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Sony to Cassette: SayonaraBy *STEPHEN WILLIAMS*

Last week [Sony](#) confirmed that it has ceased making tape-based Walkman players in Japan, where the first one debuted in 1979.

In the United States, the cassette began to fall out of favor more than a quarter-century ago, following the demise of the eight-track tape player. When compact disc players became the sound source of choice for portable use and in automobiles, it was apparent that the cassette, despite its ability to easily record, was doomed.

Efforts were made to digitize tape with the introduction of technologies like DAT, or digital audio tape, and the D.C.C., or digital compact cassette. Both failed to interest consumers.

The TPS-L2, the original Walkman tape player.

Through the years the manufacture of Sony's tape-based Walkman migrated from Japan to other countries, including Malaysia and China. Sony said that it would still be making Walkman products in China for Asian and other markets, including units that play CDs, minidiscs and MP3 files.

But it was the Japanese-made machines that retained the hip factor and were most coveted by Walkman collectors. The supply of those is expected to dry up early next year.

The late Akio Morita, one of Sony's founders, believed in the late 70's that the world would embrace a portable "personal" stereo machine that used headphones. He was right.

Sony says that it sold more than 400 million Walkman-branded products through this past March, and more than half that number were cassette-based models. A check of Sony's United States product [Web site](#) shows that it is still selling two cassette players, one a portable for \$30, the other a boombox player at \$50.

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