

Wednesday, August 23, 1989

Things to know about CD players

They're not all alike, but paying a high price isn't necessary

Cut through all the hype, and the important things you should know about compact-disc players boil down to these:

First, they aren't all created alike. But even players that cost around \$100 deliver better sound than the vast majority of vinyl disc phonograph systems.

Second, what you get for more bucks are mainly more bells and whistles, some of which are really unnecessary for most people.

Third, for audiophiles with an ear for musical nuances, some features found only on higher-priced compact-disc players may indeed be worth the extra money.

If you're making the transition from LP to compact disc for the first time, even the cheapest CD player will sound a world apart from your phonograph — no more pops, wheezes or wow and flutter caused by warping, deteriorating vinyl, damaged needles or inconsistencies in turntable speed.

You'll appreciate the convenience, too. You don't have to flip a compact disc to hear the whole recording program, and the protective plastic coating means disc care is minimal. What's more, to the average listener an inexpensive player will sound just as good as a player costing hundreds more. That's because the basic technology is the same.

For the average listener, players with list prices of \$200 to \$500 will do just fine, says Changing

Times magazine. In that price range, you get features that add convenience and versatility.

Two of those stand out:
— Multidisc play: One of the hottest developments in CD players is the changer, which plays more than one disc automatically. You can choose between cartridge and carousel models. The cartridge systems, in which stacked CDs slide into the machine on a tray, usually hold more discs than carousels — up to 10 or more — and take up less room.

The carousel changers, basically rotating platters, are easier to load and easier to use than the cartridges if you want to play just one disc. It's also easier to replace a disc on a carousel; in some models you can change discs even while another disc is playing. And because the carousel's mechanism is simpler than the cartridge's, there may be fewer repairs. Suggested retail prices for cartridge and carousel players are about the same.

— Four times oversampling: Early-model CDs scanned a given portion of a disc twice, the second time filling in any digital blanks caused by scratches or fingerprints to cut down on skips or dropouts. Today's systems typically sample four times (some eight or 16) to smooth out even more glitches. Virtually every player currently made has at least four times oversampling.

Pricier players, particularly those with disc changers, may last longer than less-expensive

models. That's because they tend to have better-quality circuitry and moving parts.

Higher-priced players are often heavier, too — which may reflect a maker's interest in reducing the number of skips that can happen when players are jarred. Models with more-substantial chassis and heavier bottom pads also help insulate a player from vibration.

Other features that are often standard in the \$200 to \$500 range are less useful. Among those probably not worth paying extra for:

— Programmable play. You program selections on a CD you would like to hear and in what order. Newer variations on this include shuffle or random play or juke box, in which the CD player picks the order of songs.

— Direct track access. You can go immediately to any point on the disc.

— Repeat lets you play a CD over and over.

— Indexing. You can use this to fast forward to a given place in the music using index numbers supplied with the disc.

— Three-beam pickup. This feature splits the laser signal into three parts instead of two, in theory to improve tracking.

You may want to put out the extra money for a remote control device (the best remotes also control volume). Many models add a keypad on the chassis as well as on the remote so you can program the discs you want to hear from either component.

Bottled ships old hat, new ones in light bulbs

TEXAS CITY (AP) — Building model ships in a bottle has been a popular pastime for hobbyists around the world — dating back many centuries.

Long hours are required to assemble a ship by passing the parts through the small pouring hole of a bottle and then assembling the vessel inside.

But whoever heard of building a ship inside a light bulb?

After a co-worker suggested he try such a feat 10 years ago, Norman Kautz has transformed his model ship building into a very unique hobby.

Kautz, a machinist for Sterling Chemical, built the first of his nearly 200 ship-in-a-bottles in 1952.

Since his co-worker's idea, Kautz has made 63 of the light bulb variety.

Creating such a ship takes Kautz about a week, depending on his daily schedule. He gets the burned-out, 400-watt sodium mercury vapor bulbs from work and brings them home for clean-

ing. The bulbs measure 10.5-inches long and 4.5-inches in diameter.

To make his ships, Kautz first cuts out the pieces from balsa wood and puts the ship together without gluing it.

Sails made of paper envelopes are added and the entire model is painted. The ship is then disassembled.

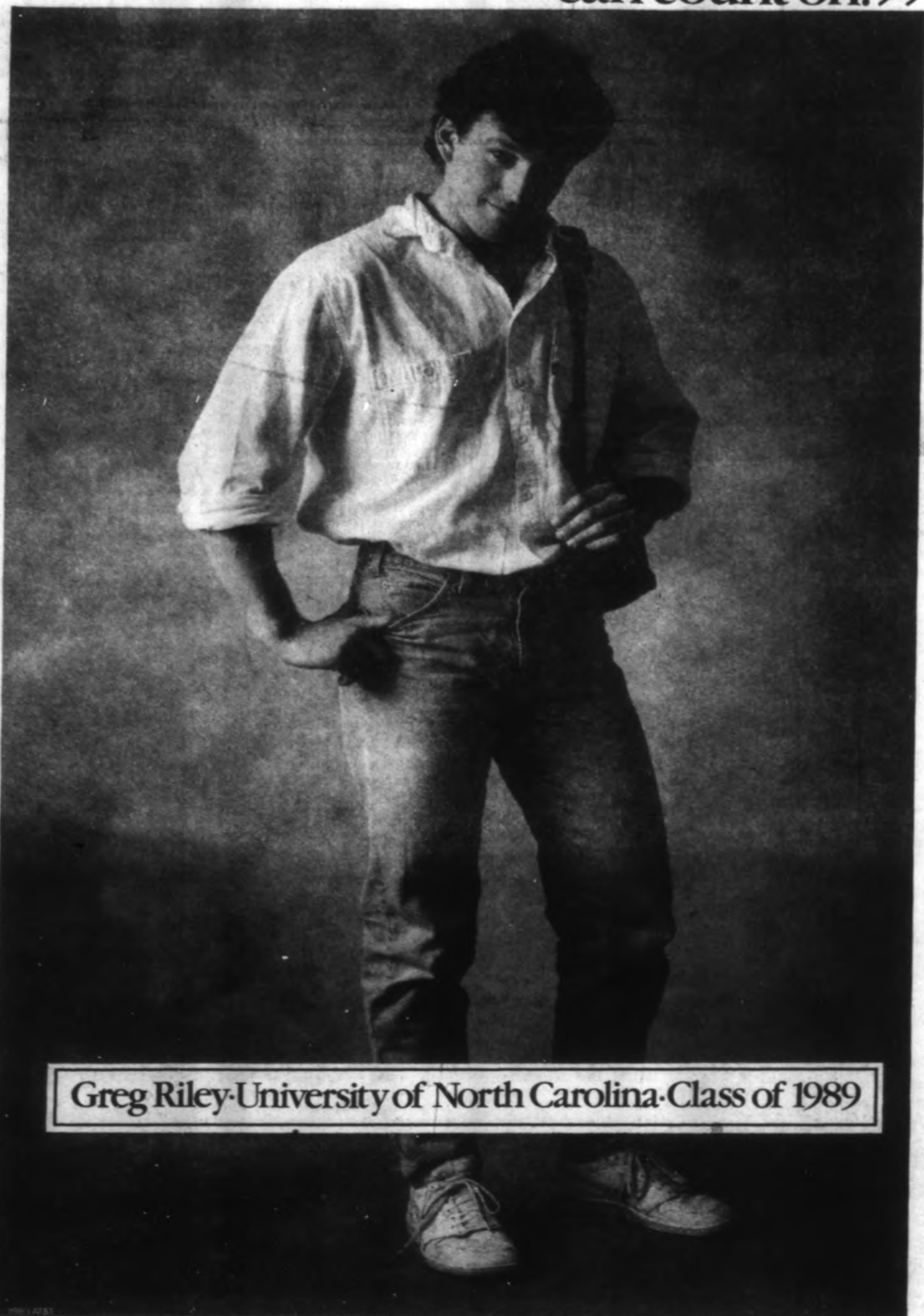
Next, while operating through a hole 1/8-inch in diameter — at the end of the bulb that screws into the socket — Kautz carefully places the parts inside.

Using tools that he often has to make for himself, he arranges the pieces inside the bulb and glues them in place.

Because he must chip away a porcelain shield covering the opening of the bulb, Kautz loses about one out of every three bulbs by accidentally breaking them.

Many ship builders assemble their boats outside the bottle so that they can be folded on hinges to fit through the bottle's opening

“I don't want a lot of hype. I just want something I can count on.”

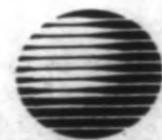


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