

Driven Deaf

Extreme AutoFest 2002

There will be two types of auto-sound competitions at the Extreme AutoFest this weekend — one for sound quality and one for what's called "sound-pressure level." What it means is "loudness."

Sound quality is judged by a human being who listens to a special compact disc played through the auto's sound system. Mike Jaffe, regional director of United States Autosound Competition International, was asked what's on the CD. "Certain cuts of music that are worthy of testing stereo systems," he said by phone from Phoenix, where he's based.

Points in the sound-quality competition are awarded for the look of the installation, too. "It's got to be neatly done," said Jaffe, "and safely done, meaning there's plenty of protection

for the electrical wiring. It's even to the point where you are given points for having a complete alarm system on a car, because if you're going to put thousands and thousands into a system, you certainly don't want to see it walking down the street for lack of a \$200 or \$300 alarm."

How is loudness judged? Surely not with a CD...? "Oh, yeah, it is. But it's not a musical one. It's almost strictly test tones." A human being is not the arbiter here. "A microphone that's attached to a meter is inserted into the vehicle. The competitor scores whatever the meter generates."

Is the competitor inside the car? "The competitor can be inside or out." Do many choose to be inside? "I'd say the vast majority. But I demand that they wear hearing protection. And I provide it." But they must not have worn protection while testing their systems... "Well, that's a whole



Speakers and amplifiers in back of car



Entry in last year's sound competition

different issue."

The demographic for the loudness competition isn't hard to imagine. "Typically it's younger males, 18 to 25." But sound-quality competitors are often older, said Jaffe, who named a 27-year-old competitor in the L.A. area. "He's almost guaranteed to be there this weekend, because he's in the business."

Yes, said Fred Lynch, who was reached at work — Image Dynamics, a manufacturer of high-end car-audio equipment in the Gardena area. His car would be "one of the keynotes."

Lynch, who began competing when he was 16 and who has attained "expert" class, was asked if he knew a special word for what he is. "They call us 'mobile tweakers' or 'mobile reference audiophiles.'" He adds, "Most of us don't hold relationships for very long because of how many hours we spend on our cars. We're definitely different individuals. Take the car I'm currently running around with. It's a

\$20,000 car that I've got over 2000 man hours invested in and \$85,000 worth of product and labor." What kind of car does it happen to be? "It's a 2001 Volkswagen Passat." Does he get a lot of free products at work? "Image Dynamics is my primary sponsor, but I have multiple sponsors, because I've shown the dedication and gone to the shows and made a good name for whoever I represent." So his car is like a sponsored athlete. "Exactly. That's just what it is."

Lynch's car is conspicuous. "It's plastered with manufacturers' graphics. You look through my back window, my entire back seat is gone because of the stereo system in it. There's no hiding it."

He can't leave it just anywhere, then, can he? "You know what? It's actually not that bad, because there's a certain point where you get so high up, your car is like a magnet, a big red flashing light, saying 'Hey, everybody, look here.' There's always too many people looking at it. I could take the car to a mall, park it in the parking lot, and have no problem whatsoever."

He has some advice for owners of cars with systems that aren't so "high up." "People think, just because they have a lot of system, they need to play it all the way up until the time they park their car. Well, those are the cars that

people steal, because they know what's in them. If you're gonna have it turned up, turn it down before you get where you're going."

Lynch's car is protected for another reason. "When you go around with something like what I've got, people get to know who you are. I had my car at the dealership, and they took it for a test drive. Within 15 minutes I was getting phone calls: 'Why is this person driving your car?'"

The guys at the dealership must have fun listening to his system while they work. "Actually, before I take it in, I disable it. I learned my lesson a long time ago. I had an issue with a different vehicle, so I took it to a service center and decided to show up early. I heard my system even before I got to the place. Certain things over the years you learn that you just don't do."

— Jeanne Schinto

Extreme AutoFest 2002
Sunday, September 8
11:00 a.m.–7:00 p.m.
Coors Amphitheater
2050 Entertainment Circle,
Chula Vista
spectators \$18
(\$2 off with flyer coupon);
auto-sound competitors \$45
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