



# FOUR MASTER ULTIMATE AUDIO

## Easy Riders

### KARL'S TOP FIVE DRIVING SOUNDS:

**SULTANS OF SWING** /  
DIRE STRAITS

**FAST CAR** | TRACY CHAPMAN

**NOTHING ELSE MATTERS** |  
METALLICA

**HOTEL CALIFORNIA** | THE EAGLES

**IN DUE TIME** /  
KILLSWITCH ENGAGE

Karl Ward is considered a rising star within the car audio industry, however, behind the scenes, it seems that a direct family influence could account for his advanced skills. We visited Ultimate Audio in Bromsgrove to get the full run down.

First impressions count and my first impression on arriving at Ultimate Audio and was directed via signage through a custom motorcycle showroom was "cool!" I am not particularly a bike fan but the array on show were real eye pleasers with every shape you can imagine on show with lots of leather work and airbrushing to admire! We were met by Karl, who led us through into a very sparse workshop area then on to a neat and tidy car audio store. The striking thing about this was the minimal amount of stock on display and how smartly everything was presented. On closer inspection it was clear that Ultimate Audio is interested in the more discerning customer and is resolutely not interested in competing with bedroom Internet distributors bent on undermining specialist businesses!

Karl greeted us enthusiastically and explained that his attire consisting of overalls and gloves was due to the fact that when he is not carrying out audio installs, he helps his dad Ian in the adjacent business – Second City Customs, where they build bikes from scratch to customer specification as well as carrying out refurbishments, but more on that later.

Ultimate Audio was established in 1997 but prior to this, Ian trained and worked as a car mechanic. He became expert in vehicle electrics and particularly audio and security and offered his services freelance to garages for some years before investing in premises of his own. Ian became well known as a high-end audio installer and competed and won many IASCA sound-off competitions eventually becoming the Pro-Class champion in which he was unbeaten with his build in a Nissan Skyline. This talent has clearly been passed

down to son Karl who installed the fabulous system in the Audi TT featured within this issue.

Ian became disillusioned when the industry shifted from one of specialism to a stock it high and sell it cheap mentality and began to focus on Second City Customs instead.

Karl however, was still keen to have involvement in audio. He is a Rock music fan but is also partial to a bit of Dub step and other musical genre's where engaging bass lines proliferate and had spent most of his youth visiting car shows and sound-off events with his dad, picking up and developing new ideas and skills. Ultimate Audio is now run almost solely by Karl and is beginning to make an impression on its local market. In fact, business is coming from all over the Midlands as Karl's reputation spreads.

I asked Karl if he could profile his typical customer; "We get all sorts but have lately seen an increase in over 30's who want a good system which can be heard but not seen. Car-wise, we see a lot of BMW's but I think all installers do as their factory offerings even the upgrades sound dire but, we get a merry mix really. We have installed to Peugeot's, Range Rovers, Lamborghini's, Aston Martin's anything really. Many of these customers have dabbled with audio when they were young but we are quick to point out that, times and trends have changed enormously from the days of huge sub woofer boxes and multiple amplifiers. We do our best to explain that better technology means that a great sound experience can now be achieved with a single amplifier, a pair of component speakers and a single subwoofer provided they are



installed sensitively and the car is properly treated with sound deadening material. We don't currently have an operational demonstration vehicle but we have plans to put a system like the one I have just described in an American Ford Pick-up we have. It will feature Hertz Mille 2-ways as both Ian and I think that these suit rock music best due to the way they handle mid-bass. We are thinking of a completely digital system using the Audison Voce 5.1K amp with digital interface fed directly from a Bit 10D and I have not fully decided on bass but may choose to keep this element as discrete as possible as many customers are moving away from heavy bass nowadays. For the time being, although a handy point of reference, not having a demonstrator is not too much of an obstacle as we use a computer on the counter to show customers previous work featured on our Facebook, which feeds us a lot of enquiries. Our sales process is more like a consult than a traditional sales pitch. Our customers trust

our judgement on product selection due to the reputation both we and the products we stock have and we can always put them in touch with a recent customer for a positive endorsement"

Ultimate Audio certainly looks the part. The workshop area is pristine and clutter free with room for two cars. They also have a separate workshop where prefabrication work is carried out as well as the metal working facilities connected with Second City Customs. The other area of synergy between the two businesses is the list of suppliers used. Karl can call on a number of local and national companies who specialise in leatherwork and stitching as well as fabrication and finishing and painting which comes in handy when carrying out some of the more ostentatious or showy installs he is asked to do. Karl's involvement with Second City Customs also helps him keep his practical skills well honed. "In a lot of ways the customers are

similar in profile with the one thing binding them being their pursuit of excellence. This means we have to keep in touch with the latest fabrication and finishing techniques as well as being able to anticipate our customers' requirements. The two businesses are far more closely linked than you may first think and certainly the joint reputation for high quality work helps us. We have the flexibility and space to expand either side in response to fluctuations in workload and all signs are that we will be doing this sooner rather than later"

As well as audio, Ultimate Audio is also kept busy fitting hands-free phone kits, reversing sensors and security systems but it is generally the audio that gets them noticed first.

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