. I declined adding a model number and my callsign on the front. Should I have opted for additional letting, I could have selected colors for the model and my callsign. Stan mentioned that popular thread colors for the lettering are gold, blue, red, silver and white. A state-of-the-art computer-controlled embroidering machine generates the logo and lettering with a high degree of precision. (Stan mentioned that he has digitized logos for most manufacturers).

A quick discussion of the back cover was next. Normally the rear cover is a flap that can be folded up so as to not interfere with the cable connections to the rear of the radio. Stan said that the 75A-4 normally came with a 3/4 panel in the rear to allow for the power, antenna, mute, and speaker wires connecting to the lower back of the chassis. That worked for me, but I can see that a fold-up flap would be perfect for radios under shelves as the covers can be slipped on and off with ease from the front.

Stan then totaled up my order and asked if First Class Mail was OK. He stated that turn-around time was running between one and two days, although that depends on the current volume of orders in the queue. Three days later, my 75A-4 cover was in my mailbox.

The cover arrived in a Tyvek bag, which I wasted no time in opening to inspect the contents. A note inserted in the cover suggested using a steam iron and damp pressing cloth to remove any wrinkles from being folded, which I did. The workmanship was excellent and the hems were perfectly sewn. The rear of the cover stopped just short of the terminal strips for muting, speaker, and antenna connections on the rear of the chassis - another nice touch.

I was concerned that maybe the black felt might have been a better match to the radios, but after placing the gray cover over my 75A-4 on the light-oak colored operating table with ivory mini-blinds behind the radio, that concern vanished. The light gray was perfect and will never show dust. Additional covers in the same color will significantly brighten up the room. (Frankly, I can see why Collins didn't stay with St. James Gray when they went to the S-Line).

Personally, I feel that adding these covers to my Gold Dust twins fulfills my responsibility as a custodian of this beautiful equipment, preserving it in style for the next owner. So for me, Stan's elegant and functional covers do indeed meet expectations.



For additional product review comments, you can find dozens of very satisfied customer reviews on eham.com: <http://www.eham.net/reviews/detail/3025>. Radio Dust Covers has a customer satisfaction rating of 5 out of 5 (why am I not surprised).