

Heathkit Receives Last Coffin Nail

Last month Heath Educational Services closed its doors - probably for good. Earlier, in 1992, with cheap electronics flooding the US market, surface mount technology becoming the electronic manufacturing norm and young Americans growing accustomed to instant gratification, Heathkit abandoned the electronic kit business.

In its heyday Heathkit offered kits that were lower in cost than equivalent store bought units, and were more maintainable - with spare parts easy to order and inexpensive. Heathkit also provided the buyer/builder the fun of assembly, the anticipation of the finished product and a genuine feeling of satisfaction when the kit was completed and working. The kits generally performed quite well; mostly they were on a par, if not superior, to their retail equivalents. The detail that went into the Heathkit manuals to make the assembly directions clear to the builder was legendary.

When Heath Company gave up the manufacture of kits in 1992 they did not die. Prior to 1992 Heath began a series of educational instructional courses with their Heath Educational Systems division. These courses were used by universities and schools; they were also available to private parties. Unfortunately the current long term economic downturn resulted in large reductions in state and federal funding for schools, and school spending dropped significantly - as did Heath's bottom line.

Recently Heath Educational Systems defaulted on its lease and filed for bankruptcy. It is now owned by a bank. A quick check shows that their website is gone and now held by a domain holding company and is for sale.

Early Heath Aviation History:

Edward Bayard Heath, born in 1888, started the E.B. Heath Aerial Vehicle Company around 1913 manufacturing and selling aircraft parts including large quantities of dope used to cover the fabric used in early aircraft construction. Heath bought the Bates Aeroplane Co. and merged the two companies into the Heath Airplane Company. Under the Heath Airplane Company name numerous aircraft were designed, built and sold, including: the "Feather", the "Favorite" in which pilot Heath won 3rd place in the "On to St. Louis" air race, the "Tomboy" in which Heath won 1st place in the National Air Races among a field of eight planes, the "Baby Bullet", the "Cannonball" and his most famous planes, the "Parasol" and the "Super Parasol". The Parasol could be purchased as plans, a kit or full assembled for \$595 in early 1928.

In February of 1931 Edward Heath was killed in the crash of a low-wing prototype of the Parasol. Eighty-one years later, in 2012, his company, which left the aircraft industry soon after World War II, closed up, likely for good.

Beginning the Kit Era:

In 1935 Howard Anthony purchased the bankrupt Heath Airplane Company. After WWII, with war surplus flooding the market, Anthony boldly purchased a large quantity of surplus electronic parts including 5BP1 cathode ray tubes. In 1947, using these parts, the first Heathkit was marketed - the O-1 oscilloscope which sold for \$39.95, less than half of what the equivalent manufactured scope was selling for.

In 1954 Howard Anthony, like Edward Heath, was killed in an aircraft accident. The company was sold in 1956 to Daystrom, Inc. ending what was known as the early Heathkit era during which over 200 kit models and kit accessories were manufactured. In 1962 Daystrom was purchased by the French Oilfield company Schlumberger. Schlumberger did little to interfere with the operations at Heathkit which continued to flourish. At its peak the Heathkit catalog offered over 300 models in 11 product lines. Heathkit occupied over 360,000 square feet of floor space in their Benton Harbor, Michigan facility.

In 1979 Heathkit was sold to Zenith, who pushed their line of Heath/Zenith computer products and seemed to care little about the other products or markets. This, atop the aging Heathkit marketing-base led to the decline of Heathkit. The Heath company became three separate entities, Heathkit, Heath/Zenith and Heath Data Systems, the last getting the brunt of the company resources. In 1992, further hurt by problems mentioned in the initial paragraph, the Heathkit division ceased. The Heath/Zenith division focused on the education market. Zenith Data Systems continued until 1996 when it merged with Packard Bell and NEC.

In 2011 Heath announced it was getting back into the kit business and introduced the GPA-100 Garage Parking Assistant. It also announced that the next kit planned was to be a swimming pool monitor. Unfortunately this effort was short lived.

73, from AF6C



Here is a one page excerpt from what could have been the last Heathkit Manual:

Refer to Pictorial 4 (fold out from page 24) for the following steps.

Position the container, completed in the last section, with the wider end to your left.

- () Place the three sections of foam padding into the container. Refer to Detail 4A for their correct orientation. Note that each foam section can be placed with either side down.
- () Carefully unfold the silk lining and lay it inside the container on top of the foam, being sure the wider end is towards your left as shown, and that the pre-sewn flaps are facing down.

Note: In the following steps you will be joining the foam to the pre-sewn folds in the silk using adhesive backed Velcro™ strips.

- () Locate the roll of Velcro™ tape from Package B. Cut 36 1" strips from the roll. Do not remove the protective backing tape at this time.
- () Remove the backing from a Velcro™ strip. At the top right corner of the rightmost foam pad secure the strip to the foam at location A. Refer to Detail 4B for the proper orientation of the strip.
- () Referring to Detail 4C join the nearby Velcro™ pad already attached to the silk flap to the Velcro™ strip, pressing firmly.
- () In a likewise manner install strips and attach the silk flap at locations B through AJ.
- () Carefully examine each attachment and make sure they are all firmly attached.

- () Pick up the previously completed Heath Company assembly and carefully place in the container. It will fit in only one direction.
- () Carefully fold the silk over the assembly and fasten with three 2" Velcro™ strips using the three pairs of Velcro™ pads sewn into the edge of the silk lining. See Detail 4D.

Refer to Pictorial 5 for the following steps.

- () Locate the wooden coffin lid.
- () Place it on top of the container so that the lips on the lid slide into the groove on the container. Be careful not to damage the lead seal located in the groove.
- () Using a #10 x 4" brass wood screw and a #10 decorative brass washer start a screw into the hole at location BA. Tighten the screw until the head is about 1/4" above the lid. See Detail 5A.
- () In a similar manner install a #10 x 4" brass wood screw and a #10 decorative brass washer at each of 23 locations, BB through BX.
- () Carefully tighten the 24 screws in the order shown in the Pictorial. Do not over-tighten.
- () Carefully check that each screw is secure.

This completes assembly of your Heathkit to end all Heathkits. Please continue to the Initial Checkout and Interment section on page 23.