

I'M LOOKING AT THE BIG SKY

NICE installation creates fantastic listening space on the move for Justin



Justin Murray is a successful businessman with ambition. Not only does he co-own a successful recruitment business in Norwich (Big Sky Additions), he also services his love of both cars and music with passionate enthusiasm. We caught up with Justin and his current, upgraded steed and he let us have a listen.

Young and successful, Justin represents the pinnacle of 21st century living. He lives in a nice house on the outskirts of Norwich with his partner and young son. His very demeanour is that of someone who is both happy and comfortable with his place in life. That is not to say he has finished striving for better things, there is plenty of ambition evident in his personality, but he definitely gives the impression that he is enjoying his journey.

A car-lover from birth, Justin has owned many cars from Mk II Ford Escorts, Renault 5 Turbo, Fiat Coupe, VW Corrado to a Techno-violet BMW 328 to a BMW M3 that he purchased as a tribute to his late father's sadly, unrealised ambition to own one. Justin attributes his love of both cars and music to his father and fondly remembers hearing much of the music that influenced his taste on family car journeys. His next happy musical memories come from his college days when he

“**BMW M5 is the realisation of a dream for Justin**”

used to travel all over the country to sample regional club culture in places as far flung as Warwick and Preston!

After landing a degree in marketing at college he joined the construction recruitment industry working for a large recruiter until, at the age of 24, he decided to travel in order to broaden his horizons. On returning from his travels, feeling fulfilled and ready to settle in his hometown, he was working for a privately-owned Finance Recruiter when an opportunity arose to set up Big Sky Additions with a close colleague.

Initially, sticking to what they knew, focussing on recruitment to the finance sector and seven years on, this is still the main focus of their company however they have now diversified into investing in the health & social care sector along with software development.

Justin has always had some kind of audio

upgrade carried out on his cars. The last five have had full installs with component speakers, subwoofer and amplification. Some of his current equipment is carried forward from previous vehicles although he is keen to experience continuous quality improvements. He is unabashed when telling me of his early adventures of adding powered subwoofers to head units on early cars. Typically, bass proved the catalyst for Justin's early musical taste development.

A BMW M5 is the realisation of a dream for Justin who is a self-confessed petrol head and frequent visitor to race circuits and automotive events around the country. On receiving the equipment list, I was struggling a little to work out how the system might be configured. There was no mention of upgrades to the stock under seat woofers that generally sound dreadful in BMW's and drag the whole system down - this despite the list including seven channels of amplification. Two Audison Voce amplifiers are featured in the build including the highly capable AV 5.1K five-channel. This amplifier focuses on quality all the way. It features a pair of 75Watt Class A channels. These are just the business when powering a component set actively. Class A is a spotlessly clean and distortion-free method of amplification.

Far from energy efficient, thankfully not a lot of power is required and in this installation, this pair of channels is perfect for driving a pair of Audison Voce AV 1.1 tweeters, providing transparent and spacious high frequencies.

Midrange is also amply catered for, this time with a pair of Class AB channels. Capable of

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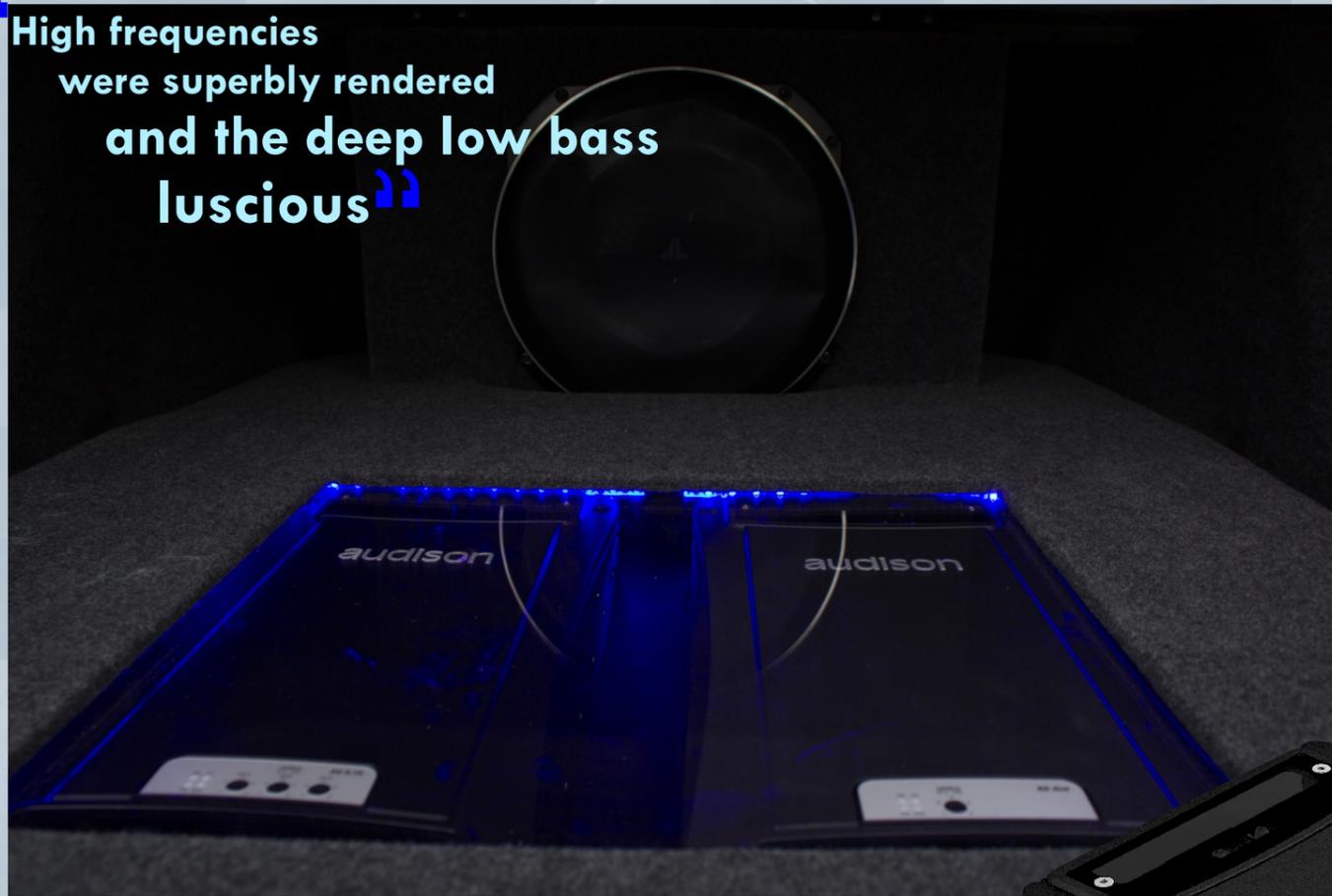
delivering up to 140Watts RMS into 4 ohms, these are connected to a pair of Audison Voce AV 3.0, 3" midrange speakers providing plenty of attack in the upper middle reaches. This is a desperately important area of the audio spectrum particularly if you are fond of snare drums, other relatively upper frequency percussion and highly precise guitar solos.

This leaves a single 1000Watt RMS Class D mono channel. In this car, it is used to drive an old school American subwoofer fitted in a custom enclosure. This provides a huge amount of very low bass and led us to spend much time exploring



“Justin has quite eclectic tastes”

“High frequencies were superbly rendered and the deep low bass luscious”



a huge gap between what it was delivering and the bass from the under-seat woofers.

On investigation, it appeared that installer, Wayne, from Norwich In Car Entertainment had done his best to fill this gap. This he had done by installing an Audison Voce Due, sporting 2 X 260Watt channels to drive the under seat woofers. I could immediately see the purpose of this and the premise that these lack power in factory standard configuration is a good one. However, in this instance, the solution created what proved to be an impossible balancing act. The under-seat speakers do indeed work better with a bit of clean power thrown at them however, their response is not linear enough to enable Wayne to blend them seamlessly with the high-end Voce mid-range speakers and subwoofer. It was clear that this was not for the want of trying however as an Audison bit ONE digital signal processor had been installed. I don't believe this was installed just to throw more electronic might at the bass issue. The bit ONE is also used to create a near perfect stereo image via time alignment and also for squeezing as much performance as possible out of the on board Voce speakers courtesy of a 31-band equaliser and sophisticated filter options. The bit ONE has plenty of spare capacity as it can operate over eight channels so it also provides Justin with up to four separate settings via the handy DRC controller that he uses frequently depending on his 'genre du jour' and the number of passengers in the vehicle. The DRC also enables him to adjust level which is critical with some head units featuring "dynamic EQ". This is a feature thrust upon many car owners by vehicle manufacturers and is there to protect speakers from damage at high listening levels. You may



have noticed that the sound you get from some OEM systems changes with level? Typically, when bowling down the motorway, a bit more level is required but with an increase in level, the bass and sometimes treble goes missing leaving the listener with a distorted mid-range mush - Nightmare! With the DRC, this is no longer a problem as level adjustment is carried out externally to the head unit. The other very important factor here is that a FOUR MASTER will always add sound treatment/proofing to a vehicle to reduce road noise and spurious rattles. The effect of this is that you can still listen in high quality at relatively low listening levels.

To the listening then! I had already picked up that Justin has quite eclectic tastes. He told me he prefers exploring playlists these days to listening to a whole album. This is very modern and something I am doing more and more now. Not only does it mean I discover music I would not ordinarily entertain, but also many modern day albums sound increasingly deadline-oriented and



full of "filler" to me.

First tune to hit my ears is from the impeccable production and emotion-filled melodic beauty of London Grammar. The track is one I am not so familiar with; "Truth is a Beautiful Thing" from the album of the same name.

The track begins with prominent piano chords and it sounds like the sustain pedal is jammed on as the notes from the five-chord figure combine and assisted by the electronic sounds in the background, fill the entire sound stage with beautiful ambient tones. The vocal starts at 1:06 and it doesn't take long for Hannah Reid's pure

delivery to melt my heart (again!). Deep bass arrives at 1:28 seconds. It is not violent but in this car the force of it takes the breath away, at the same time Hannah hits the high registers. There is a characteristically huge amount of reverb on everything so the whole car is swamped with sound at this point. It is like I am listening in a cathedral rather than a car. The Voce amplifiers and speakers are replicating the mids and highs as beautifully as they always do. Time to give them something else to do.

Next up was "Get Miles" by Gomez. This is a track I listened to extensively when it first came out in 1998, but I hadn't heard it for a while. There is a fairly harsh keyboard running through this track that can prove distracting but the bass is so powerful it renders it insignificant. The track is fairly downbeat but incidental percussion pushes it along and there are a lot of other sounds to keep interest too and of course Ben Ottewell's Mississippi-mud-like vocal. The hole in the bass registers was quite distracting with this one but the midrange and high frequencies were superbly rendered and the deep low bass luscious. Beautiful clarity on drum hits where a combination of soft beaters on toms and some splash cymbals of oceanic proportions join the shaky eggs and other percussive sounds panned across the sound stage. Apart from the percussion the rest is quite minimal and easy to unpick as the Voce amp/speaker combo did its thing wonderfully.

Justin and I had a listen to the bass area in particular in a bid to demonstrate the area that I felt needed improvement. We used my favourite Sohn track "The Wheel" to explore where the holes were. It was easy to hear. The first two notes of the three-note bass figure were quite low level while

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Audison bit DRC controller neatly installed in a spare pocket



Audison VOCE AV3.0 Installed in the original door position

the third and lowest was thunderous! Once this was out in the open, we could pick up the weak area in other music quite easily.

It is not my job to sell products to those who have kindly invited me to have a listen to their cars, but on this occasion, Justin asked for my professional opinion. I offered up two brands that I knew NICE had worked with in the past, Intelligence Line by Rainbow and Upgrade by ETON respectively. I am familiar with both and having been exposed to Justin's music collection I was leaning toward Upgrade. It was with absolute delight that I received an email some weeks later from Justin: "Had the Eton speakers fitted under the seats in the M5 - talk about a power hike, really impressive." So there we go. I will have to take another trip to Norwich and have a listen sometime. In the meantime, a huge "thank you" to Justin for giving up a considerable amount of his time on the day and to FOUR MASTER NICE for putting together a most enjoyable system. □



Audison VOCE AV1.1 Mounted high on the dashboard

JUSTIN'S TOP FIVE DRIVING SOUNDS

- "Waiting all Night" – Rudimental ft. Ella Eyre
- "No Lie" – Sean Paul ft. Dua Lipa
- "All Cried Out" – Blonde ft. Alex Newell
- "Coming with You" – Ne-Yo
- "Into You" – Fabolous ft. Tamia