

ENTRANCE

THE AUDIOPHILE'S: AUDIOFILE

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FOUR MASTER

FOUR MASTER

“I am currently building a truck. I do this in the luxurious comfort of my purpose-built garage at home”

We walk through to the workshop where we find a sight I have never seen in a FOUR MASTER before. His four full-time fitters are all working on a single car, cooperating and genuinely working as a team to get the job turned around in as quick a time as possible. Gary's background as an installer has led him to many seemingly quirky processes which help ensure a job is done to the highest quality with everyone's work being checked by someone else. It is a joy to see. The workshop has space for three vehicles and so working this way helps to maximise capacity. Apart from the car being swarmed over, there is another part-completed car. Gary explains that the second car was not such a priority as the owner was happy to leave the vehicle for a number of days.

Gary is currently booked some four weeks in advance, which lead me to ask where all of his business was coming from. He explained that he is well known on car forums where satisfied car owners often sing his praises. "Because of mobile device connectivity, customers are able to research 24 hours a day and we seem to turn up all over the place!" He also attributes a great deal of business to the stability of his business. "We have been around for 26 years and if anyone in the country is asking about car audio installers our name will eventually come up." Asserts Gary, "Once it has, people land on our website and generally once they make initial contact they become customers." I don't believe this is because Gary is a pushy salesman but his passion is extremely contagious. In a very short amount of time you just know that he understands what you want of him and makes you feel extremely welcome and important. It is testament to Audiofile's commitment to its customers that all are made to feel important and welcome which cannot always be said of specialist businesses.

Although still heavily involved in security and tracking products, it is clear that Audiofile-Incar is an expert in audio. A further inspection of the workshop reveals a fabrication room where parts are handmade to suit. Gary tells me he works in all materials including metal, MDF (spray-painted or upholstered), fibreglass and pretty much anything else that has the right properties for the job in hand. "We do masses of fabrication in this room. The only thing we don't do is stitching which we subcontract out to a third party." This is always pleasing to see although Gary does admit that an increasing amount of their work requires discrete installation, especially in the many BMW's that he sees. "Many of these cars are leased and so customers typically want installations that can be removed and cars returned to stock condition at the end of the lease period." Gary has moved away from the workshop himself and leaves most of the installation work to his four full-time and one part-time installers these days. This fab five are carefully administered by the very capable Emma who looks after the administration of the whole business. Gary tells me "I miss the hands-on part of the business somewhat but keep my skills honed with many home projects. I am currently building a truck. I do this in the luxurious comfort of my purpose-built garage at home. It has everything I need including heating and most



importantly, a full-on multi-zone audio system on which I mainly stream from TIDAL."

As for the future, Gary predicts that car manufacturers are never likely to put real development money into good quality audio and he is therefore, extremely optimistic regarding the future of his business. "Having a big voice in a small industry is helping us to attract increasing amounts of audio work. We have seen year-on-year growth since 2010 and the business continues to expand." This despite a lack of obvious marketing spend. Gary explains; "We get an awful lot of traffic to our site and links in from forums. We have actively courted a significant Facebook following but this takes up a lot of time and delivers very few customers to us. I do like to keep in touch with followers however as many are existing customers. Others are fellow specialist installers and we share a lot of ideas and technical information but again, I couldn't really say it directly brings in a lot of bacon!"

However, Gary is always ready to follow trends and diversify in order to enjoy continued growth. This is a smart idea for any small business and this one has definitely stood the test of time.

I would have no hesitation in recommending Audiofile-Incar for car audio upgrades. I saw nothing but high-quality work and 100% commitment to customer satisfaction during my all too brief visit. His FOUR MASTER status means he is able to provide a national three-year parts and labour warranty on all equipment sourced from Hertz, Rainbow and Audison – not that I would expect customers to have any problems in the first place. Huge thanks to Gary and the boys for welcoming us in and keeping us half-drowned in tea! ☐

FOUR MASTER Audiofile
01279 757218, www.audiofile-incar.co.uk

Team work and attention to detail comes as standard



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Advice supplied with the weight of 35 years in the industry behind it

Gary Hallwood is a dedicated music lover and has been since the age of 14. This is when he got his very own turntable, amplifier and pair of speakers in his bedroom. After cutting his teeth on the music of the time, he was well and truly bitten by the music bug and this shaped his future.

Audiofile-Incar in Bishops Cleeve is a hugely successful and thriving business but this has not always been the case. However, despite the various trends, trials and tribulations of the business environment they inhabit, one constant has always remained - they install lots of car audio! You could say that above anything else, audio is in their DNA and this has come directly from the top.

On leaving school and with his burgeoning love for music, Gary went to university to study electronics. He had already demonstrated a keen interest through building his own amplifiers and crossovers many of which he used to undertake car audio installations both for himself and his friends. Gary told us; "I was keen to demonstrate to friends that they could vastly improve the sound in their vehicles. In those days our cars meant everything to us and we used to spend many hours modifying and polishing them and then taking them off to weekend cruises to show them off. My speciality at the time was fabricating rear shelves that housed self-built crossovers working with proprietary 6" speakers and tweeters. In a way, apart from the electronics element that I had picked up quite quickly, these days were excellent training for some of the work we do at Audiofile today. Each shelf would be painstakingly upholstered and finished to as high a standard as I could manage, as image was everything. My rear shelves were very popular at cruises and I received many enquiries from others who wanted one."

However, Gary's life changed forever following a visit to legendary home of car audio - Watford Car Audio. Gary continued; "I sat in their demo car which featured two 10" subwoofers. Man, the bass extension was completely wild and I knew right then what I wanted to do! As soon as I got home I ordered a pair of 10" drivers from a famous retailer of electronics products and set about trying to recreate the feeling that demo car gave me!"

Spinning forward some years and Gary got himself a Saturday job at Audiofile-Incar. He had caught the attention of the owner through competing in a national "sound off" series, where cars were pitted against each other against some very stringent criteria. He ended up winning plenty of trophies. Gary continued to work holidays and weekends to help fund his audio habit and ended up being asked to run the business for a year. As with so many niche specialist businesses, things were not always rosy and the reality of having to pay the bills led the company to the brink despite his best efforts. Gary was eventually offered the opportunity to buy the business, which he gleefully did! This was in 1994.

Today, Gary tells us he is doing better than at any other time; "Over the years we followed the usual trends of getting heavily involved with tuning and styling, alarms and tracking and found ourselves carrying out a lot of trade work. This kept the wolf from the door but was not what I wanted to do and it is a hard way to make a living. However, many businesses like ours went this way particularly during the recession of 2007. I made a conscious decision to redouble my focus on audio install. Not only was I good at it, I felt that this was future-proof business. The fact that many competitors were giving up on it opened up holes in the market. As we escaped those dark years, we began to see an older customer was searching us out specifically for audio upgrades. Cars were failing to deliver on the showroom promise of great entertainment. Yes they had AV systems and navigation but they sounded rubbish! AV dwindled as video capable mobile devices became common place and that really only left audio as a growth stream which was great from my perspective."

I wanted to bring us right up to date and find out what makes Audiofile stand apart from other similar businesses. One thing that strikes the casual visitor to its website is how upgrades are communicated without a heavy reliance on user knowledge and Gary confirmed this to be the case; "Many of our customers are 35+ and the majority have little or no knowledge of what is possible in a car let alone the product that will help them achieve it. These are great customers for us as they are totally result-focused. They want great sound in the car and all I need to do is find out what constitutes great sound in their eyes (or ears) and give them a price. Brands, model numbers and technical specifications are irrelevant. We take a common vehicle and we design three systems to fit different budgets and tastes. This puts a lot less pressure on the customer to research. We stock an enormous amount of product in order to help customers make a choice and learn about which elements of a system work together but we sell installed packages. This works best for us as we know what works and the customer has an expectation of cost."

Gary's customers come from far and wide; "we have customers coming from the Channel Islands and mainland Europe as well as from all over England Scotland and Wales." At this point he registers my look of surprise and goes on to explain: "For the past 15 years I have run a fleet of courtesy vehicles. I currently have four which means customers can drop their car off for a time and either go out for the day in a borrowed vehicle or go home and live their lives with as little inconvenience as possible. This is a fairly unique feature in our industry but I see the fleet as a business essential." >



- Sista
- Rachelle Ferrell
- Kiss From A Rose
- Seal
- Hotel California
- (Live from Hell
- Freezes Over)
- Eagles
- Heaven Help
- Lenny Kravitz
- What It Feels Like
- To Be A Girl
- Madonna