Resist if you must
IT HAD TO happen. That most neglected of audio products—my cassette machine—recently reached the end of its useful life after years of uncomplaining wear-it-to-death use and I was faced with the task of replacing it. As is always the case when you are content with an item of equipment that serves you well, your knowledge of the relevant market falls away steeply from the highly informed state of consciousness you had reached at the time of purchase. After some eight years of satisfied ownership I emerged from a catatonic state in to a market that is now sadly devoid of the selection of suitable machines I was convinced it would still be littered with.

The choice is actually paltry as many of the big names that used to supply 'pro' cassette machines have turned their attentions to other formats. However, the real eye opener was the price. Given the decidedly old technology being courted, the same money would have got me DAT or MD even though the R&D that went in to creating the MCC device must have been written off at least a decade ago.

What is wrong with this picture? Only that older technology is being side lined in favour of funkier newer stuff—not to the total exclusion of the older formats, you understand, but just enough to make it increasingly difficult to resist change.

Examples of such encouraged obsolescence can be found in every sound chain—users want something they're perfectly happy with but is hard to find, while the manufacturers try to sell them something else. Build what people want, sell them what you can. I bought another cassette machine.

Zzen Schoepke, executive editor

Old Masters
WHEN ONE OF the old masters signed off a canvass, his job was essentially done. His art had been given its head and stood or fell on its own merits—there was no equivalent compulsion to that of getting it PQ encoded, glass mastered and copied in its thousands, and certainly no question promotion or distribution problems.

Attempting to compare such a situation with that of today's recording artists is complicated but enlightening. Consider, for example, that 16th—18th century painters were free from the kind of 'three painting deal' that would be analogous to a modern record contract, and it's easy to see how damaging the modern attitude to 'career development' can be. Consider also that when a painting was complete, it belonged to the artist.

Many points of comparison, like impoverished painters reusing old canvases, are of curiosity value only. The most informative comparisons, however, arise when you introduce the term 'media'. We're not talking PB now, we're talking canvass as against high-output tape, oils as against tape binder. When that painting dried, its merit—along with its worth—lay in a single item. When you look at an original Rembrandt, you're looking at a work that has survived some 300 years.

Other aspects of the painting-recording pairing that are telling include the relative worth of each. Certainly painters copied their own work, but this bears no comparison to the way in which copies of a recording sustain the record market. Ultimately the value of a recording is in thousands of low-cost copies rather than a precious original. That's the way the record companies have been used to reading the vinyl market, anyway. Then came CD and reissue mania.

Suddenly music's old masters were back in demand. And they weren't generally looking at us if they were going to make it to their 300th birthday. Enter the restoration brigades and with them many of the same questions facing the restorers of old paintings: how far to take the restoration, whether to use materials (outboard) nor contemporary to the original work, how the restored version will age, and so on. The principal problems are probably older than our original recordings—and may point the way to the best solutions.

Anybody fancy making a comparison of forgery and piracy?

Tim Goodyer, editor