



## ***Made in Japan transistor radios: Sissy's Radio***

*by Lello Salvatore \**

*English translation edited by Robert Davidson*

### **A bit of history**

Probably the reader will be surprised to read the title of this article and will wonder who this Sissy is. Yes, Sissy, or better written, Sissi, is the nickname of an aristocrat, such Elisabeth Amalia Eugenia of Wittelsbach, born Duchess in Munich of Bavaria on 24-12-1837 and then became Empress of Austria and Queen of Hungary as consort of Emperor Franz Joseph belonging to the House of Habsburg-Lorraine. In the twentieth century, thanks to the success of the trilogy of films directed in the fifties by the Austrian director Ernst Marischka, Elisabeth became famous with the name of Princess Sissi<sup>1</sup>.

At the time when Empress Sissi lived, it had just been demonstrated (1886) by the German scientist Heinrich Hertz, the existence of electromagnetic waves, and wireless (wireless telegraphy), was there to arrive, thanks to the two scientists Guglielmo Marconi (1896)<sup>2</sup> and Nikola Tesla. In Europe, in the German world in particular, in the 1950s, '60s and '70s, radio models were marketed under the names of women: Mirella of the Austrian company Minerva or even Grazietta, of the Austrian Siemens, or Simonetta, of the Germanic brand Quelle, are just a few examples. Think then to call a radio with the name of Sissi, the empress whose fame had now become world-wide thanks above all to the three films dedicated to her, interpreted by the beautiful Romy Schneider between 1955 and 1958, was undoubtedly a stroke of genius that came to the marketing director of Japan Electric Corporation, the Japanese company that commercialized 60s, the small pocket receiver: figures 1 and 2 proudly show off the name Sissy (written in a variant that places a 'y' in place of the final 'i').



**Fig.1**



**Fig.2**

<sup>1</sup> Princess Sissi (Sissi) is the title of the first of a trilogy of films dedicated to this historical character by the director Ernst Marischka. The film was produced by Erma-Film, distributed in Austria by Sascha Filmverleih and presented in Vienna on 21-12-1955. Given its great success, the film enjoyed worldwide distribution and various re-releases. It should be noted that the correct nickname of the empress is Sisi with only one of the es. Some argue that the original nickname was Lisi (classic diminutive of the German name Elisabeth), became Sisi following an error by Francesco Giuseppe. The Sissi version, with two of them, is due to the famous films of the fifties, while still in Austria they prefer the traditional Sisi version, used in the name of the museum dedicated to her ("Sisi Museum" at the Vienna Hofburg)

<sup>2</sup> From the web page: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Invention\\_of\\_radio](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Invention_of_radio)

## Beauties made in Japan

Japanese pocket radios are considered by collectors of this kind the most beautiful in the world. I have already had the opportunity to talk in other issues of ARM on the technique of "reverse painting"<sup>3</sup> used by Japanese manufacturers to decorate their radios, their small tuning dials in particular. But not all manufacturers (see for example Sony itself) used this technique or even managed to create really nice models. And this is precisely the case of our Sissy that does not have a reverse-painted dial but has on its entire face a protruding metal insert of a shimmering gold color in the center of which is a circular speaker grill. The upper part of the insert bears the inscription Sissy, 6 TRANSISTOR and immediately below it a small emblem in the shape of an enlarged "V", in the center of which there is the stylized letter "T". On the right side (fig.2), on the back, there is a numerical tuning knob which also shows the two American Civil Defense (CD)<sup>4</sup> triangles; on this little knob, a protruding gold-colored pointer indicates the tuned frequency. On the left side there is the volume knob and the earphone jack for individual listening. Regarding the letter "T", beginner collectors but also the more experienced ones, always attentive to details, ask themselves the meaning of this "T" without easily arriving at a certain answer. In their help comes my experience as a collector who finds further confirmation in the information available on the catalogs of radio collecting as well as in that inexhaustible mine of information that is the web. Just at the web page <http://www.jamesbutters.com/aerog607.htm> of the New Zealand collector friend James J Butters, another radio (I will tell you later) is presented which almost identical to our Sissy and frontally equipped with the same letter "T". From him we learn that this "T" is the initial of the name of the Japanese company that produces this and several other radios: the Tokai Wireless Co. Ltd., Tokyo (J). On the web page [http://www.radiomuseum.org/dsp\\_hersteller\\_detail.cfm?company\\_id=6986](http://www.radiomuseum.org/dsp_hersteller_detail.cfm?company_id=6986) of the Swiss website Radiomuseum.org, we further learn that Tokai had a German subsidiary, Deutsche Tokai GmbH, in Köln (Cologne) at Rolandstrasse 74, which specialized in transceiver devices. From another friend, Adriano Michelini, whom I dutifully thank, I received a very

interesting ad (Fig.3) published on page 21 of the issue 252 of August 1960 of the Italian prestigious vintage magazine **Radio Industria**.

The advertising shows the minimal size of this radio device as compared with a pack of cigarettes and it also shows that Japan Electric Corporation, a distributor, clearly for Tokai Wireless Co. Ltd., had its own European office in Berlin- West with deposit and general representative in the person of Julius Lehrer in that of Lugano (CH) - Piazza Cioccaro, 12, yes indeed in Italian Switzerland. The advertisement is also very useful for us to know with good approximation the year of manufacture of the object.

**Mi chiamo SISSY**  
**e sono la più piccola Radio**  
**del mondo con 6 transistori**



*Io sono progettata con i principi più moderni e sono per voi creata; e sarò per voi l'amica fedele per il futuro.*

*Il tono della mia voce è perfetto e spero di farvi molta compagnia.*

*Accogliete i miei più sinceri saluti.*

**SISSY**

**JAPAN ELECTRIC CORPORATION**  
EUROPA BÜRO  
**BERLIN W 30, GEISBERGSTR. 11**

Europa Lager und General Verfertigung:  
**JULIUS LEHRER**  
LUGANO (Suisse) - Piazza Cioccaro, 12 - Tel. 25259

### Technical features

Sissy is a small radio and I would say that it can better be called a palm radio than a pocket radio: it sits comfortably in the hand of a girl or in the pocket of a T-shirt with 73 mm of height, 54 of width and 23 of thickness. On the back side (Fig. 4) there is the adhesive sticker inscription "JAPAN" while inside the back face (Fig. 5) is glued a label that shows the technical data of

<sup>3</sup> For the meaning of the terms, the reader is referred to one of the following issues of the Journal: 77, 86 or 102.

<sup>4</sup> Further information on this subject, on the article dedicated to Radialba 6 transistor published in n. 89 of ARM.

the small receiver: number of transistors (6 + 1 transistors), type receiver (super heterodyne), operating frequency range in kilocycles (frequency 535-1605 kC) and intermediate frequency (IF 455 kC).



Fig 4

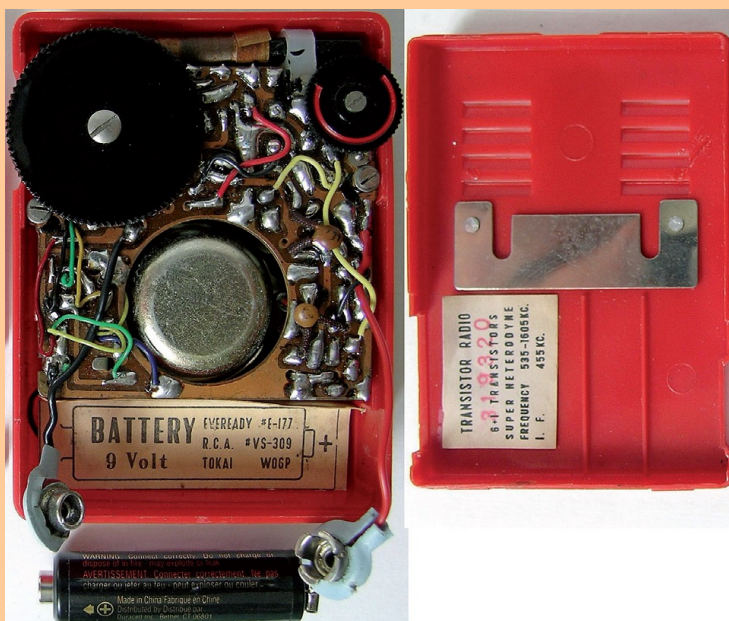


Fig.5

By removing the back panel you have a view of the soldered side of the chassis (Fig. 5) and just unscrew two screws and the earpiece of the headset to completely extract the chassis from its plastic cabinet (Fig. 6). Figure 6 shows a very compact assembly of components in a small space,



Fig.6

reduced to a minimum: this was the typical construction technique of radio equipment made in Japan at that time! On the chassis are visible almost all the components used: from intermediate-frequency transformers, in the foreground (their tops black, white and yellow), to the oscillator coil (red); from the tuning capacitor of solid dielectric to the two transformers in the audio frequency stages in the background; from passive components (resistors and capacitors) to active elements, diodes and transistors. As far as the transistors, three of which of type 2SA for use in the high frequency stages and other three of type 2SB used in the low frequency stages of the set, they are marked on their cylindrical case with the lettering "TEN". I had already mentioned the **TEN** branded transistors in n. 102 of ARM, about the Boy's Radios of the Hinode. I only remind you that they were built by Kobe Kogyo Corporation, a pioneer company along with Sony in the construction of the first Japanese transistor devices. All these components are appropriately joined together to form the classic circuit (universally used in pocket receivers of that period) of a

superheterodyne radio set operating on the medium waves (BC), that is to say with frequency conversion and a push-pull output stage like the one shown in figure 7. The function of each indivi-

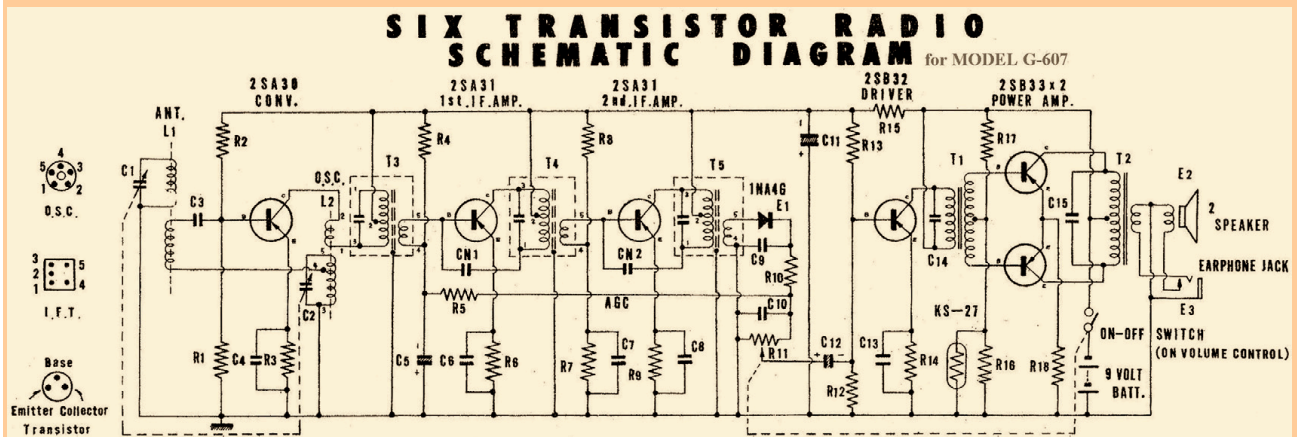


Fig.7

vidual transistor is clearly indicated in the same. The schematic is the one taken directly from the packaging (Fig. 8), that is, from the box in which this radio set was stored together with all the other accessories supplied with it. The model of radio stated on the packaging is the **G-607**. A more complete and detailed version of this scheme is the one made by the famous US house Howard W. Sams & Co., Inc. Indianapolis, Indiana, published in set 564 of folder 14, dated 1-62, or in volume 16 of their lords schematic, the TSM (Transistor Service Manuals). Our small radio was supplied by a 9-volt battery, different from the modern one with a standardized format. In common with the modern one, the old battery, almost cylindrical in size, has only the dimensions of the two metal contacts which are placed at opposite ends. Depending on the manufacturer, this particular battery took the name of Eveready # E-177 or R.C.A. # VS-309 or TOKAI WOGP. Although no longer in common use, it is reproduced again as a battery for special uses for the US market and, in this era of globalized market, it can easily be bought online in that country, from which comes the example shown in the figure 5.



Fig.8

### A.k.a. Radios

Attention: this is not the name of a radio company or a Japanese trademark! With the term a.k.a. radios, American collectors usually indicate all those small transistor radios that although

identical in cabinet design and without or even with small external differences (friezes, badges, decorations and the like) and all with the same chassis, although coming from the same parent company, they were marketed under several different names or sometimes even with different model numbers. A.k.a. radio stands indeed for "*also known as*". There are so many Japanese radios with these minimal differences or, in other words, that have so much in common that to name them all would be a long list. Only experienced collectors with a wealth of knowledge of many models and brands can argue about this, and two collectors have tried doing so: Norman Smith in his beautiful book "Transistor Radios 1954-1968" published in 1998 by Schiffer Publishing Ltd. and Robert Davidson with his web pages on the subject at the address: <http://www.abetterpage.com/transistors/trans/MasterIndex/1naka.html>

To this family of radios our Sissy radio belongs well, since at least her manufacturer Tokai came out with two twin sisters who bring, the own name TOKAI in good sight (on page 106 of Smith's book) and the other that of HONEYTONE, visible on page 38 of the splendid "Made in Japan" photo book-catalog, published in 1993 by the "Chronicle Books" of San Francisco. Two other sisters (not twins though) of Sissy bear the name AERO and MONARCH. In the AERO model, the small emblem under the name of the radio has the shape of two wings in the middle of which, in place of the stylized "T" there is a small winged horse. The MONARCH model, visible on page 104 of Italian "Transistor Radios" guide<sup>1</sup>, despite having the same plastic cabinet and chassis, differs for the front grille that is not circular but rectangular. Also among the Boy's Radios, told in n. 102 of the magazine, there are a.k.a. radio, models almost identical to each other but sold with the most diverse names, as is the case with Coronet. An Italian example of aka radio that comes to mind is precisely the "Transix" model of the SNT also known (by few, I add) as "CARISCH Baby". Who does not remember it can see it in my article on Transix available on n. 92 of the magazine.

Not having certain data and, moreover, for the nice name that can easily be associated with that of the famous princess of Austria-Hungary, I can affirm, without fear of denial, that the Sissy model built by Tokai Wireless Co. Ltd., it has been designed especially for the European market, for that of the German area particularly.

### Sissi and Italy

The beautiful and sensitive Sissi, became a very young empress (the wedding was celebrated on April 24, 1854) and because of her education and her character it was not easy for her to adapt to the rigid ceremonial court of Vienna. The frequent disagreements with her mother-in-law, Archduchess Sophia, and her poor state of health, often took her away from the court for long and frequent stays in pleasant places with climates milder than Austria's. Madeira, an isle of Portugal off the Atlantic, represented for Sissi, the first real great escape from the Viennese court. Among the favorite destinations of the sovereign there was also Italy<sup>1</sup> more especially those localities that then reentered in the provinces of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, in particular Trieste, in the region Venezia Giulia, and Merano in Venice Tridentina (Trentino-Alto Adige or Tyrol for Austrian at that time). Trieste and the small spa town of Merano are in fact the Italian towns where the memory of Sissi is more alive and tangible. Also in the then "*Welschtirol*" (term with which the German-speaking population indicated the old Italian Tyrol, ie the current Trentino up to the small country of Borghetto) also the beautiful location of Campiglio, enclosed in the beautiful scenery of the Brenta Dolomites (Western Trentino) hosted twice (in September 1889 and later, with the consort emperor, in July 1894 ) Elizabeth of Austria. Even today in Madonna di Campiglio (TN), "Pearl of the Dolomites", Princess Sissi and Emperor Franz Joseph parade on the annual

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<sup>1</sup> This "Transistor Radios" book is a practice guide for buyer and seller of pocket transistor radios. It was published in the 1999 by the Italian journal Antique Radio Magazine. Further information at: [http://www.antiqueradio.it/ARM/index.php?page=shop.product\\_details&flypage=flypage.tpl&product\\_id=191&category\\_id=8&option=com\\_virtuemart&Itemid=66](http://www.antiqueradio.it/ARM/index.php?page=shop.product_details&flypage=flypage.tpl&product_id=191&category_id=8&option=com_virtuemart&Itemid=66)

<sup>1</sup> Find out more about the trips of Elizabeth' of Austria (in Italian language): <http://www.elisabeth-sissi.org/elisabeth-sissi-luoghi.php?link=5>

anniversary of the "Hapsburg Carnival", a historical reenactment of the ancient life at the imperial court that this year (2013) reaches its 30th edition. The myth of Sissi remains so still alive and current. After more than 50 years from the famous trilogy of films, three years ago, on February 28th and March 1st 2010, on one programm of the Italian public television, Rai Uno aired on prime time a TV miniseries dedicated to Elisabeth of Baviera, co-produced by Austria, Germany and Italy, directed by another Austrian director, Xaver Schwarzenberger in which Sissi is played by a rising star of Italian cinema, the beautiful and equally good actress Cristiana Capotondi<sup>1</sup>. And our Sissy, the shirt pocket radio of course not the aristocratic character, also arrived it in Italy? It seems so, given that what you can admire in these pages, from the collection of my friend Gabriele Galleazzi (whom I thank for having made available) has landed through e-Bay.it, after having belonged for decades to a man of Brindisi, in the easternmost of the Italian regions, the far Apuly (*Puglia* in Italian) in the South of Italy.

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*Lello Salvatore*

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[http://www.antiqueradio.it/ARM/index.php?page=shop.product\\_details&flypage=flypage.tpl&product\\_id=293&category\\_id=13&option=com\\_virtuemart&Itemid=62](http://www.antiqueradio.it/ARM/index.php?page=shop.product_details&flypage=flypage.tpl&product_id=293&category_id=13&option=com_virtuemart&Itemid=62)

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<sup>1</sup> See also Wikipedia at the web address: [http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sissi\\_%28miniserie\\_televisiva%29](http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sissi_%28miniserie_televisiva%29)