

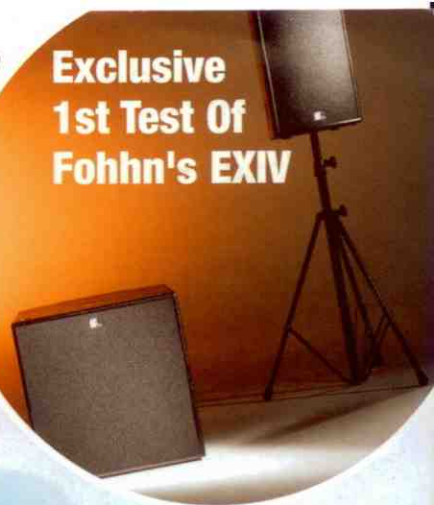
PA REVIEW

Is This The World's Finest PA System?

Exclusive
1st Test Of
Fohhn's EXIV

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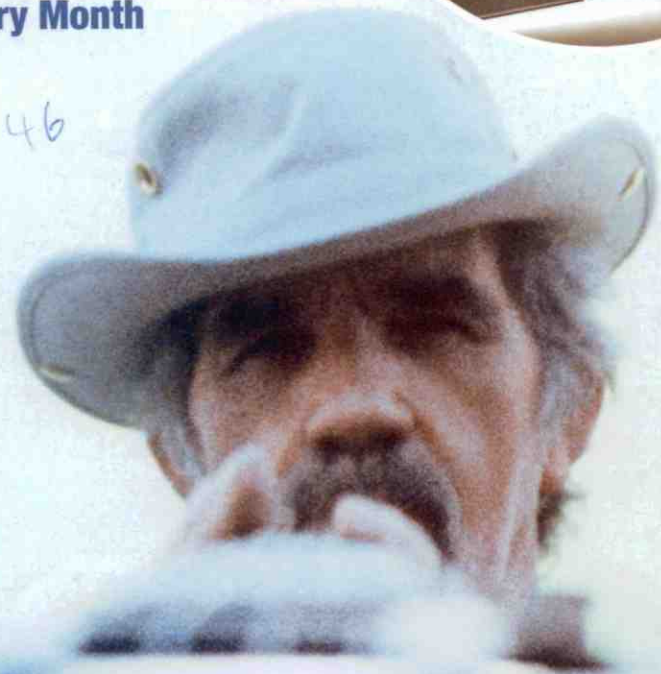
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September 2005

The Revolution Will Not Be Hardwired

Death To Cables Wi-Fi Audio Is Here!

P 46



Backstage Bar

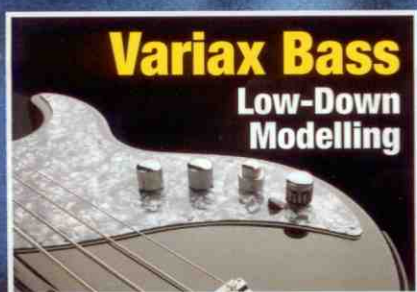
**SO, YOU WANNA
PUT ON A FESTIVAL?**

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Preparing For War... Again

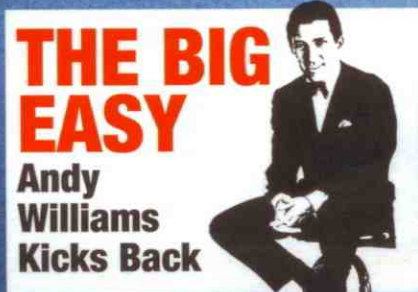
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September 2005

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92/93 Edward Street
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Trinity Publications: (0207) 772 8300

Published every month,

On the fourth Friday of the month
preceding cover date.

Distribution

Comag Magazine Marketing
Tavistock Road,
West Drayton, UB7 7QE
Tel: (01895) 433 600

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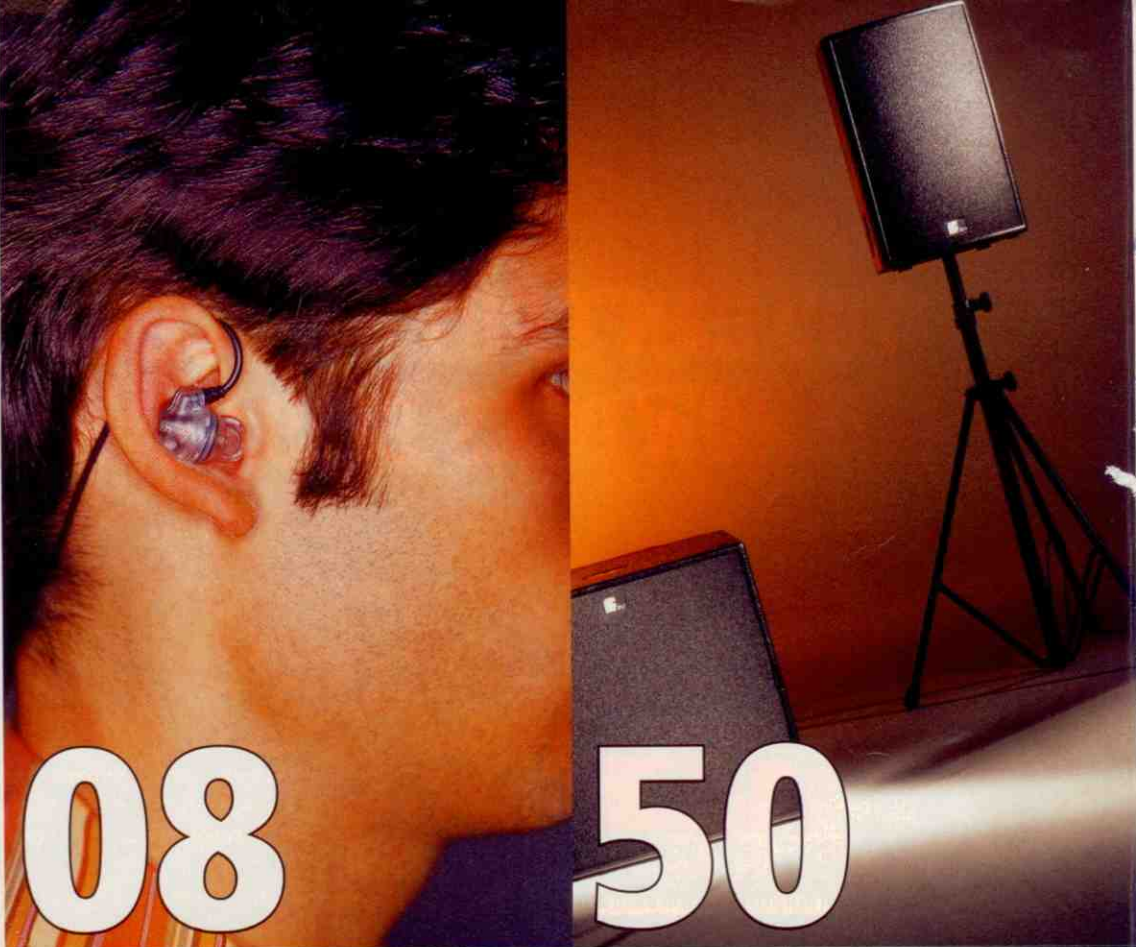
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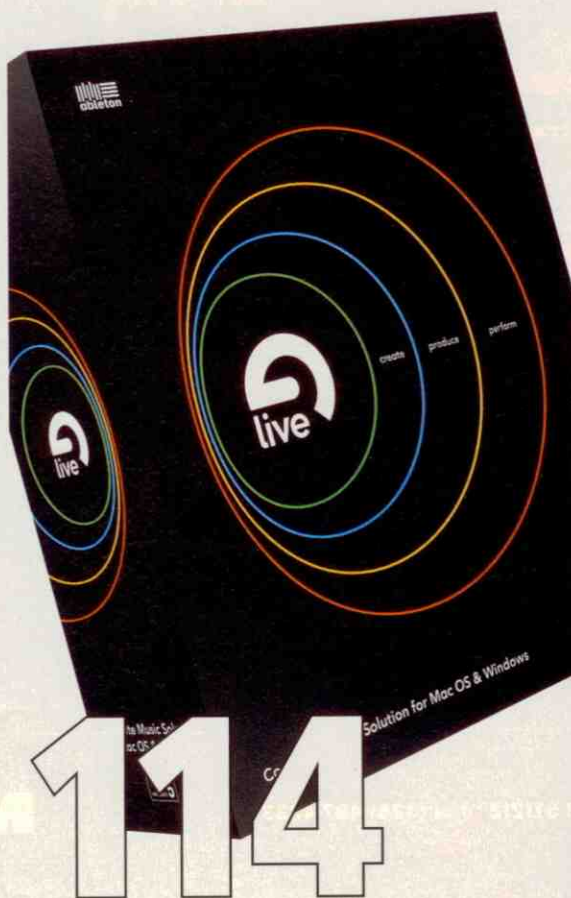
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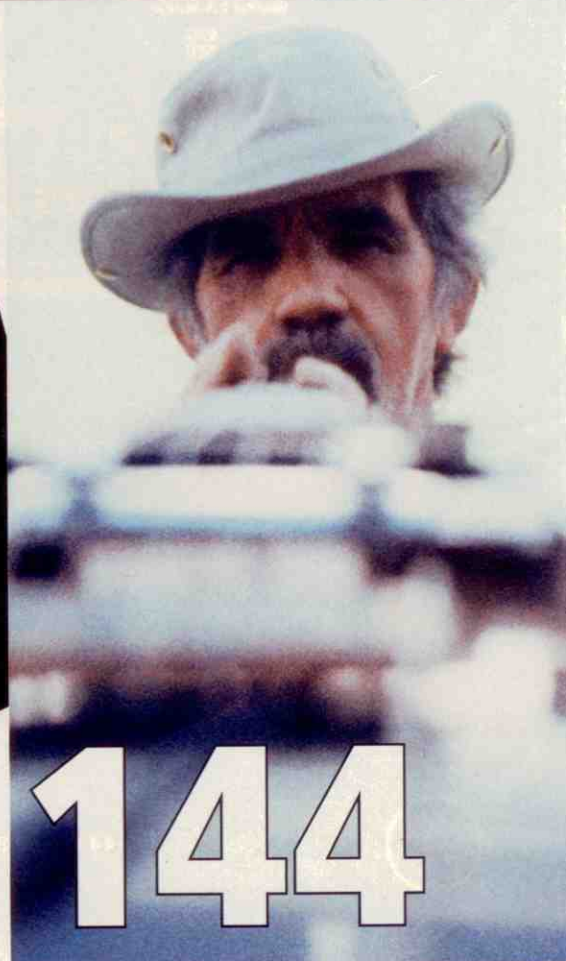
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Fohhn Louder!

John Moore gets a world-first chance to review the latest addition to Fohhn's already excellent *Xperience* range of active PA systems.



The performance of the Fohhn PA systems that we've reviewed up until now have been instantly charming, wonderful sounding pieces of kit... And we've loved them for it. No single PA system has created more correspondence into this office during my tenure as Editor – and so for once and for all I would like to clarify that, yes, it is as good as that, and you do get a lot for that price tag... Yes, I know it's expensive, but it's all about what you use your PA for... Put it this way, if you wanna impress, your choices are limited

The new *Xperience IV* system subwoofer certainly takes it major pointers from the *XS-3* units that are part of the previously reviewed *Xperience III* system. Stylistically, the *XS-4* is very similar it's predecessor – with the same steel front grille covered with foam (the perfect combination for both protection and good

looks), four handles – two per side in the current very de rigueur moulded recess style (making two per side – excellent for a two-man lift) but with four coaster wheels for transportation instead of the *XS-3*'s two. However, this is far from being a simple update of that technology. Yes, you do get the same 15" drivers and essentially the same styling in a slightly bigger Birch-Ply cabinet (the new unit measures 59 x 60 x 68cm compared to the 43 x 59 x 52cm of the original), a little extra weight (39kg, instead of 36kg) The real differences however, are in the extra amplifier power within the unit's switch mode powered digital amplifier (an additional 250 Watts extra per channel boosting the whole shebang to 1500 Watts) and the unit's inbuilt DSP abilities – and the changes that they have demanded of the rear panel.

Internally, the *XS-4*'s DSP is capable of storing up to 100 presets for its tweakable parameters, these include a basic volume control, and a 10-band EQ offering +/- 15dB of attenuation - the

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effects of which can be graphically represented as a chart, similar to those you see for frequency response of mics or speakers. These EQ alterations can be applied either individually to amp channel 1 or 2 or - by pressing the link button - to both simultaneously. Also, there are a few of drop-down menus, which allow you to select from the aforementioned global presets or simply denote which of the Fohhn range of mid-tops you're going to be using... Allowing the internal DSP to select the right crossover configuration automatically for you.

Also there's a Limiter/Compressor for shaping incoming sound before sending it to the amplifier and a delay line for sorting out any phase problems between the bass and the mid/tops... Rather handily, this can be adjusted by either time (up to 116.5ms) or via distance (the equivalent 40m), perfect for getting everything sounding sweet, when your placement conditions are not ideal... These delays can also be applied to specific channels, or two both simultaneously.

Finally, the software allows you to monitor the status of your systems, with a sub-screen that shows the temperature of the amp, whether protection's active, status, and a total operating time - so you can know just how many hours of punishment you've been putting your drivers through.

DSP parameters can be edited in two ways, you can via the backlit LCD screen and for data buttons that adorn the *Xperience IV's* rear panel or - should you feel that scrambling around on your hands and knees behind a PA in your spectacles is a little unseemly - with the use of a Laptop PC, a USB/RS45 interface and Fohhn's *Fusion* editing software.

Now, in the past, I've been a little sceptical about the willingness of people to operate PA systems in this way. I've wondered aloud in these pages on a few occasions just how many decisions people actually want to make about their sound. And certainly, I've wondered about the practicalities of being reliant on carting around a laptop computer as an integral part of a PA system... And that's before we even get to the 'well that's another thing to go wrong' logic of sticking some advanced electronic trickery in a PA system full stop'. We'll return to this subject later.

The rear panel of the *EXIV* breaks down like this, left to right there are two speakon outs for the mid/tops, next to this is the LCD display, four function buttons and a selector knob for scanning through menus, below this are the two XLR inputs, and a further two XLRs for a link out should you wish two use the *XS-4* units as part of a bigger system. Further to the right of the back panel, there's the on/off rocker switch above a powercon in, and - rather handily - another powercon connection for sending power to another unit... Allowing an extra sub, and two further tops to be powered from one plug. Brilliant.

PERFORMANCE

Man that sub can kick it out... This is a much heavier bass sound than previous Fohhn systems I've come across - a function of the

bigger amplification and the slightly larger enclosure, no doubt. In tandem with the 12" *X7-3s* which - as always - provide a sharp, crisp top-end with good full-bodied mids. They make a powerful duo. It's not really fair, however, to judge a system of that possesses the DSP abilities of the *EXIV* on the out of the box sound. So we fire up the software, and get tweaking. With a laptop in hand it takes very little to get the boxes working the way we want. Literally seconds to select the right crossover profiles for the transition of the signal to mid/tops. Another few minutes to get the ten-band EQ in line, and then some tweaking of the limiting and compression - badaboom. All in line.

Things aren't quite so much fun without the laptop, and crawling around the back of the sub to edit on that little blue screen would get boring so very quickly. Still, those are the modern times.

Taking about the music handling ability of the Fohhn, and its ability to adapt is pretty much a moot point. It sounds great, and how great it sound basically relates to what you put into - both in terms of mix quality, and set-up time. Some may find the EQ a little rudimentary for many live applications - certainly feedback elimination - but as a general, musical system it works fine. Maybe a future update of the software could offer more bands, or some parametric power to really allow for fine-tuning... At least we can hope. Also, the compressor - whilst working well - lacks a gain reduction meter, to allow you to gauge the effect of the settings. Yes I know it's all in the ears, but all these things help to visualize your mistakes when you make them.

CONCLUSION

I've got to be honest, and start this conclusion by saying that this is not the same instantly pleasing, ear-caressing PA experience that the other Fohhn *Xperience* systems I have reviewed have been. But, by the same token, this is very much a different beast - a bigger, wilder animal designed for much less intimate performances... And almost certainly designed with the intention that it be cascaded into a bigger, powerful concert system, suitable for some pretty sizable venues. As such, the *EXIV* is a sound engineer's PA... A system with plenty of adaptability, tweakability with intelligent design and fabrication by the bucketload - and very far from the plug-and-play ethos which made its smaller brethren so cool. It also has the skills to pay the bills on this front... It is a very versatile system, that will deliver top-notch sound for PA hire companies and installers who take the time and effort to put together good systems, and operate them properly.

Whereas the *EXII* and *III* were like owning a cat... Very pretty, great to have around but essentially self-sufficient when kept fed, the *EXIV* is something akin to a house-trained tiger, scarily powerful, perhaps even a little intimidating until you get used to it, but ultimately a very cool thing to own... Oh, and it's got a far old roar on it - Fohhn quality, only loud is same.

The Score

KEYNOTES

- Powered PA system w/ 2x 750W/4ohm amplifiers (bridged 1500W), 15" LF driver and on board DSP
- Dedicated mid/top units (NT-33), not used as part of review... (delivery pending)
- 2 Digital Signal Processors w/ selective 3-Band-Limiting (Bass/Mid/High), 10-band parametric EQ, 100ms delay per channel, speaker data bank w/ max. 100 different speaker types (top units), Compressor/Limiter, noise gate, 100 programmable user Presets
- 56-Bit double precision Filtertechnology, AD/DA 24bit/48kHz, S/N 105dB
- Subwoofer measures 59x 60x 68cm and weighs 39kg

PRICE: £3,930 inc VAT

HIGH NOTES

- ▲ More powerful incarnation of the brilliant EXIII
- ▲ On-board DSP offer powerful system tuning
- ▲ Laptop operation worked well - software is simple and effective
- ▲ Strong bass capabilities
- ▲ Looks fantastic
- ▲ Reliance on Powercon and Speakon connection
- ▲ Quality of build and components
- ▲ Can work with any of Fohhn's existing Mid/Tops, or its own dedicated NT-33 units
- ▲ Fairly light and easy to handle

LOW NOTES

- ▼ Not the plug-and-play solution that the other *Xperience* systems are
- ▼ Not everyone wants to consider a laptop a 'tool of their trade'...
- ▼ ... In which case they're going to get sore knees trying to get to that little LCD screen
- ▼ That little LCD screen
- ▼ No gain reduction meter on the compressor software GUI
- ▼ 10-band EQ not as powerful as many units sound engineers would be used to

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