



## Second Century

# Right to Repair

*One of the YouTube content creators I follow outside of the amateur radio arena is a car fanatic named Mat Armstrong. He is known for buying cars — typically supercars — that have been totaled in accidents and restoring them to perfect condition. He has recently run afoul of two particular brands: Ferrari and Bugatti. Despite laws to the contrary, they are refusing to sell him the parts necessary to repair the vehicles.*

In the United States, 2025 saw bills introduced across 22 states pursuing a legal Right to Repair. These bills have now been introduced in all 50 states. One of the categories important to us as hams is that the bills address electronics as one of the categories supported. Certain cell phone and computer manufacturers have obstructed consumers from repairing the units they own, now going to the extent of embedding brand-identifying logic in replacement parts so that third-party components won't work.

Why is this important to the ham radio market? Because we *expect* to be provided the technical information to diagnose and repair the equipment that we buy. We also expect to be able to purchase components directly from manufacturers and will routinely go out to the market at large, including sites like eBay, to find components that will fix or even enhance the equipment that we own and use. In fact, in Title 47 § 2.1043, radio amateurs are granted the ability for use any communications equipment for modification and use on the amateur bands as long as the requirements spelled out in Part 97 are met. This is a very big deal for the hobby, as repurposing commercial gear to the amateur bands can be an inexpensive way to get on the air, especially in the VHF and UHF bands.

I had a 6-meter preamp that took a little hit of RF, which damaged some of the internal components. I reached out to the manufacturer to see if it could be repaired. I was told that the preamp was garbage at that point, and I should throw it away and buy a replacement. That was not what I wanted to hear, looking at this otherwise brand-new box sitting in my hand! Fortunately, our local club “has a guy” — an experienced electrical technician who repairs amateur radio equipment for members. He was able, with a microscope and a tiny soldering iron tip, to remove the surface-mounted device. He bought a bag of them on eBay for less than a dollar (!), replaced the damaged compo-

nent, and brought the preamp right back to life. A very inexpensive repair versus an expensive replacement.

How would you react to opening a radio and finding out that you melted a custom FPGA (Field-Programmable Gate Array) chip and the manufacturer would not sell you one to fix your radio? How would you react if your end-fed half-wave antenna started acting strange, with SWR swinging all over the place, only to open the unit and find that the manufacturer had potted the inside so that you could not identify, let alone repair, the blown capacitor connected to the toroid?

Amateur radio operators have been accustomed to, to the extent they want to, having access to technical manuals, schematics, parts lists, and replacement parts in support of the equipment that they own. As this trend by manufacturers in many industries has made right to repair a hill to die on, we are most fortunate to work with and be served by a community of manufacturers who understand our culture along with our needs and desires to remain close to the technology. And for those manufacturers who decide to go the other way? I suspect hams will vote with their wallets!

Keep radio active! Take on a project to build or repair a radio, just for fun. Be a connector! If you know of someone struggling to solve a problem with damaged equipment, see if you know someone in your club or the community who can help. And now is the time of year with the great hamfest schedule to get out and buy those things that allow us to enjoy our right to repair.

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