

ASTON INSTALLATIONS

James Hawkes Reed came from the cellular phone industry. A chance call from an Aston Martin dealer while he was working as technical support for a hands-free car kit manufacturer changed his life drastically!



Aston Martin has always been a quirky company. Its automotive excellence and pedigree are undisputed. The build quality is first-class, and the drive and handling are excellent.

However, sometimes, the onboard equipment can leave people scratching their heads. Infotainment/audio systems change rapidly, with ever more ambitious systems being dreamed up and developed, often with companies not explicitly known for car audio

equipment. Bang and Olufsen, Mark Levinson, Bowers, and Wilkins are all big hitters in the world of home hi-fi, but...

Back to James. His perseverance and electronics prowess meant he was able to crack the thorny issue of hands-free in an Aston Martin first. This led to a deluge of Aston Martin owners wanting the same for vehicles of all vintages.

As he worked tirelessly to develop more elegant solutions to satisfy the demand, he got the germ of an idea. In 2017, he and associate Lenny Knox decided there was mileage in providing further aftermarket assistance to Aston owners looking to improve their mighty steeds. As a result, they set up Aston Installations.

Things have gone well, and when I arrived at their new premises in Tewkesbury, I was greeted with the sight of 10s of Aston Martins in various states of disassembly. Some were receiving screen upgrades and Apple CarPlay/Android Auto modules, while others were getting full audio system upgrades. The onboard screens require upgrading to something with better resolution to get acceptable visual performance from CarPlay/Android Auto. This is bread and butter for these clever boys, and I saw tidy stacks of screens being installed into original Aston housings and being wired with bespoke handmade wiring harnesses to fulfil this high demand. I was also shown 3d-printed housings.

In the relatively short time that Aston Installations has existed, they have become extremely well-known in Aston circles, especially with many dealers who are often asked by owners for upgrades that they themselves are not capable of delivering. Things are going so well that Lenny's son, Ryan, has been employed to manage the modern and extremely tidy workshop. Ryan has worked as an Auto technician from school, and his skills have allowed Aston Installations to expand their offering while keeping much of the work they do in-house.

When asked what he felt made the difference for their Aston Martin customers, Ryan replied, "We treat each and every customer like they are the most important. We genuinely feel that being friendly and personable makes a huge difference, particularly when working with owners of prestige car brands. We take time to explain exactly what we plan to do for them, which is much appreciated."



The Team left to right, James, Daniel, Ryan, Lenny & Amy

Other staff include additional technical help from Daniel and Amy, taking care of the admin. I had been invited to Aston Installations specifically to see and hear a customer's vehicle receiving an Audison and Hertz audio upgrade.

Aston Installations has provided audio upgrades since it began but has recently converted to the Hertz and Audison brands. This was the first such installation undertaken on a DB12.

The car's owner, Frank, bought two Aston Martins for himself and his wife. His car featured a touch-screen head unit but basic audio. While his was being serviced by his local Aston Martin dealer, he was lent a replacement car. This one had a B&O audio upgrade, which Frank thought eclipsed the standard system. He asked his dealer if he could upgrade. They informed him this was not possible but recommended he contact Aston Installations.

He duly made contact and was happy with what he heard. He handed over the keys with the instruction, "Make it sound better." He also specified that he didn't want anything on display. This is standard for Aston Installations; they carefully design installations to be easily de-installed without leaving a trace. The equipment can then be reused in the customer's next car.

Frank is originally from Yorkshire and works in IT. He attended a high school steeped in brass band culture, but he decided at 11 to commit to learning the drums. Frank played in several bands but admits that, although he still has a kit, he no longer plays it himself. At the age of 38, he learned to play Bon Jovi's "Bed of Roses" on guitar, which he performed at his wedding.

He has always been a big fan of hard-edged rock bands and frequently listens to this genre while driving alone. However, in-car listening poses a challenge, as most car systems have limited mid-range capabilities, which is where the excitement in rock music resides.



The Workshop



Front speaker installation

Fortunately, Aston Installations asked Lee Preston, who works for FOUR the UK distributor of Hertz and Audison, for help. Together with James and Ryan, they designed a system that would suit Frank's requirements.

Installing replacement speakers in an Aston presents physical challenges. Fortunately, Lee's technical team was able to design and 3D print custom mountings, which made the job considerably easier.

The equipment choices were made to achieve the best performance at a high level. They employed the amazing Audison Thesis TH 1.5 tweeters, which perform incredibly well even when mounted off-axis. They also crossover at a very low frequency, reinforcing the upper mid frequencies often occupied by keyboards, cymbals, and high guitar solos.

Products from the Hertz Mille Legend range were selected for the mid-range and woofers. This range is renowned for its punchy, lively performance, especially at high listening levels.

Hertz Mille Legend ML 700.3 speakers are installed in the factory door locations. Likewise, the ML 1650 woofers are positioned in the factory locations in the front footwells. A second pair of mid-range speakers has been placed behind the front seats to enhance sound distribution and overpower the engine when necessary. These speakers are Hertz Mille Pro MP 70.3s, complemented by an additional pair of tweeters, the Hertz Cento C 26 OE.

A powered flat-box subwoofer is installed on the rear bulkhead, as it is essentially the only place it would fit without consuming valuable boot space.

Full-range speakers receive power from a single Audison Forza AF M 12/14 bit amplifier. This 12-channel powerhouse includes advanced signal processing, which is essential for this vehicle.

Equipment list

- AUDISON Forza AF M12.14bit DSP Amplifier
- AUDISON Thesis TH 1.5 Tweeters
- HERTZ Mille Legend ML 1650 Woofers
- HERTZ Mille Legend ML 700 Mids
- HERTZ Mille Pro MP 70 Mids
- HERTZ Cento C26 OE Tweeters
- HERTZ Deici DBA 201F Active subwoofer



DSP Amp, Rear Speakers, Active Subwoofer installation and Final Setup

Frank's Top Five Tunes



- Hell and High Water - Black Stone Cherry
- Reckoning Day - Magadeath
- Heartbreaker - Dirty Honey
- Man in the Box - Alice in Chains
- Thunderstruck - AC/DC

Bridged channels drive the footwell-mounted woofers to enhance mid-bass energy. Frank typically streams all his music from an Android phone. He currently uses Spotify but became intrigued when I mentioned that Tidal offers significantly better quality. To reduce the quality loss often associated with Bluetooth streaming, an Audison B-Con Bluetooth receiver with LDAC has been installed.

The car was getting final tweaks when I arrived. Lee was at the controls but let me listen to a few tracks to see how things were shaping up.

The car was getting final tweaks when I arrived.

The first track I played was "NUEYVEYoL" by Bad Bunny. This begins with a traditional rendering of this Puerto Rican standard until, at 22 seconds, all hell breaks loose. This was going to challenge the mid-bass! The system handled it brilliantly, with the dynamics of the ML 1650 and ML 700 combination making me jump out of my skin. The rhythms were electric, speedy and accurate, while the bass was "unmuddled" and punchy. The centre channel speaker in this car did make the tune play a little narrow, but this was not the case for other tracks I played.

For Balance, I played Johnny Flynn's "Detectorist", which many will know as the theme tune for the TV show of the same name. Johnny is blessed with a bass-rich voice without unnecessary ornamentation, perfect for folk music. A subtle accompaniment of guitar, bass, strings and trumpet (played by Johnny himself) all came through brilliantly.

I managed a couple of other tracks before Lee turfed me out so that he could give Frank a listen.

I thoroughly enjoyed my few hours at Aston Installations and would strongly recommend their work. Once the speakers bed in and the final tweaks are completed, this car will sound fantastic. stuff, released under his own name.○