

Vince Jennings Interview June 2011

We commenced by asking Vince what got him started building speakers...

"I was like many hifi enthusiasts at the time, I'd been in electronics in the RAF, and I'd developed an interest in making speakers having read books by Gilbert Briggs (*the founder of Wharfedale and author of several highly influential books on speaker design*). Those books got me started."

"There were companies around making speakers, I liked CELEF, I could see it was successful, and what could be done, so we started building speakers in the garage in early 1974, then we began supplying local hifi shops, and from there it all grew very fast".

"The RAM name, as I recall, came about originally as Reflex Acoustic Monitors, but was never used in this form. The RAM badge was designed by an artist friend, which, before being plastic moulded, he screen printed on pieces of aluminium and then baked them in his mother's oven".

First early models used Seas drivers, as RAM expanded it began to use mainly Dalesford speakers "The chassis were a bit rough, the metalwork wasn't well finished, but Dalesford were helpful, the units worked well and the really great thing was they were 30% cheaper for us to buy than the others around at the time" (*a reference to KEF B200's*). "We initially used Isophon tweeters, but soon changed to Audax drive units, and settled on their tweeter (*Audax HD 12 x 9D25*) which was a good unit that we ended up using for a long time."

Even in the early days, special attention was paid to good quality cabinets for which RAM is still well-known - "we spent a lot of time on the cabinets, we always used 2 sided veneered chipboard (*particle board*), we thought it gave the best results, and 6mm of bitumen damping pads. They were horrible to work with, cutting them up, stripping the paper off and then sticking them in - I remember we got the first supplies from Halfords" (*a UK car accessory retail chain*).



RAM 1

The first RAM range was the RAM 1, 2 and 3. "The Ram 3 was a 3 way unit with 2 Dalesford 8" 13 ohm units specially made for us which were wired in parallel, the RAM 2 was a smaller version, and the RAM 1 was a 2-way resistive port system with a single Dalesford 8" and an Isophon tweeter. We worked quite closely with Dalesford over the years, they developed a large magnet version of the 8" for us, and later the ABR used in the RAM 150 and 200 which was specially developed and tuned for us."

"Kevin Franklin was now with us in Norwich and we had met Jerry Lewin and Vince Adams who formed RAM Ltd and took on the UK marketing and distribution for us within their existing operation from Milton Keynes. The idea behind calling the marketing operation RAM Ltd was to make it all seem as though it was the same company although in fact they were completely separate. They already distributed to 400 hifi shops, so suddenly we had a lot of marketing outlets available to us, and it gave us a big increase in business. It really worked well for us. This was in the UK only, we always did all the export shipping ourselves from Norwich."

By this time RAM had already moved twice from the original garage to industrial units, but for the imminent increase in business that was about to occur it was clear that much larger premises were needed, and it moved to the Granary at Bracondale which was rented from the local Council. "I was responsible for all the design side, and also for ordering what we needed for production. Matthew looked after the financial part of RAM and Kevin was Sales Director but also looked after Production. We were very busy, and in effect we'd suddenly moved from a relatively tiny unit into a building where we had a proper production line with 12 staff."

"All our networks were made by Falcon Acoustics to our designs, cabinets were made from a number of manufacturers, and things were going well. I used to go to Falcon for a coffee and a chat, and I remember one day I arrived and Malcolm had got one of the first Commodore PET computers, I'd never seen anything like it. *(He's still got it!)*"

Then in 1978 we introduced the Bookshelf, the RAM 100 which I had designed as a replacement for the RAM 1, the RAM 150 and RAM 200, the last two models used the Dalesford ABR in different sized cabinets. I also designed the RAM 400 in 1979 which used the KEF B139 in an Infinite Baffle design for the first time".



RAM 100



RAM 200



RAM 400

"I tried to give our speakers a distinctive quality, probably a bit more bass than was expected, for me getting good bass was always a priority."

"I have always liked transmission line speakers for that reason, so I had designed the STL4, it was enormous (*it measured 122 x 61 x 45 cms*) and used 2 Dalesford 8" bass units in a 3m damped transmission line, and a Dalesford 8" as the midrange with an Audax tweeter. I took it to the GEC Research Centre anechoic chamber to be measured, it had the deepest bass of any speaker they had ever measured, remaining flat to 30HZ before rolling off. I remember the image placement was really good. I think we only ever built 6 pairs of them, from memory they were about £400 a pair, a real enthusiast's speaker, I'm told there's a pair still owned by someone in Norwich, and there's supposed to be a pair in France, but I don't know where any of them are, they've vanished". (*A copy of a preliminary brochure is in the Archive, but if anyone knows who has these and can put us in touch so we can get some photographs, please email us at Falcon Acoustics*).

"Things were going very well for us at RAM, the marketing system was working well, and we knew several months in advance what was ordered through Milton Keynes so we could plan ahead for what was needed for production."

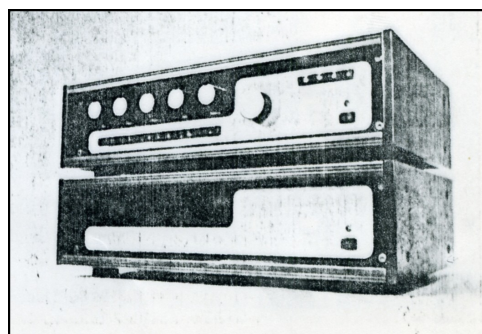


Also in 1978, one of the 3 LS3/5a BBC licences became available following Chartwell going out of business.

"We applied for the licence, it seemed like a sensible opportunity for us, so we took the Mini-Bookshelf down to the BBC to show what we could do, they liked it, and gave us the licence to build the LS3/5a. Falcon did the crossovers, and in late 1978 or maybe early 1979 we started to build them".

"They were definitely a prestige product, we never made much money out of them, they were expensive to make and took a long time to build. We only ever made a few hundred pairs. I remember I used to measure and match the pairs up before they were boxed up. They went everywhere but I recall we had a lot of interest from Japan."

Also designed at this time was the RAM P100 pre-amplifier and the A100 (50W per channel) and A200 (100W per channel) Power Amplifiers. These were designed by Ivor Green, but only ever reached the prototype stage and were never made in any quantities.



The last RAM speakers were designed by Vince in 1980 - the Domestic Range, made up of the CD10 and 20, and the RAM 60, RAM 70 and RAM 80. These were improved versions of the RAM 100, 150 and 200 using Dalesford units with Seas tweeters. The CD10 was an improved Compact, and the CD20 was an enlarged version of the CD10 with resistive port loading.

RAM 60, 70 & 80

Then in the middle of 1980 things began to go badly wrong for RAM, as the company responsible for all the UK marketing and distribution unexpectedly ran into financial difficulties. This naturally had a major impact on Vince and his colleagues at RAM.

“ I’m still not sure what happened, but they certainly ran into financial problems and missed 2 months sales payments to us. Our cash flow just dried up, it stopped. We started our own UK sales and distribution but it took time to organise and get running, Kevin Franklin went back to Sales having been in charge of the Production side, it was all very difficult, but we all worked very hard at it. We kept on manufacturing throughout this period, we still had our export sales but they were probably only about 20-25% of the whole business, and it took time to get everything in the UK going.”

“We went to our bank with a business plan and a 6 months plan of sales targets. They increased our overdraft, and we managed to hit our sales targets for the first 5 months, but in the 6th month, we literally just missed the target, and that was it, the bank stopped the company overdraft. We had no choice, we had to stop, and eventually the company went into liquidation.”

And looking back on it all now?

“It was a frantic few years, we were not business people, we were just enthusiasts who moved into the market, and we probably made mistakes. There were a lot of similar companies around at the time like us, and I met a lot of interesting people, many similar to us who had moved into manufacturing. The good thing is that there’s quite a few people around who worked with us, and we’re all still enthusiasts”.

RAM Mark 11

The liquidation of RAM Electronics Ltd took about 18 months to finalise, and the rights to RAM were bought in June 1982 by a new RAM company called RAM ElectroAcoustics Ltd with 3 non-UK directors. This continued to manufacture RAM speakers including some LS3/5a (*data taken from Falcon Acoustics records*) from the Granary at Bracondale, but no new models were developed or introduced. Production finally ceased after 15 months in late 1983 when RAM ElectroAcoustics went into liquidation. Although there are no official reasons given for what happened, it was probably due to a combination of market forces and the fact that Dalesford had gone into liquidation 6 months before so the supply of drive units would have dried up. Vince and his colleagues had no connection with RAM Mark 11.

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