

# On The Road Again!

**Managing the UK's most successful distributor of car hi-fi is anything but easy. However, FOUR's Managing Director Brian Parton's passion for great quality music reproduction in cars is infectious. We were fortunate enough to be offered a chance to undertake a road trip with him in his fabulous VW T6.**



change in driving machine. Brian recently chopped in his BMW 5-series motorway muncher for a new VW T6. The van has had a camping conversion carried out with many top-end features and is used heavily for shows and exhibitions and provides a safe haven for staff at these events as well as adding to FOUR's mighty armoury of demo vehicles. Inside, Brian has let loose with his desire for great sound and has installed a top-of-the-range Audio Circle (Previously Rainbow!) 2-way Profi speaker system with a matching Profi PL-S 10 subwoofer. These are driven via an Audison Voce 5.1K 5-channel amplifier with signal processing courtesy of an Audison bit Nove. In the rear, a pair of Audison Prima APX 4 coaxial speakers is driven from a bridged Audison Prima AP4 D amplifier.

It is not only the quality of the equipment that makes this example so special, it's just as much the work that has gone into the install. FOUR MASTER Plush Automotive in Leicester installed the audio. Plush is nationally renowned for the excellent ingenuity and finish it brings to integrated audio systems and this is a great example of the capabilities demonstrated on a regular basis. The Audiocircle tweeters are large and feature a 28mm cone. New A-pillars have been fabricated to accommodate these and to set them on-axis. Similarly, the PL-S 10 subwoofer has been installed into an integrated enclosure below the dashboard and matched-in flawlessly to look just like it was put there by VW!

This article is not supposed to be about the vehicle itself but more the man behind the company that has brought specialist in car brands; Hertz, Audison, Eton and Rainbow/Audiocircle to the UK. Over many years, Brian and I have sat in cars talking about music and sound. Eventually, we have both ended up enjoying each other's track selections and used the opportunity offered by a road trip to Scarborough to share music. I joined Brian at a service station in Nottingham and we set off. Knowing the route well meant that Brian was able to offer an accurate ETA that would include a stop off at his favourite roadside coffee emporium. Personally, I felt the time he allowed for this to be overly optimistic. I added half an hour then texted Bill who we were due to meet in Scarborough. Eventually, after sitting in the van for 30 minutes waiting for him to return with his coffee, I went to find him! This done, we were on our way and it was time to put some music on. We had decided to stream tracks from Tidal using his iPhone. Brian was a recent convert, having previously streamed exclusively from the revolting, high-end distorting, compression-loving Apple Music. Brian released "pause" and we listened for a while to a band Brian had come across called Big Wreck. Pretty heavy but I felt over-layered with superfluous instrumentation as opposed to raw garage band rock 'n'



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roll! Time for something slightly more attuned to our joint tastes. This came in the shape of the very excellent Gregory Porter. We have been using a few tracks to demonstrate at shows for many years now as they always draw a great reaction. In Brian's van, Gregory's work sounded sensational with precise cymbal and drum hits underpinning luscious, deep bass with tinkling keyboards and of course, superb sax providing the perfect bed for the silky soulful voice of the maestro.

We had recently auditioned a couple of tracks in the van that had impressed others. One of these was described as "that Genesis number with the big drum break in it". This referred of course to Phil Collins' "In The Air Tonight" – a mighty track indeed which put me in mind of a true Genesis track from "The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway", called "Fly on a Windshield" This also starts quietly with a fairly naked vocal then explodes into a beat and bass heavy second half. I turned it up loud and when it went off, we both jumped out of our skins! On that previous audition, Brian had also mentioned that he was really enjoying the trumpet. This would not be a natural instrument for a fan of Five Finger Death Punch to cite, but on that occasion, we had compared two versions of Elvis Costello and Clive Langer's "Shipbuilding". The first sung by Robert Wyatt, features a piano solo which is OK but nowhere near as impactful as the Elvis Costello version featuring Chet

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Baker on trumpet. As a continuation of this previous exploration, we hit Jazz mode, first with the opening track from SEED Ensemble's "Driftglass" album swiftly followed by Citrus Sun's "Mr. Wolf". We were having a great deal of fun already as we headed up the M1 toward the M18 junction where we would head north and east toward Scarborough! During this time, we experimented with listening at different levels and mused on the effects of different road surfaces and their effects on what we were hearing, especially when we hit a stretch of concrete road surface – this is the sort of "vibing" Brian and I get into when sharing a car! We noted that sections that had been patched to repair diesel spillages created far less road noise than the original road surface too.

At some point I felt it would be a good idea to go back to the trumpet theme and so I selected "Beirut" by Ibrahim Maalouf. This 12-minute opus builds very slowly to a mad guitar solo that I thought would key into Brian's love of heavy rock! In his van, the track sounded awesome with bags of emotion and indeed the guitar solo did its trick and left us speechless. Unfortunately, it also left us navigation blind and we missed our junction adding 30 minutes to our ETA and so another text to Bill was required.

We were now heading on a cross-country route, albeit on reasonable A-roads. We had a sonic foray into the Hammond artistry of Brian Auger before looking for a genre change. At this point we had been driving behind a police car for a while and continued to do so while we listened to "Jailbreak" by Thin Lizzy. Half way through "The Boys Are Back In Town", the police car signalled for us to follow him into a pub car park! The van had been on show at BusFest before we left for Scarborough and

for this, Brian had exhibited the vehicle on what turned out to be not quite up to spec number plates! Brian conversed with the officer and showed that he had correct plates on board the vehicle and would change them immediately and set to work! No sooner had he completed this work, than a couple approached. They had pulled up alongside the van and announced that they had just purchased a similar vehicle. Brian, as always, engaged them in a rather lengthy conversation about the work that had been completed and insisted they sit in for a demonstration. Coincidentally, they had just sourced some replacement speakers on ebay as they were not impressed at all with the sound from the standard set up. This is no surprise to me, as straight from factory and despite the list of flashy features on the head unit, these vans sound rubbish! The speakers they had chosen were made by Eton, a German specialist brand that Brian brings into the country! – this was a lovely diversion; however, it required another text to Bill. Our original ETA of 10:30 am had drifted out to 12:30! Bill was very tolerant and happy to still see us thankfully.

The remaining 25 minutes of our journey was travelled in near silence – or more accurately, Brian was on the hands-free, running his business! We finally arrived at our destination and Bill took us for lunch, which was a fabulous treat. On conclusion of our business in Scarborough we set off for home. Bill had recommended a scenic detour that the sat nav didn't fancy, but was actually quicker than the route it attempted to force us down. We were cruising small roads in deepest rural Yorkshire. The countryside was beautiful and we mused over just how lucky we are having such beautiful countryside on our little island. We were listening to Buena Vista Social Club at a fairly low level but enjoying every nuance for a good long time when Brian said; "Let's take a musical journey around the world!"

I love a challenge but was tiring at this point so inspiration was slow and my knowledge of geography and nationality of artists found wanting! Anyway, we headed to the south of France to listen to Gypsy Kings who sing in Spanish! – This was all a bit too much for us so next up, I went for some Manu Chao who it turns out is also French from Spanish descent. I felt a trip to Italy might be in order so we listened to "Acoustic Revenge" from a live album by Antonio Forcione. This really struck a chord (excuse the pun) with Brian. The recording and rendering via Tidal is superb and really bought

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**Brian & Carl's**  
**TOP FIVE DRIVING SOUNDS**

- Big Wrack - Albatross
- Gregory Porter - Take Me To The Alley
- Citrus Sun - Mr Wolf
- Thin Lizzy - Jail Break
- Moving Hearts - The Storm



unexpected sounds to our ears. Brian was smiling at this point! Next up I put on a track by Paco De Lucia (Spanish) accompanied by guitar virtuosos, Al Di Meola (Italian/American) and John McLaughlin (Doncaster!). Now these three are all intensely brilliant guitarists but it can all become a little overwhelming and "widdly-widdly", so we moved on to Ireland with "The Storm" by Moving Hearts. At about this point I fell asleep (no insult intended; I was simply tired!). I am not sure how long I slept for or what Brian listened to whilst I slumbered, but when I awoke, we were quite close to the service station where our mammoth music share began and it was time to say goodbye. Brian and I have spoken about our trip since and we both agree that we should repeat the experience at some stage. We had a right adventure and more importantly indulged our joint love of music for the best part of a day. Neither of us can think of much we would rather do during our working days. Perhaps a "music listening cruise" can become a thing? Be sure to rid yourself of nasty standard-fit speakers and amplifiers first though – I know a man who can help with that! ☐

