

Kef Equipped Lotus Emira – Worthy of Credit?



We were invited to look and listen to a Lotus Emira belonging to Tui airline pilot Michael Bavin at his home. Michael was happy to answer some questions on his life and the upgraded audio installation in his car.



Michael Bavin

Michael lives in Solihull with his wife and two children. He was raised in the beautiful spa town of Cheltenham. However, Solihull, where he has lived for the past 15 years, suits him much better due to its proximity to Birmingham airport.

He currently flies 737s on short to medium journeys, previously flying long haul. He has worked for Tui for 21 years.

Michael clearly loves his cars. He has an Audi S5 parked on the driveway and has previously owned a Lotus Elise.

As far as my brief research takes me, "Emira" is a Latin word meaning "worthy of credit" (I don't just throw this stuff together, you know!). It is also a Slavic word for Princess, and so I toyed with referencing the Austin Princess in the title to this article, but decided to go with the high-brow and far less likely to offend version!

Michael purchased his pride and joy with just 500 miles on the clock. Despite the low miles, he saved a considerable amount of money by doing this.

When we arrived, the car was looking majestic in Michael's customised garage. The yellow livery, striking white upholstery with black detailing, and even the colour-coded seat belt stripe all worked together to state that this car is very special.

What was not so special on the car's arrival in Michael's

life was the sound. The car featured an audio "upgrade" using Kef speakers. Having been fairly excited about this feature, Michael was instantly disappointed with the audio.

Kef is a solid manufacturer of high-end home Hi-fi, and so the expectation for something special was unsurprisingly high. The reality was depressing, however. As with the majority of factory-installed audio we listen to, the sound was mushy, lacked dynamics, and couldn't compete with the engine note while on the move.

It turned out that, apart from a space-age-looking 2" mid/tweeter sitting behind a giant grill in the doors, the rest of the sound was coming from a pair of 6" plastic-and-cardboard full-range speakers and a 6 X 9 single-cone speaker for sub bass. None of these looked like anything I have seen Kef manufacture for home audio, and the tweeter position at the base of the A-pillar was completely devoid of tweeters!

Fortunately, Michael is a researcher. His online searches led him eventually to Adil at Cambridge Car Audio (CCA).

Michael's Top Five Tunes



Motorcycle Emptiness-
Manic Street Preachers
White Horse-
Chris Stapleton
Mr. Jones-
Counting Crows
Skankin' Sweet-
Chronixx

I Love the Dough-
Notorious B.I.G (Feat. Jay-Z & Angela Winbush)

CCA post a lot of its work on social media. Adil presents well on YouTube, and it was clear that he was not new to the audio problems with the Lotus Emira. In fact, the standard audio is famously bad, and other owners have expressed their views on forums along with how they got them sorted.

After a short conversation, Michael decided CCA was the company to sort out his issues. CCA's first job was to strip the car interior and remove all the bad stuff! A liberal application of Skinz sound-deadening to both doors, all bulkheads, and the floor was the starting point for improvement. The engine note is important to owners of such cars, but the bare metal and resonant plastic door panels do not lend themselves to decent audio reproduction, simply amplifying wind and road noise.

Adil and his team have quickly become big fans of Audison Voce II speakers and selected the AVK 6 P II 2-way component set for the front of Michael's car. They have fitted the equally brilliant Voce AVX 6.5 II coaxial set in the rear. Both sets are mounted on custom 3D printed speaker rings. The speakers are driven by an Audison Forza AF M8.14 bit 8 X 140-watt amplifier equipped with an onboard Digital Signal Processor. The amplifier is fitted in a void behind the rear driver's side panel where the 6 X 9" subwoofer used to sit. Unusually, the Voce II coaxials allow for separate amplifier channels to be connected to the woofer and tweeter. This allowed all 8 channels to drive individual speakers. This is most beneficial as it allows an installer to tune individual speakers to help optimise the overall sound in the vehicle. In this case, CCA utilised the onboard software suite in the amplifier, "Accordo", to automatically analyse the car's interior audio characteristics and adjust all speakers for optimal optimisation.

"The guitar riff returns, and the drums punch the track along. I could already tell that the system was special."

As expected, there aren't many places in the cabin for a subwoofer. Fortunately, there is space behind the driver's seat where Michael had installed a proprietary active subwoofer to try to sort out the sound. CCA have removed that and managed to install a 10" Audison APBX 10 AS active subwoofer, against the rear bulkhead of the vehicle. I didn't even spot it at first. This is an exceptional piece of work and is as solid as a rock! The 10" subwoofer provides bags of low, musical sub bass, which is extremely desirable given the noise and proximity of the engine!

We didn't get around to discussing Michael's musical influences and listening habits in much detail. However, he mentioned that he listens to a Sonos system at home and that he had recently seen Chris Stapleton in Birmingham, which he really enjoyed. The Top Five, which he sent me after my visit, suggests that there is a lot of variation in his taste, as is very common these days.

He invited me to climb in and have a listen. For some reason, I was unable to connect my Android phone to the Emira Bluetooth, and so I did the listening test using Michael's own iPhone and streamed music from a non-Hi-Res source (Apple Music).

The first track we played was "White Horse" by Chris Stapleton. The track opens quietly, featuring a cymbal and acoustic guitar. Pretty soon, an electric guitar joins in, then a high descending run on a bass guitar. At 34 seconds, a louder guitar comes in with a bluesy riff with drums low in the background, but then a quick crescendo until 48 seconds, when there is a pause, when the vocal comes in with a single electric guitar again. Bass joins in at 1:18, the track comes together.

The guitar riff returns, and the drums punch the track along. I could already tell that the system was special. The width and height of the soundstage were surprising and immediately made the car's interior feel much bigger than it is. Although it is not a particularly bass-heavy track, the subwoofer control on the Audison DRC controller, mounted in a panel overhead, brought the sub bass up to a high level. I think you could call the guitar arrangement a wall of sound, yet all the parts were easy to separate with little concentration.

Gypsy by Fleetwood Mac was notable for its amazing clarity. I sometimes find Stevie Nicks' vocals a bit mumbly and indistinct, but I could hear every word on this system.

Finally, we listened to "Without You" by Lucy Pearl. Once this gets going, this is a very funky track. The guitar chops and snare drum were accurate and tight. The bass guitar was stable and solid, and there was plenty of it available. The voice was nicely centred and all in, this was a great listening experience.

I noticed a harshness at the top end, but from experience, I would bet it's due to streaming Apple Music from an iPhone. A Hi-Res streaming source, such as Qobuz or Tidal, would fix it and add additional detail to the sound. Having said this, many people like their music much brighter than I do.

Huge thanks to Michael for allowing us into his life and his car and also to CCA for turning audio dreams into reality! ☺

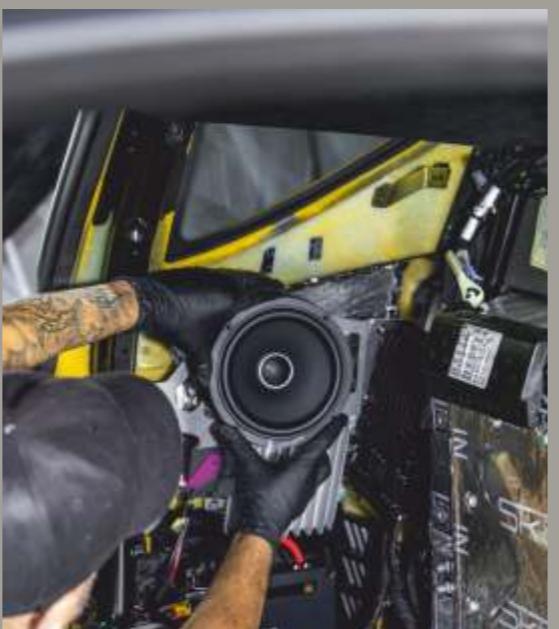
Michael & Carl sharing notes on their music selection.



"Gypsy by Fleetwood Mac was notable for its amazing clarity."

Equipment list

AUDISON Forza AF M 8.14 bit - Amp & DSP
 AUDISON DRC AC - Digital Remote Control
 AUDISON Voce II AVK 6.5P II - Two way active component
 AUDISON Voce II AV X6.5 II - 2-way coaxial
 AUDISON Prima APBX 10AS - Active sub woofer



A liberal application of Skinz sound deadening.

AUDISON VOCE II front and rear speaker installation.

AUDISON Prima active sub installation.

All install images courtesy of CCA.