



FOUR MASTER EXEC SPEC

From tints to tunes



Ash delivers the facts, Carl notes them down



The artist formerly known as Exec Spec Tinting has grown from two men in a van making car windows darker to an all encompassing car audio and accessory business. We spent a most enjoyable day with them to find out how.

Brothers Ash and Snoop Sharma now run a highly successful FOUR MASTER business on the outskirts of Nottingham, but this wasn't always how it was for the Sharma family. Affable, humble and eager to talk about his upbringing and rise to relative affluence, Ash takes the lead role in the business. His background includes an apprenticeship as a motor mechanic. Ash admits that, as with many teenagers starting a new job, he was somewhat naive and hapless. As an apprentice, he was the brunt of much abuse and spent most of his early days with a broom in his hand – I can totally relate to this as it was just the same for me.

Ash told me; "At the age of 18, something just clicked in my brain. I didn't want to be the "useless apprentice" anymore so I learnt. I began to develop my physical skills and started to think more deeply about the tasks I was asked to carry out. My progress from that moment was rapid and I was quickly voted mechanic of the year by my college and went on to win a regional title. It was inevitable that I would not remain on the tools for long and soon took on a management role. Another light bulb moment in 2002 and I decided I needed to work for myself for greater fulfilment. At this point the car-modifying scene was at its height and I saw an opportunity to offer window-tinting services. My brother Snoop decided he wanted to join me and frankly I was thrilled to have his support. It was a big jump and potentially a huge financial risk. We worked very hard in those early days. We tried where possible to be van-based but ended up carrying out work at our own

homes at all hours and in all weathers. We built a solid reputation for the quality of our work and accommodating service and the business became a hit!"

I asked Ash what prompted the move to a permanent premises; "We predicted that change was in the air and were already being asked to carry out auto-electrical work including audio upgrades, all tasks in which we were trained and competent. This kind of work is much harder to do outside in the street and my father invited us to build a workshop on the side of his village store. This helped him as well as we could cover for him and my mum as they were at the stage of wishing to reel in their own hours having worked extremely hard for many years to provide a solid foundation for us. Eventually, the market

for groceries changed and customers went to large supermarkets once a week relying less on the convenience store close by. They retired and we took on the whole premises and have extended the property over the years to what you see today."

What I see today is a carefully thought out and easy to navigate store which states exactly what Exec Spec does, without the detritus and clutter which can sometimes overwhelm small specialist businesses. In fact, this FOUR MASTER does not look or feel like a small business at all. A wall of alloy wheels as well as parking sensors, alarms and tracking products sit alongside a comprehensive display of Hertz and Audison audio equipment. The counter features two glass cabinets tastefully lit to show off products from both of these brands.

Having a current payroll of four staff however tells its own story; "we are definitely stretched both man power and space-wise these days. Our refocus on consumer work and a more coherent trade work strategy has led

"At the age of 18, something just clicked in my brain"

FOUR MASTER

EXEC SPEC

us to greater success than we had expected to be able to achieve from these premises. A lot of credit for that has to go to the team. We are as solid a team as you could ever wish to have."

I simply had to ask about the refocus Ash referred to; "Our business used to comprise 90% trade work. We would take on anything at all. The issue with this was that we found ourselves financially exposed. Some of the larger car franchises would bully us into agreeing very low prices in return for high volumes of work. In the end, one of our biggest customers went into administration owing us a good deal of money and although we were able to cover the loss, it hurt us badly. We vowed not to let that happen again. Our trade work reduced to about 10% within six months of us adopting a more consumer facing model." This seems to have been a popular move as Ash tells me he is currently booking work a month in advance!

The team is completed by installers Matt and Martin who have worked with the Sharmas for five and two years respectively; "We all work long hours and are multi-skilled and so able to step in to help each other when required. In truth, a larger workshop and another member of staff could remove some of the pressure and we will act on that sooner rather than later. Having said that, leaving our family home and business, is going to be a mighty wrench."

As a company fairly fresh to the FOUR MASTER network, Ash is already feeling the benefits. We are seeing a customer who is more receptive to the idea of us installing a system that performs to the highest level. These customers have a love of music rather than gadgets or the need to impress peers or friends. We have previously been as guilty as any other car audio installer of migrating toward a volume rather than value market. Although we welcome all manner of customer, it can get a little inefficient spending time convincing people to purchase goods from us instead of from ebay. These days we are more about the whole system rather than trying to compete with an overhead-free online business to sell a £40 pair of speakers. The majority of our customers are happy to accept our advice on system design and the right products for their needs. Collectively we have a lot of experience and know a lot about cars and car audio equipment."

I am always intrigued to find out where customers come from. I spent some time in cars sat at the front of the store and the location is an obvious source of passing trade sitting, as it does, at traffic lights on a major route into Nottingham. I noticed many people looking over to check out the cars. But having seen some of their work I would suggest that this is a major source too. The two installs we looked at, listened to and photographed for the next couple of pages are fabulous. They are both demonstration vehicles and as such it is necessary for some equipment to be on show but both installations could equally have been completed with absolutely nothing on show. This is a universally experienced trend in car audio as the real music lover is focussed on the result rather than the equipment.

Snoop's Audi A6 Allroad really catches the eye at this prominent roadside location. The traffic is so busy, I worry slightly that my audition will be spoiled by road noise! Of course, there is absolutely no need to worry about that. The car has been deadened to within an inch of its life and as I close the driver's door, I have to check that I haven't gone deaf. In previous auditions I have learned my lesson about auditioning cars without the engine running. Although most will play beautifully for a while, the volts from the battery can dip after even a short while and the performance of some equipment is optimised for running voltages that tend to be around 14 rather than 12 Volts. Some equipment finds more headroom when running at a higher voltage, that is, they will stand more level before they start to distort. Although very careful with my hearing



apparatus these days, I do still like to check a system out at high level. If there is no distortion, then I am not in much danger and it is important to get to the levels usually used at motorway driving speeds. I also like to listen to the music the owner has left playing. In this case it is a Trevor Nelson compilation and whatever track was playing was swamped with very low bass. While settling myself down, the Michael Jackson hit "Rock With You" burst into life. Suddenly the "over the top for my taste" low bass rumble was replaced with a thunderous rocking accompaniment to this classic tune. Everything balanced brilliantly and I was left somewhat breathless! – I listen to this album in HD form in my office at home fairly often and am always amazed at the incredible details producer Quincy Jones managed to cram into this recording. I could hear pretty much all of the most important elements here too. The instrument separation that is a key feature of the Hertz Mille Legend speakers fitted to this vehicle is amazing in this car and the stage is wide and deep. To visualise what I am hearing I often close my eyes and point to where certain instruments or sounds are coming from. When I opened my eyes, I was pointing well outside of the limits of the car. This is a great result from a system whose tweeters face up toward a curved screen.

I next reached for something completely different, Eric Clapton "Unplugged", track 1. The opening applause was very promising however, once the music began it was accompanied by a most unmusical bass rumble that I don't think is supposed to be heard. I reached for the Audison

Ash unaware that his company status is in full view



- Travesuras**
Nicky Jam
- Bad (feat.Vassy)**
David Guetta
- Dragon**
Martin Garrix
- Out of space**
The prodigy
- For crying out loud**
Meatloaf



"I have no hesitation in recommending Exec Spec. If you live in or near Nottingham, like music, own a car and want to know how your life can be changed forever"

DRC controller and turned the subwoofer off altogether and the issue was fixed. This is not a fault or an issue of any sort but a warning that if you are incorporating a large amount of bass into a system, it is often wise to provide the means to adjust the level and even mute it when listening to music that doesn't need it. In this case, Snoop is running a Hertz High Energy HX 250D 10" subwoofer from 550 Watts of Class D output from a Hertz HDP 5 compact amplifier. The remaining four 100 Watt channels run the 3-way Hertz Mille Legends up front in passive active configuration. This means that two of the channels feed high quality passive crossovers that distribute the correct frequencies to the ML 280 tweeter and ML 700 mid-range. The other two 100 Watt channels drive the ML1800 7" woofers in the doors. No wonder this system is bass heavy at times! However, the whole system is controlled by an Audison bit One processor. This allows for comprehensive tweaking of the system including time alignment and incorporates 31-band graphic equalisers on each of its output channels. Snoop tells me that the boys take it in turns to tweak the bit One and that it does need a definitive set up now that all of the speakers are well run-in. He also tells me that he is an unabashed fan of very heavy bass and so whatever setting he ends up with, I will probably still need to temporarily adjust when listening to my "hippy" music. (Thanks for that endorsement, Snoop!)

The VW Passat sat next to Snoop's belongs to demonstrator installer Martin or rather, his wife! It is employed as a demonstrator on request and Martin was keen that it should perform. The equipment list is exactly the same as in Snoop's except he has installed an obscure American subwoofer that he rather likes. He admits that it is doing a bit too much work at the moment and his intention is to change it once the Hertz Mille subs become available later in the year.

Once again, I wanted to take my reference "feel" for the system from the owner's music choice and so pressed play on the CD player and got an earful of "Old MacDonald's Farm" from an album called "Wiggly Giggly Singalong Songs". The dog bark was very realistic but I am not sure this was Martin's own choice and not his usual listening material. A look to the rear seats confirmed that the car is clearly used for ferrying a small child around!

I set about loading a couple of my own discs instead. Once again, the bass was somewhat over the top for my "hippy" music, which in this case was a 1980's Talking Heads

A complete and happy team

track, "This Must Be The Place" from the very excellent "Stop Making Sense" album. I muted the subwoofer and was completely blown away. The image in Snoop's Audi was great - the image in this was unreal! The difference? Martin has manufactured some A-pillar pods that orientate the tweeters towards the listener's ears. The resulting soundstage is outstandingly accurate and stable. The openness and linearity was exceptional with every single sound laid out in an easy-to-consume audio pallet. The mid-range punch was also extraordinary and the power was frightening. Not many will get the opportunity to put two identical systems in very different situations and I found the experience most illuminating. However, as with Snoop's, the set up in the Passat is a work in progress as Martin learns more about the equipment and its capabilities – This learning process bodes well for any audio customers who go to Exec Spec for an audio upgrade.

Both of these vehicles show great installation skills albeit in different ways. Snoop's is showy and highlights all of the components of the system to great effect, while the Passat is far more discrete but does manage to show Martin's fantastic fabrication skills while keeping the majority of the boxes hidden from view.

I have no hesitation in recommending Exec Spec. If you live in or near Nottingham, like music, own a car and want to know how your life can be changed forever, go and visit them today! ☐

This neat install gives customers the chance to see what they are listening to



FOUR MASTER Exec Spec: 0115 922 9252, www.execspec.co.uk