

= Madman Muntz =

Earl William " Madman " Muntz (January 3 , 1914 ? June 21 , 1987) was an American businessman and engineer who sold and promoted cars and consumer electronics in the United States from the 1930s until his death in 1987 . He was a pioneer in television commercials with his oddball " Madman " persona ? an alter ego who generated publicity with his unusual costumes , stunts , and outrageous claims . Muntz also pioneered car stereos by creating the Muntz Stereo @-@ Pak , better known as the 4 @-@ track cartridge , a predecessor to the 8 @-@ track cartridge developed by Lear Industries .

He invented the practice that came to be known as Muntzing , which involved simplifying otherwise complicated electronic devices . Muntz produced and marketed the first black @-@ and @-@ white television receivers to sell for less than \$ 100 , and created one of the earliest functional widescreen projection TVs . He was credited with coining the abbreviation " TV " for television , although the term had earlier been in use in call letters for stations such as WCBS @-@ TV . A high school dropout , Muntz made fortunes by selling automobiles , TV receivers , and car stereos and tapes . A 1968 Los Angeles Times article noted that in one year he sold \$ 72 million worth of cars , that five years later he sold \$ 55 million worth of TV receivers , and that in 1967 he sold \$ 30 million worth of car stereos and tapes .

After his success as a used car salesman and with Kaiser @-@ Frazer dealerships in Los Angeles and New York City , Muntz founded the Muntz Car Company , which made the " Muntz Jet " , a sports car with jet @-@ like contours . The car was manufactured between 1951 and 1953 , although fewer than 400 were produced .

Muntz married seven times . His wives included actress Joan Barton (who appeared in Angel and the Badman with John Wayne) and Patricia Stevens of the Patricia Stevens Finishing Schools . Phyllis Diller was among his many girlfriends . He was friends with celebrities such as singer Rudy Vallee , comedian Jerry Colonna , actor Bert Lahr , television presenter Dick Clark , and cowboy actor Gene Autry .

= = Early career : 1922 ? 1953 = =

Muntz was fascinated by electronics from an early age . He built his first radio at age 8 and built another for his parents ' car at age 14 . During the Great Depression , at age 15 , he dropped out of Elgin High School to work in his parents ' hardware store in Elgin , Illinois .

= = = Car sales = = =

In 1934 , Muntz opened his first used car lot , in Elgin , with a \$ 500 (\$ 9 @,@ 000 in 2016) line of credit . He was only 20 years old , and his mother had to sign the car @-@ sale papers because legally he was too young to close his own deals . During a vacation in California , Muntz discovered that used cars sold there for far higher prices ; so he moved to California in 1940 at age 26 to open a used car lot in Glendale . On a hunch , he purchased 13 brand @-@ new right @-@ hand @-@ drive vehicles to resell . These vehicles had been built for customers in Asia , but could not be delivered due to World War II . One vehicle was a custom @-@ made Lincoln built for Chiang Kai @-@ shek . Local newspapers ran stories about the unusual cars , and Muntz sold them all within two weeks , still in their original shipping crates . Muntz soon opened a second lot in Los Angeles and closed his lot in Elgin .

Muntz rejected the then common opinion that used car salesmen should project a staid image . He realized the possibilities of generating publicity with odd stunts , and developed a " Madman " persona as a result . His flamboyant billboards and oddball television and radio commercials soon made him famous . In his used auto commercials , he marketed one model as the " daily special " ; Muntz claimed that if the car did not sell that day , he would smash it to pieces on camera with a sledgehammer . Another infamous Muntz used @-@ car TV pitch was " I buy ' em retail and sell ' em wholesale ... it 's more fun that way ! " His commercials generated so much publicity that

comedians such as Bob Hope , Jack Benny , and Steve Allen often tried to outdo each other during television appearances by telling " Madman " Muntz jokes . University of Southern California fans would spell out Muntz 's name during halftime as a prank .

Muntz 's car lots became tourist attractions due to the widespread publicity from his television commercial appearances . A 1946 survey by Panner Motor Tours revealed that they ranked seventh among tourist attractions in Southern California . Muntz was willing to take large risks in his attempts to generate publicity . During the era of McCarthyism , he asked one of his advisers , " Do you think I 'd make the front pages if I joined the Communist Party ? "

= = = Muntz Jet = = =

In 1948 , race car designer and Kurtis @-@ Kraft founder Frank Kurtis attempted to market a new sports car , the two @-@ seater Kurtis Kraft Sport . Only 36 units had been sold by 1950 . In 1951 , for just \$ 200 @,@ 000 (\$ 1 @.@ 8 million in 2016) Kurtis sold the cars ' manufacturing license to Muntz , who quickly rebadged them as the " Muntz Jet " . Initial production of the Jet took place in Glendale , where Muntz extended the two @-@ seater Kurtis Kraft Sport 's body by 13 inches (33 cm) , making it a four @-@ seater , and exchanged the Ford V8 engine for a larger Cadillac V8 . Later , after making just 28 Jets in California , Muntz moved production to a new factory in Evanston , Illinois , extended the body further by 3 inches (8 cm) , and replaced the Cadillac V8 with a less expensive Lincoln sidevalve V8 .

The Jet was featured on the cover of the September 1951 issue of Popular Science along with a Jaguar and an MG . It featured its own design , with aluminum body panels and a removable fiberglass top . Paint schemes were extravagant , with names like " Mars Red " , " Stratosphere Blue " , and " Lime Mist " , and interior options included alligator or Spanish leatherette . The backseat armrests contained a full cocktail bar .

The Jet was capable of a top speed of 125 miles per hour (201 km / h) and acceleration of 0 ? 50 mph (0 ? 80 km / h) in 6 seconds , a significant achievement for a road car at the time . The fastest production car in 1953 was the Pegaso Z @-@ 102 Supercharged sports car at 155 miles per hour (249 km / h) . Jet owners included then @-@ CEO of CBS Frank Stanton , and actors Mickey Rooney and Lash La Rue .

The labor and materials required to produce the Jet resulted in a high price for the end product and , in 1954 , after selling about 400 cars and losing about \$ 1 @,@ 000 (\$ 9 @,@ 000 in 2016) on each , Muntz closed the company . Today , Muntz Jets are prized collector cars and are recognized as predecessors to the Chevrolet Corvette and Ford Thunderbird .

= = = Muntz TV = = =

Muntz started plans to sell television receivers in 1946 , and sales began in 1947 . Muntz played the madman in his unorthodox television commercials , but in fact he was a shrewd businessman and a self @-@ taught electrical engineer . By trial and error , taking apart and studying Philco , RCA , and DuMont televisions , he figured out how to reduce the devices ' electrical components to their minimum functional number . This practice became known as " Muntzing " .

In the 1940s and 1950s , most brands of television receivers were complicated pieces of equipment , commonly containing about 30 vacuum tubes , as well as rheostats , transformers , and other heavy components . As a result , they were usually very expensive : the cheapest U.S.-manufactured receiver made before World War II used a 3 @-@ inch (8 cm) screen and cost \$ 125 (\$ 2 @,@ 126 in 2016) ; the cheapest model with a 12 @-@ inch (30 cm) screen cost \$ 445 (\$ 7 @,@ 570 in 2016) . By 1954 , although broadcast television in the United States had existed in various forms since 1928 , only 55 percent of U.S. households owned a receiver . By contrast , eight years later , 90 percent of U.S. households had one .

Muntz developed a television chassis that produced an acceptable monochrome picture with 17 tubes . He often carried a pair of wire clippers , and when he thought that one of his employees was " overengineering " a circuit , he would begin snipping components out until the picture or sound

stopped working . At that point , he would tell the engineer " Well , I guess you have to put that last part back in " and walk away .

Marketed under the name " Muntz " by his company Muntz TV , Inc . , the simplified units were the first black and white TV receivers to retail in the U.S. for less than \$ 100 . Muntz was also the first retailer to measure his screens from corner to corner rather than by width . The receivers sold well and were reliable partly because fewer tubes created less heat . The sets worked well in metropolitan areas that were close to television transmission towers where signals were strong . They worked poorly with weaker signals , as most of the components that Muntz had removed were intended to boost performance in fringe areas . This was a calculated decision : Muntz preferred to leave the low @-@ volume , high @-@ performance television receiver market to firms such as RCA and Zenith Electronics , as his intended customers were primarily urban dwellers with limited funds . Additionally , many urban apartment buildings had rules prohibiting external television aerials , and installation of an aerial , even if allowed , cost as much as \$ 150 . Muntz solved this problem by adding a built @-@ in aerial to his receivers . In 1952 , Muntz TV Inc. grossed \$ 49 @.@ 9 million (\$ 445 million in 2016) .

Muntz continued with his " Madman " persona in many of his advertisements . In one TV commercial that normally aired after The Ed Sullivan Show , Muntz , dressed in red long johns and a Napoleon hat , promoted his new 14 @-@ inch (36 cm) televisions by saying , " I wanna give ' em away , but Mrs. Muntz won 't let me . She 's crazy ! " Another TV commercial presented a marching @-@ band song with lyrics about Muntz TVs and incorporated animations by Oskar Fischinger . His radio commercials , which Muntz ran up to 170 times a day , initially followed a classical music theme built around the spelling of Muntz 's name . However , he soon convinced radio stations to run ads more in line with his persona . In one spot , Muntz screamed " Stop staring at your radio ! " He followed up his radio ads with a direct mail campaign , collecting thousands of TV knobs and mailing them to prospective customers with a note saying , " Call us and we 'll show up with the rest of the set ! "

Some sources credit Muntz with inventing the abbreviation " TV " . Muntz used skywriting as one of his marketing tactics , but , after watching one of his ads being created , he noted that the letters began to blur and dissipate before the pilot could finish spelling out " Muntz Televisions " . So Muntz came up with the abbreviation " TV " . However , " TV " had earlier been used in the call letters of television stations , such as WCBS @-@ TV , which adopted those call letters in 1946 . Muntz also named his daughter " Tee Vee " , although she normally went by " Teena " and , later , " Tee " .

= = Audio and video : 1954 ? 1985 = =

Despite his early success , sales later declined and Muntz 's creditors refused to provide further financing in 1954 . Muntz admitted his business lost \$ 1 @,@ 457 @,@ 000 from April to August 1953 , and although he tried to reorganize , Muntz TV filed bankruptcy and went out of business in 1959 . (The company would be reorganized and last through the 1960s , but without its namesake at the helm .) However , Muntz 's success continued in the sales of cars and general consumer electronics .

= = = 4 @-@ track cartridge = = =

Attempting to combine his two main product lines , cars and stereos , Muntz invented the Muntz Stereo @-@ Pak 4 @-@ track tape cartridge . 4 @-@ track was the direct predecessor of the Stereo 8 cartridge , also known as the 8 @-@ track , later developed by American inventor Bill Lear . The Stereo @-@ Pak cartridge was based on the endless @-@ loop Fidelipac cartridge , which was being used by radio stations , designed by inventor George Eash . Muntz chose stereo recording as a standard feature because of its wide availability . Before Muntz developed the Stereo @-@ Pak , the only in @-@ car units capable of recorded playback were phonograph @-@ based players , such as the Highway Hi @-@ Fi invented by Peter Goldmark . These units played special 162 ? 3 rpm records or 45 rpm records , however they tended to skip whenever the vehicle hit a

bump in the road , and attempts to alleviate this by increasing the pressure on the arm caused discs to wear out prematurely .

Muntz designed a stereo tape player called the Autostereo for cars and had it inexpensively manufactured in Japan . The Autostereo could play a complete album without changing tracks or turning the tape over , did not suffer from skipping or premature wear as the phonograph @-@ based players did , and its number of knobs and controls were minimized to allow the driver to concentrate on the road . The tape player gave customers greater control over their listening experiences , because the tapes never ran advertisements or public service announcements , unlike radio broadcasts . Muntz sold the players and cartridges from his own stores and through franchises in Florida and Texas .

Muntz audio products were so profitable by 1962 that he cancelled his agreements with tape @-@ duplicating companies and founded his own company to manufacture prerecorded Stereo @-@ Pak cartridges . Most record companies did not manufacture Stereo @-@ Pak cartridges themselves ; however , the Muntz Electronics Corporation licensed music from all the major record labels and issued hundreds of different tapes in the mid to late 1960s . Muntz exhibited his Autostereo players and Stereo @-@ Pak cartridges under the trade name Stereo @-@ Pak at the 1967 Consumer Electronics Show .

The Autostereo player , which retailed from \$ 129 in 1963 (\$ 1 @, @ 000 in 2016) was a popular aftermarket addition to cars among the Beverly Hills rich and famous . Frank Sinatra used one in his Buick Riviera , Dean Martin in his Corvette , and Peter Lawford in his Ghia . James Garner , Red Skelton , and Lawrence Welk also used Autostereo players in their cars . Barry Goldwater purchased one for his son , and Jerry Lewis recorded his scripts onto Stereo @-@ Pak cartridges to learn his lines while driving .

Muntz attempted to establish a modern , trendy image for his players and cartridges . His print advertisements often showed the player installed in an appealing sports car and usually incorporated a young , attractive model with a suggestive tagline . Most of his employees in his California shops were attractive young women dressed in overbright clothing .

Bill Lear distributed the Stereo @-@ Pak in 1963 , intending to install units in his Learjet aircraft . However , he soon decided to re @-@ engineer and customize the units to suit his own wishes , the result of which became the Stereo 8 system . The market for Muntz 's 4 @-@ track system had faded by 1970 due to competition from Stereo 8 , which reduced costs by using less magnetic tape and a less @-@ complex cartridge mechanism . Although the 4 @-@ track system had higher fidelity since the tape speed was double the speed of the Stereo 8 system (and the 4 @-@ track had wider heads for better bandwidth) , the Stereo 8 quickly became the dominant format for car stereo systems during the late 1960s . Ford Motor Company began featuring Stereo 8 players in their 1965 automobiles , and it became a standard option by 1966 .

In a 1979 interview in The Videophile newsletter , Muntz revealed the biggest problem for the Stereo @-@ Pak business was returned merchandise . He explained that when reproducing the work of major artists like The Beatles , the Stereo @-@ Pak plant had to make hundreds of thousands of cartridges . But once a popular album became less popular , retailers would return the unsold cartridges , expecting credit towards new titles . Muntz was unprepared for the returns and said the huge cost of unsold merchandise eventually made his Stereo @-@ Pak business unprofitable .

== = Home video == =

In late 1970 , Muntz closed his Stereo @-@ Pak audio business after a fire severely damaged his main offices . He then entered the growing home @-@ video market . During the mid @-@ 1970s , Muntz thought of taking a 15 @-@ inch (38 cm) Sony color cathode ray tube (CRT) television receiver , fitting it with a special lens and reflecting mirror , then projecting the magnified image onto a larger screen . He housed these primitive units in a large wooden console , making it one of the first successful widescreen projection TV receivers marketed for home use .

The receivers were built in Muntz 's headquarters in Van Nuys , California . Sony 's U.S. sales

division was unaware that Muntz was dealing directly with Sony 's Tokyo original equipment manufacturer (OEM) department , which shipped him the TV chassis directly . Thanks to Muntz 's talent for mass @-@ market advertising and self @-@ promotion , by 1977 the projection receivers were a multimillion @-@ dollar business . Muntz was quick to feature Sony 's Betamax as well as JVC 's and RCA 's VHS recorders in his store , setting up a showroom to demonstrate the potential for a " theater experience in the home " .

In 1979 , Muntz decided to sell blank tapes and VCRs as loss leaders to attract customers to his showroom , where he would then try to sell them his projection TV systems . His success continued through the early 1980s until he invested heavily in the Technicolor Compact Video Cassette (CVC) , a 1 / 4 in (0 @. @ 6 cm) system designed to compete with Betamax , VHS , and the Super 8 film home @-@ movie system . The CVC format failed in the marketplace , sales quickly eroded , and Muntz 's store closed soon after .

= = Later years = =

Shortly before dying of lung cancer in 1987 , Muntz centered his retail business on cellular phones , satellite dishes , a motorhome rental company dubbed " Muntz Motor Mansions " , and prefabricated aluminum houses . He made headlines in February 1985 as the first retailer to offer a Hitachi cellular phone for less than \$ 1 @, @ 000 (\$ 2 @, @ 200 in 2016) , when just two years earlier most cellular phones had cost about \$ 3 @, @ 000 (\$ 7 @, @ 100 in 2016) . At the time of his death , he was the leading retailer of cellular phones in Los Angeles . During his final years , Muntz drove a customized Lincoln Continental with a television installed in the dashboard : Muntz claimed it helped him " drive better " .

After he died , his children , James and Tee , continued to operate two Muntz stores in Van Nuys and Newhall ; the remainder of the stores were franchised businesses . James employed his father 's advertising techniques to create splashy ads featuring prices that annoyed his competitors so much that they referred to them as " cutthroat " .

= = Legacy = =

The " Madman " method pioneered by Muntz was later copied by other retailers , including California car salesman Cal Worthington and New York area electronics chain Crazy Eddie . In Crazy Eddie TV commercials , radio personality Jerry Carroll leapt at the camera and jumped around while jabbering at high speed , always ending with the line , " Crazy Eddie : Our prices are insaaaaaane ! " As a result of his Crazy Eddie commercials , Carroll became a significant 80s icon , even appearing in the film Splash .

Muntz 's cultural impact was such that he was mentioned in novels , including children 's book The Neddiad : How Neddie Took The Train , Went To Hollywood , And Saved Civilization by Daniel Manus Pinkwater , The Lost Get @-@ Back Boogie by James Lee Burke , and Franklin Mason 's Four Roses in Three Acts .

A production called Madman Muntz : American Maverick was screened at film festivals through 2007 . Directed by Dan Bunker and Judy ver Mehr , it was produced by Jim Castoro , an owner of an original Muntz Jet . The film was an official 2005 selection at the San Fernando Valley International Film Festival and the Ole Muddy Film Festival . The film documents Muntz 's life , paying particular attention to his colorful career , and includes interviews with people who knew him and home movie footage contributed by his children .

The KCET 1997 documentary More Things That Aren 't Here Anymore has a segment on Muntz and is broadcast by the station regularly during pledge periods .

In 2001 , Madman Muntz was posthumously inducted into the Consumer Electronics Hall of Fame .