

# The SUPERADIO III

## A Brief Review

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Being a long-time fan of the General Electric Superadio, I was eagerly anticipating the arrival of the new Superadio III. This was especially true because the "III" was touted as having dual selectivities and I had tried several years ago to install a narrow ceramic filter in my old "A" model without success (that is, without excessive insertion loss or leakage). Because I couldn't find a "III" in Pensacola and because my wife was planning a visit to Tucson, AZ, I asked her to look out for a Superadio III and buy a couple (one for me and one for my local DXing buddy, Charlie Barfield) if she came across any. She called to say she had found them priced at \$39.95 at a discount store. This was well below list price and I was ecstatic—"How lucky could I get? The upgraded "III" model with dual selectivity and at a lower cost than my old Superadio II! Hot Dang!" Well, to make a long story (i.e., "review") short, the Superadio III is a bummer (in my humble opinion, and based on an examination of only two samples).

### Packaging Impressions

The first tip-off to my impending gloom was the description of the dual selectivity feature printed on the outside of the box. Instead of saying the usual "Wide" and "Narrow" for the two selectivity positions, the description talked about WIDE and NORMAL; (What? That's a strange way of labeling selectivities, I thought). And this dual selectivity feature was called "AM Accent"—not a radio electronics engineering term I had ever heard of before. Oh well, all the other heart-string-strumming words were there—*Tuned RF on AM, Large 7-7/8" Ferrite Rod, Long Range Reception*, and so on. So, I opened the box and found a very handsome, black with chrome trim radio about the same size as the older Supers.

### Turning It On

The first thing I noticed upon applying power to the "III" was what seemed to be an uncharacteristically high level of "hiss" to all but the strongest of local signals. As I tuned down the dial, I noticed that the dial read-out seemed to be pretty consistently 30-40 kHz off from the actual frequency but my real shock came as I started to notice "birdies" at several places across the band, apparently the result of my strongest local WRNE-980 (a moderate strength 10 kWer). The old Superadio II never had trouble with any of my locals. Hmm. What's going on here? There was no apparent answer so I decided to try the dual selectivity feature and, as it turns out, the label on the controls is accurate—the selectivity is WIDE and NORMAL (not NORMAL and NARROW as I would have preferred). The only difference between the WIDE and NORMAL positions is an increase in the hiss level in the WIDE position; any improvement in fidelity was minimal (I guess because the NORMAL position pretty well passes most of the AM audio band already). I had to find out what in the world was going on here so...

### Off With The Back

I noticed as I was removing the screws on the back of the radio that, whereas earlier models of the Superadio were made in Japan, Taiwan, or Malaysia, this fellow was made in China! Removing the back revealed even more surprises. The first was that there was only one circuit board (earlier Supers had isolated the RF/Oscillator sections on a board separate from the IF/AF sections). The second BIG surprise was THERE WAS NO VARIABLE CAPACITOR!!! THEY WERE USING VARACTOR DIODES TO TUNE THE THING! Now, it is definitely possible to design a perfectly adequate radio using varactor diodes but the engineers who put the Superadio III together obviously flunked the course. Things were becoming clearer—this radio was not designed for performance, it was designed for profit margin. A tear almost came to my eye as I recalled the beautiful metal, multi-ganged, relatively expensive, air-gap variable capacitor that tuned the old Superadios;

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here I was looking at a single, cheap potentiometer controlling at least five varactor diodes. As far as the dual selectivity feature goes, there's no sign of an AM ceramic filter; I think (though I'm not sure; I don't have a schematic) in the WIDE position a Q-spoiling resistor is simply switched in. It is really a shame that such a venerable nameplate as the Superadio has been reduced to this.

### Attempts At Improvement

I spent a couple of hours the next day trying to align the various sections of the beast with only minimal success—it's just a poor design.

### Performance—HA!

In the daytime, I get nine stations; none farther than 50 kW WWL-870 in New Orleans. At night, things pick up so that almost every channel has a station detectable (but my \$9.95 clock radio does too).

FM? Audio was great, AFC worked fine, DXability? I don't do much FM DXing so I don't feel qualified to comment.

At this point, my disgust was just too overwhelming to continue. Charlie Barfield reports similar non-results so my findings apparently aren't a fluke. And given the engineering/manufacturing short-cuts I saw inside the radio, it's unlikely, in my opinion, that dramatically different findings would occur with different samples.

### Conclusions

The Superadio III is a major disappointment. If you want to experience a really super radio, run to your electronics stores and try to find some remaining Superadio IIs. Pay extra, if you have to, but think twice about purchasing the Superadio III; that would only encourage General Electric's Consumer Electronics Division to continue offering low-performance/high profit margin products.