

Wired for sound

By HOMER ASHBURN

ALL IT took was a session in a TEHNICHI audio kitted out Land Rover Discovery more than 10 years ago at a Star AV Fest event to make a young music and hi-fi enthusiast realise that it was possible to get very good quality sound inside a car.

That Zainal, a company director today, lacked that most basic of components — a car — did not stop the man. As a passionate music lover looking for musical involvement in what he listens to, he knew what he had to do.

“A runner will pick the best shoe that best fits his feet. It’s the same with ICE. You choose the system that best suits you. Of course, you have to do this according to what you can afford. It took me two years to discover what I wanted and another two years to afford it,” he laughed.



Perfect: Take a seat in Zainal's BMW to experience a real life sound experience.

Zainal is proud of his 3 Series Bimmer. He said he would not part with the car and, because of that, he has over the years, slowly upgraded the ICE system in his BMW to help him achieve his goal of getting a real life sound experience in a car.

What he wanted was a system that was not necessarily loud sounding or powerful but one with sufficient power and detail resolution that could convey the emotion and natural tones of a live performance. And he wanted it in his BMW.

His first upgrade from the stock standard ICE that came with the car saw the OEM head unit as the only thing retained.

In went two Zapco amps, a set of Dynaudio mid-range and tweeters, Tehnichi Audio proprietary braided speaker cables, and a bargain basement subwoofer that he himself called a “sub sub.”

Months later, PHD Firenze speakers replaced the Dynaudios and four Tehnichi Audio power conditioners. Over time, in came a Blaupunkt Bremen head unit, base line Phass AP amps and Tehnichi Audio interconnects. Later, Phass A-series speakers replaced the PHDs and Phass reference RE50 and RE100 amplifiers took over the amping duties.



The Blaupunkt head unit.

“Out went one of the power conditioners and in went a new Tehnichi Audio proprietary signal-to-noise compensator called the Black Box. Once all this came together, it was like the difference between a gloss and a matte black wall. The music just breathed into life,” he added.

How good is the system in Zainal’s car? Let’s just say the phrase to use phrase “blown away” is probably an apt description. Zainal is a lover of live music; the system in his car makes you feel like you are in the same recording studio where the performance was being taped.

The harmonics from a plucked acoustic guitar, the warm voice that emanated from the installer’s test CD was, how best to put it, near picture perfect? The system, with the Black Box at the heart of the matter, was making the music seem real, which in turn makes the listener feel involved and one with the performance.

This feeling was especially established when a drum solo track was played. From the hi-hat, to the snare to the pounding of the toms, it was all reproduced as if you were there. Even the kick of the bass drum gave the perception of the air being shifted in your direction ? as if you in a live setting.

Now, these were live recorded test CDs. The real test for the system was analogue to digital CDs, usually 80s and early 90s CDs when the technology was yet at its best. Tracey Chapman's self titled debut album was a joy to behold because, despite the limitation of earlier CD recording techniques, Zainal's system breathed life into the recording.

Suspecting that the system thrived on well-recorded tracks with empty spaces between the instruments, James Blunt's All The Lost Souls, a Grover Washington Best Of, tracks from warbler Robin Thicke and a few tracks from local jazz musician Roger Wang shone.



Trunk sub woofers and amps.

Slap in some Lightning Seeds jangly guitar pop, several difficult The Verve tracks from their Northern Soul album, Crowded House's Together Alone album (chock-full of interesting atmospherics), The Style Council and David Gray and nothing could pry this reader from the driving seat of that lovely BMW.

Even when things got sonically complicated, as in live recordings by John Legend and Sheila Majid or when tonnes of atmospherics are used — as in tracks by Violet Indiana and David Sylvian — the system got on with the job and lovingly, delicately, recreated the harmonics and atmospherics that are the invisible backbone to any recording.

So, how does our BMW-driving company director feel about his system?

Pleased as punch, considering that he not only has one of the best systems on four wheels, he did it at a fraction of what one needs to spend for a home hi-fi system to replicate the same sort of involvement.

“To replicate the sound that I have in my car today in a home system, and I have asked around, would require a major investment in audio equipment, speakers and room acoustics. It would certainly require much more than what I’ve spent inside my car,” he said while declining politely to reveal his total outlay.

“It took me a long time but for a music lover like me, it was worth it. And when my friends tell me I’m crazy, I just say what price would you put to music?”

http://star-motoring.com/news/story.asp?file=/2008/8/3/ms_ice/1603639&sec=ms_ice