

BY BRETT SOLOMON

THE HISTORY OF HIFONICS

A JOURNEY INTO THE MYTHOLOGY OF ONE OF CAR AUDIO'S MOST POWERFUL BRANDS.

Most of you guys in the bay have come across or installed Hifonics amps — they have been a stalwart of the industry for the past 22 years (it's so hard to believe that these amplifiers have been around about as long as some of you guys have!). The badass names of the amps are classic — why not use the names of Greek and Roman gods when your target audience is probably reading about these same things in high school and college literature classes? This, coupled with Hifonics famous tagline 'Power from the Gods,' made the amplifiers irresistible from a marketing standpoint, but marketing alone cannot make an amplifier. The company still produces some of the most powerful amplifiers with phenomenal dollar-to-watt ratios. I'll bet that most of you guys probably have no idea of how the company was started, or the balls that it took to become a car audio amplifier manufacturer when most amps were little more than 'power boosters' bolted underneath the dash.

We caught up with the creator of Hifonics, Helmut Stieglitz, to get the story behind the creation of an amplifier company. Stieglitz has passed the baton to Maxxsonics (the new owner of Hifonics, and other long-time car audio manufacturer Crunch), where president Alden Stiefel and VP Ted Henricks are responsible for

keeping the legend of Hifonics blossoming.

Hifonics was created back in November of 1981, but actual trading started in the middle of 1982 (they're as old as MTV!).

"The idea of model names rather than just model numbers actually came from American cars," explains Stieglitz. "They all had names, not like European cars such as BMW, Mercedes, Volvo, etc., which just had numbers. So, we started borrowing the names of Greek, Roman, Teutonic, and later Egyptian gods, along with stars in the constellation. Our first three models — the Vulcan, Odin, and Thor — were imported from South Africa, where they were conceptualized and developed by Lukas Louw."

United States Customs demanded a sticker on Hifonics packaging with the country of origin. Stieglitz remembers having a sticker made that said Made in RSA (Republic of South Africa).

"People thought it was a printing error that we said RSA instead of USA," remembers Stieglitz with a laugh.

South Africa is actually an unbelievable place to do manufacturing — just check out all of the 'kit cars' that are manufactured there. But, back in the early 1980s, there were all sorts of boycotts against South Africa because of Apartheid ("an official policy of racial segregation formerly

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practiced in the Republic of South Africa, involving political, legal, and economic discrimination against non-whites" — dictionary.com). So, Stieglitz made the decision to bring the manufacturing of Hifonics to California, right here in the United States.

"At first, dealers were skeptical," explains Stieglitz. "They wanted model numbers! But in a short time, people started asking for Odin, Thor, or Zeus. Later on many people didn't know the name Hifonics, but they knew the names of the amplifiers very well."

Installation expert Billy "Box" Bode (he got his nickname from being a master cabinet maker and then switching trades back in the 1980's to car audio where he remains one of the best MDF fabricators; he is also known for installing winning systems for Frank 'Turtleman' Monaghan) remembers the Hifonics craze at the beginning.

"Man, it was like nothing we ever saw before," remembers Bode. "I had a couple of Zeus amplifiers, and I admit that I didn't know them as Hifonics amps, but as 'Zeus' amps, but it was the first time that I experienced out-board amplifiers that gave tremendous amounts of power. Back in the 1980's, if you had a Zeus with a couple of good pro audio 10-inch woofers in a custom box you were really pounding."

"There were only four major amplifier manufacturers located in the USA in 1983," adds Stieglitz. "One of these, Linear Power, had a 150-watt-per-channel amplifier which was, at the time, the most powerful amplifier available. Of course, 150 real watts, not the '1000-watt' boosters the size of cigarette boxes that were offered at the time from Asia. Lukas and I decided to engineer and market the Daddy of the Gods — Zeus. Zeus had 200 watts-per-channel into a 4-ohm load and had to be contained in a huge chassis. In January of 1984, Lukas and I stood in a 10-foot x 10-foot booth at CES in Las Vegas. People walked by, took leaflets, and

told us we were 'crazy,' 'loco,' 'meshugga,' or just plain 'nuts' with such a huge amplifier. I only had a 150 pieces, and by the end of the show we had not sold one piece. Then, a couple of amps hit the streets, and the word got out. By the end of February, I was sold out. People started calling and



ordered samples of this 'monster' amp. The name Zeus almost became synonymous with Hifonics and became the most famous amp. Next came models of 250 watts-per-channel, then 275 watts-per-channel, and, finally, 300 watts-per-channel models were produced. The power race was on!"

WORDS TO LIVE BY

"In 1984, I thought of the slogan 'Power from the Gods,'" explains Stieglitz. "Since Hifonics amplifiers became more and more powerful, we showed ads of amplifiers stacked up and called it 'The Tower of Power'."

As the power race among amplifier manufacturers escalated, Hifonics wanted to remain in the forefront.

"A few manufacturers claimed they had the most powerful amp in the world," recalls Stieglitz. "Well, we shocked the industry with the Colossus — a monster amp that produced 600 watts-per-channel (RMS) into 4 ohms; strapped into mono, the amp produced 1800 watts RMS. One of the most famous car stereo magazines back in the day tested the most powerful amps. Colossus won

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easily! After that statement piece of Hifonics engineering, we concentrated on more four-channel, six-channel, and mono amps. We didn't want to go higher in power since there were no woofers available that could even handle the Colossus. I remember loudspeaker companies such as Cerwin-Vega and JBL that refused warranty claims with a Colossus hooked up to one of their woofers!"

A LOOK TOWARD THE FUTURE

Ted Henricks wants to make sure that Hifonics retains its legendary status. As vice president of Sales and Marketing of Maxxsonics (the parent company of Hifonics), Henricks sees that the Hifonics line stays true to its roots.

"Hifonics continues to embrace the original philosophy of high-powered amplification for the mobile market," states Henricks. "We still use mythological namesakes for our products —

they're all quite recognizable, such as the Zeus series and, of course, the Colossus. We continue to be internationally renowned for big power at reasonable prices. Today, Hifonics manufactures a myriad of amplifiers for virtually any application, from sound quality designs to ground pounding D-Class, to mini 'under-the-seat' applications."

We asked Henricks about some of the new kick-ass products Hifonics has introduced: "Certainly our XX Colossus has taken the market by storm," he explains. "Already a world record holder in dB Drag Racing and other sanctioned audio events, the XX Colossus is a thundering 1 x 3200 watts RMS at 2 ohms or 2 x 2000 watts at 1 ohm. The interest in this product has once again established Hifonics in mobile audio circles as the powerplant of choice for the serious enthusiast."

Of course, while Hifonics originally manufactured amplifiers, they decided to engineer their own subwoofer line to complement the powerful amps.

Henricks notes: "Our new Atlas AS12SQ square subwoofer has drawn serious attention. This '900 watt' RMS power-handling subwoofer features a woven Kevlar cone, our first cast aluminum basket, and an illuminated dust cap that you must



see to believe. Because of its unique design, you can use it for dB competition or sound quality."

The new resources that Hifonics has under the umbrella of Maxxsonics certainly allows for some great dealer opportunities.

"Maxxsonics USA, the parent company of Hifonics and Crunch car audio, has taken the rebirth of Hifonics to new levels of support," adds Henricks. "We offer no minimum order quantity, an enhanced



Web site, technical service, and we have enlisted Net Enforcers to patrol the Web for us. Plus, and best of all, we're easy to deal with from placing an order to executing a warranty claim."

In the tumultuous world of car audio, it's great to see a famous name live and thrive in today's marketplace.

"The future at Hifonics is bright," states Henricks. "Our amplifier line-up is stronger than ever — it's known by our dealers as the 'King of D-Class amplification.' When you need to pound, you look to Hifonics. The Generation XX series, which features the XX Colossus and other competition and sound quality amplifiers, is taking the industry by storm and our Genesis IA (Interactive Audio) products will be available this fall in time for the Christmas selling season. We continue to emphasize sound quality. Systems only sound as good as the clean output that your speakers, subs, and amplifiers can produce, and that's what Hifonics is about today — the same as we were in Helmut's day!"

FOR MORE DETAILS, VISIT HIFONICS ON THE WEB AT WWW.MAXXSONICS.COM/HIFONICS.