

TANNOY



A BRIEF HISTORY OF...
TANNOY

INTRODUCTION

Few companies' products have such a profound impact on our lives that their names enter the dictionary as generic descriptions for their inventions. There are notable exceptions such as Biro, for its ballpoint pen and Hoover, for its vacuum cleaner.

In the audio field, Tannoy stands alone for its success in developing early public address systems and then continuing its reputation for pioneering audio solutions. The word Tannoy is synonymous with sound, appearing in the dictionary as: 'a communications system with loudspeakers, used for making announcements in public buildings.' The phrase 'Over the Tannoy' is universally used to describe a PA announcement.

THE EARLY YEARS

In the early days of broadcasting after the First World War, radio sets needed both low and high voltage DC power and that had to be supplied by batteries. The lead acid batteries used in the radio sets of the time were extremely large and heavy and needed regular recharging by heavy duty charging equipment.

In London, in 1926, Guy R Fountain perfected a new type of electrical rectifier with the aim of designing a charger more suitable for use in the home. His rectifier consisted of two dissimilar metals held in a special electrolyte solution. One metal was Tantalum and the other an alloy of Lead. So successful was this invention that Guy Fountain founded a British Company called Tannoy (a contraction of the words 'Tantalum' and 'Alloy'). Tannoy began to diversify and soon became internationally known and highly regarded in all aspects of sound reproduction.

Moving coil loudspeakers with DC energised magnets began Tannoy's continued success in terms of audio technology. A discrete two-way loudspeaker system followed in 1933 and shortly after a range of microphones and loudspeakers capable of high power handling. The company built many communications devices that went into service in World War II, including hand held microphones used by tank commanders.

In the 1940s Tannoy emerged at the forefront of the communications revolution, developing its own equipment and production technology. The music recording industry was in its infancy and a growing band of enthusiasts perused better sound in the home. Tannoy loudspeakers and microphones were involved in every aspect of the music industry, from live music to recording and home playback.

Tannoy's Chief Engineer at the time, the well-respected Mr. Ronnie H. Rackham, was well aware that a single transducer could not reproduce the full range of musical sounds. However, he knew that splitting the musical spectrum across two physically separated transducers, even if only inches apart, would degrade musical accuracy. Sound waves emanating from two distinct acoustical centres create subtle yet audible patterns of destructive interference. Only a true point-source radiator, with all frequency bands emanating from a common acoustical centre, could resolve this difficulty.

However, despite several coaxial driver systems from other companies were being produced at the time Mr. Rackham realised that systems that placed a separate and bulky horn or acoustical lens in the low frequency cone created more signal degrading anomalies than they solved. His inspired solution was to design and manufacture the low frequency cone in such manner as to also function effectively as the high frequency waveguide. Both elements would thus function in perfect harmony as an ideally balanced and acoustically congruent point-source, free from any detrimental diffraction or masking effects.

The first Dual Concentric loudspeaker, designated the Monitor Black, first appeared at the London Radio Show in 1947. This debut model employed a high frequency compression driver concentrically mounted within a 15-inch bass driver. The two were conceived as an integral unit, with the flare shape of the bass driver's cone continuing the flare rate of the high frequency unit. The crossover point was set at 1 kHz, nearly an octave above the lower cut-off point of the natural horn frequency, resulting in exceptionally low colouration.

Monitor Black marked a defining moment in the history of high fidelity sound reproduction and the History of Tannoy. The famous Dual went through many incarnations, including the famous Monitor Red and Monitor Gold, before arriving at today's highly sophisticated and high-tech Kingdom Royal Dual and the Gold Reference Duals in the Prestige GR series. Smaller but no less sophisticated Dual Concentric drivers can be found through Tannoy's loudspeaker ranges and across its professional audio loudspeaker line up.

LATER DEVELOPMENT

Guy R Fountain retired from the company in 1974 but Tannoy continues his philosophy to this day, and the company is dedicated to the accurate and realistic reproduction of music for both enthusiasts and professionals around the world.

The Tannoy brand name can be found not only in the homes of discerning hi-fi enthusiasts across the globe but also in some of the most prestigious audio installations throughout the world. Examples include the Hong Kong Convention Centre, the Sydney Opera House, the London Palladium and the Bellagio and Hard Rock Hotels in Las Vegas. More recently the Burj Khalifa and Atlantis Hotel Resorts in Dubai and Yas Marina Hotel on the Abu Dhabi F1 circuit have been installed with Tannoy loudspeaker throughout. In airports, shopping centres, churches, stadiums, music venues and in living rooms around the world, Tannoy has a cutting edge loudspeaker solution.

Innovations like the award-winning QFlex beam steering loudspeakers that allows precise placement of audio messaging in public spaces, the VQ series of high-efficiency arena loudspeakers (up to 114db/1Watt), and the outstanding Kingdom Royal, make Tannoy the obvious choice for any audio installation where quality and accuracy are absolutely paramount.

The company's Scottish factory and headquarters is located in Coatbridge, near Glasgow where it has been based for the past 35 years. Indeed, all Tannoy products are still conceived, designed and developed at their UK base to this day, and the extensive manufacturing facility builds professional and touring loudspeakers, as well as Tannoy's high-end Residential ranges including Definition, Prestige and Kingdom Royal.

Tannoy became part of the TC Group of companies in 2002. TC Group now comprises of several individual audio technology businesses, which includes TC Electronic, a leader in MI and studio products, Swedish amplification specialist Lab Gruppen and signal processing technology company Lake. The combined expertise of Tannoy, Lab Gruppen, Lake and TC Electronic is allowing the companies to share research and development and create award-winning products in every sector of the loudspeaker market in every corner of the globe.