



News

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Slimline marketing works wonders for Full Fat Audio

UK: No advertising, the beginnings of a website and no stand at PLASA. Is this any way, you might ask, to build an amplifier brand? Full Fat Audio's Dave Millard has the perfect response: who said we set out to build a brand? He set out to build an amplifier. Success in doing that is what has turned it into a brand.

"I used to be a support engineer at C-Audio/BSS/Soundcraft, working on the entire product range," he begins. "When the operation was closed down I decided to design some amps and started selling them to contacts I'd made in the trade." Those contacts came not just through connections he'd made with C-Audio and its pals but via his PA rental company (now trading as Project Audio). Project's clientele includes fashion shows, corporate work and parties for MTV and the like. "We do some live sound but it's mainly playback," Millard says. "We do a big thing at Notting Hill Carnival and a lot of DJ parties for Sancho Panza."

One of FFA's earliest successes was T Bar, in Shoreditch, one of London's hippest venues. "We hired them a couple of stacks when they started," says Millard, "and then they were humming and hawing about expanding it. Then they went for it and now they have a huge FFA-driven Funktion One system [designed and implemented by Project Audio in conjunction with Kelco]."

Despite Millard's self-deprecating description of his company as "a fledgling UK manufacturer of pro audio power amplifiers" he's evidently brand-minded. You don't build amps that colour by accident.

"We've spent a lot on the boxes," he admits. "They're made in 2mm aluminium, milled, extruded and anodised, and whereas practically

What are the three most important elements in brand marketing? Product, product, product, reckons Dave Millard of Full Fat Audio

everyone else is just using a standard finish, we use DuPont paint. I want clients to be impressed." And he wants his amps to be distinctive.

"They're known as the purple amps so it's starting to work," he says.

All his marketing so far has been through word of mouth. "Mass releasing a product before it's ready can be fatal," Millard believes – hence FFA's non-attendance at PLASA – though his word of mouth contacts are impressive enough. In particular, Full Fat Audio has been endorsed by Funktion One as a recommended amplifier (along with MC² and Lab.guppen) for powering its subs. "Full Fat Audio is in the top three best bass amplifiers we know about," says Funktion One's Tony Andrews. And bass is currently FFA's speciality. Its range – the FFA-2000, FFA-3600, FFA-6000 and FFA-8000 – is rated 2 x 1kW, 2 x 1.9kW, 2 x 3kW and 2 x 4kW respectively (2 ohms, RMS). The 6000 and the 8000 also incorporate dual power supplies, completely separate and unaware of each other, so if one fails, the other continues operation.

"We're known for our bass performance," says Millard. "The whole point was to design a proper 2-ohm system, producing very high power for driving subs." Millard designed all the metalwork and people around helped with the engineering. Manufacture takes place in Leighton Buzzard, UK, by "very good subcontractors who do as



Dave Millard: Full Fat bloke

much as I let them," he says, but adds, "Every amp passes me and I do all the listening tests."

While FFA also undertakes some OEM work (for Noise Control Audio, using a grey, not purple, front panel), that is as far as it goes – for the moment. "We'll probably bring out a cheaper range in due course," Millard says, "and we'll be looking to launch a HF range later this year, in both 4-channel and 2-channel versions."

The auguries are good: FFA amps have recently been used in three Bournemouth locations – the Opera House powering Funktion-One and Martin Audio speakers, in 'Hush' powering Martin Audio W8/W8S and 'Dusk 'Til Dawn' powering Funktion One Resolution 2, F218 and F88s – a total of 45 FFA units, all specified by Mark Neil of Production Hire, an FFA main dealer.

Further afield FFA amps were specified for Cream which bought six 8000s. "I installed them on Boxing Day along with Andy Kayll. We had them powered up ready for three or four thousand people that night, and the Phazon bass bins sounded beautiful." Kayll was also instrumental in lining FFA up for DC10 in Ibiza. "They took four 6000s," he says. "I think that with the noise regulations they didn't dare have the 8s."

Europe is very much within FFA's sights and a clear indication that it is changing from fledgling manufacturer to fully-fledged brand is that it has now appointed its first overseas distributor. Unsurprisingly, there's a Funktion One connection: >>

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Clockhouse Concepts, which already represents Funktion One in France, Portugal and Morocco, is now looking after the same territories for FFA.

"We'd been buying FFA's amps for a few years (including one of the first batch released) and wanted to get more involved," says Clockhouse's Chris Hawkes. "Their amplifiers are extremely well received, they sound excellent and have exemplary reliability – not one failure during all the time we've used them. It's the one we send into the difficult circumstances and the high performance environments." It's almost superfluous for Hawkes to add that he's excited about the relationship, but it's a true relationship – where he gets to propose modifi-

cations or new product directions and Millard actually listens to him and often implements his suggestions – rather than simply a commercial transaction.

While Millard is happy to farm out distribution to the rest of Europe, he wants to continue looking after the UK. "I enjoy dealing with the dealers direct, and I don't want to give that up. So we'd welcome new dealers but have no plans to appoint a UK distributor."

No need, apparently. Word of mouth and Millard's enthusiasm for selling seem to be doing the trick. "Every year we've grown," he says. "We're just starting to get into profit – but still fighting cash flow, keeping our eyes on the consistency, and keeping suppliers at the

right price." That's a well worn path and one which pro audio's biggest brands, almost without exception, trod in their early days. Not that Millard is even dreaming

of building empires. He's still concentrating on building amps. ☐

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All ready for the colourful Sancho Panza street party at the Notting Hill Carnival



Amplifiers: full, fat, and bright purple