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When Old Tech Turns Valuable: What's Worth Insuring in Vintage Technology

Historic technology collecting is a constantly evolving field, where exciting developments can quickly lead to new assets.

Many of us have old phones and computers, it can be tricky to decipher which pieces of tech are worth looking at for insurance.

Demand is influenced by several factors. For vintage tech more broadly, the most valuable are those historically important pieces which resulted in a change in global society.

So let us look at a few areas of the vintage technology market and what to look out for.

In July 2023 Apple grabbed the headlines when a first-generation iPhone sold at auction for over \$190k (suggested insurance figure £250k) – tripling the record price set just 4 months earlier. Surprising for a phone whose purchase price was around £500 when released in 2007.

But this iPhone was not an ordinary example. The lot was 'factory sealed', meaning this rare survivor was unopened, unused, and still in

its plastic casing. The phone was also a 4GB storage model, this version was less popular when issued in 2007, therefore scarcer. As a comparison Heritage auctioneers sold a factory sealed first generation of the more popular 8GB version in February 2024 for \$21,600 (Heritage, Video Games, Lot 28129, February 24, 2024 - suggested insurance figure £65k).

In the current market, replacement values for first generation iPhones typically only



1st generation iPhone 4GB, factory sealed, sold for over \$190k

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exceed £500 in instances where the device is in excellent condition with packaging. It is the extremely rare factory sealed pieces which are the ones to look out for.

The most collectable pieces in the world of Apple products are those manufactured in the early days of the company.

In September 2024 auctioneers Christies sold an Apple computer for \$945,000 (suggested insurance £1.8 million).



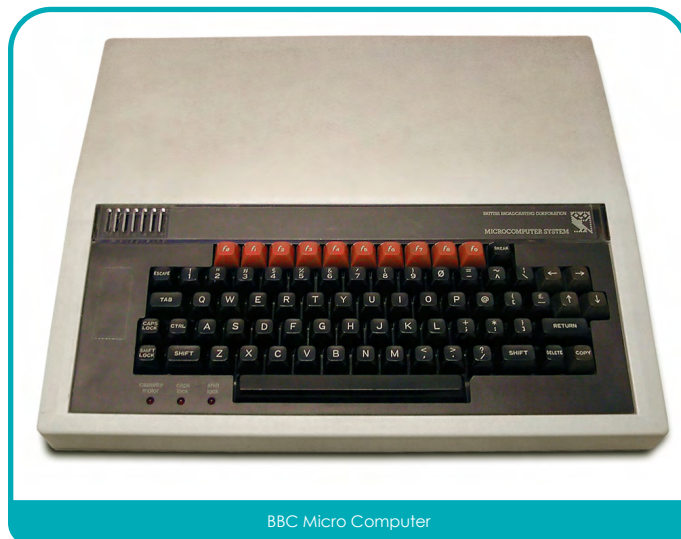
An Apple-1 personal computer 1976 sold for \$945,000.

However, this example, was arguably the most important commercially produced computer in the history of the company.

An Apple-1 personal computer, manufactured in 1976, it was sold as part of the collection of Apple co-founder Paul Allen (2024, Lot 10, Paul G. Allen Collection, Christies NY). The first commercial Apple computer, this piece had previously stood in the office of Steve Jobs. The value here is dictated not only by the technology itself, but as an extremely important item in the history of computing. Early Apple products are scarce and of great interest to collectors – Apple-1, Apple II, Apple Lisa and prototypes should all be considered.

To retro gaming: with contemporary video game collecting, those pieces with the highest values are akin to the markets for vinyl, trading cards, collectable figures, and comic books. Rarity and condition are

pivotal factors in value. Original packaging and unopened are desirable to collectors. Areas with a strong international market and instantly recognisable brand name such as Sony Playstation, XBOX and Nintendo command the highest prices. Those produced with a more British focus



BBC Micro Computer

such as the educational BBC Computers or ZX Spectrum in general are of limited value. Looking at the market for Nintendo video games, in July 2021 auctioneers Heritage sold a copy of Super Mario 64 for an astonishing \$1.5 million. This piece was not a typical game of its type. This version was unopened and sealed, it had been professionally graded at 9.8 – being a near mint copy – only four versions are known at this grade (Heritage Video Games auction, July 2021, lot 28137). It is worth noting that in the same auction, the same game with a slightly lower grading of 9.6 fetched just



Super Mario 64 in mint condition sold for \$1,500,000.

over \$13k (suggested insurance for 9.6 version £15k).

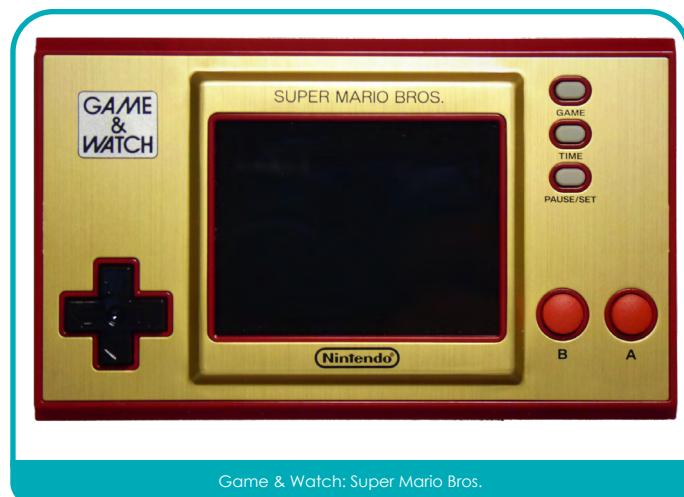
In general Nintendo video games would have been played and sold in large numbers – these are of modest value and not usually requiring separate insurance. Sealed version of iconic titles such as Zelda and Super Mario are amongst the most desirable.

Here are some factors worth looking at for more valuable pieces. Was the piece rare at time of issue? For example, games that were not commercially available when

manufactured. 'Not For Resale', 'Test', and 'Competition' editions are all something to be aware of. These pieces are extremely rare – they would have been exceptional or unusual at the time of acquisition

(see Heritage Auctions, June 12, 2025 – Video

Games – Lot 79029 – Super Mario Club Communication Cartridge CIB sold for \$475 - suggested insurance value is £600).



Game & Watch; Super Mario Bros.

Furthermore, games which were unsuccessful at the time of release, therefore sold in small numbers, if in excellent condition can be valuable. For those consoles which were more widely commercially available condition is key to value. Nintendo manufactured the 'Game & Watch' series - a precursor to the Game Boy - where each handheld console played just one game. Game & Watch are popular amongst collectors and can be a good entry point. In September 2023 auctioneers Ewbanks sold a Super Mario Bros Crystal Screen (YM-801) in very good condition with box for a hammer price of £750 (Lot 5036 – Ewbanks – Retro Video Games & Consoles – September 28, 2023 - suggested insurance value £875).



Super Mario Bros Crystal Screen (YM-801) in very good condition with box for a hammer price of £750.

When a lesser condition version appeared at auction last year, again with box, it achieved a hammer price of £320 (Hawleys Fine Art – 18th May 2024, lot 1182).

In the field of retro video gaming, there is combination of nostalgia, for vintage titles played during childhood or adolescence, alongside iconic names and characters with broad appeal.

If you haven't considered it before, your treasured vintage home computing, technology and retro video games, may be worth insuring.