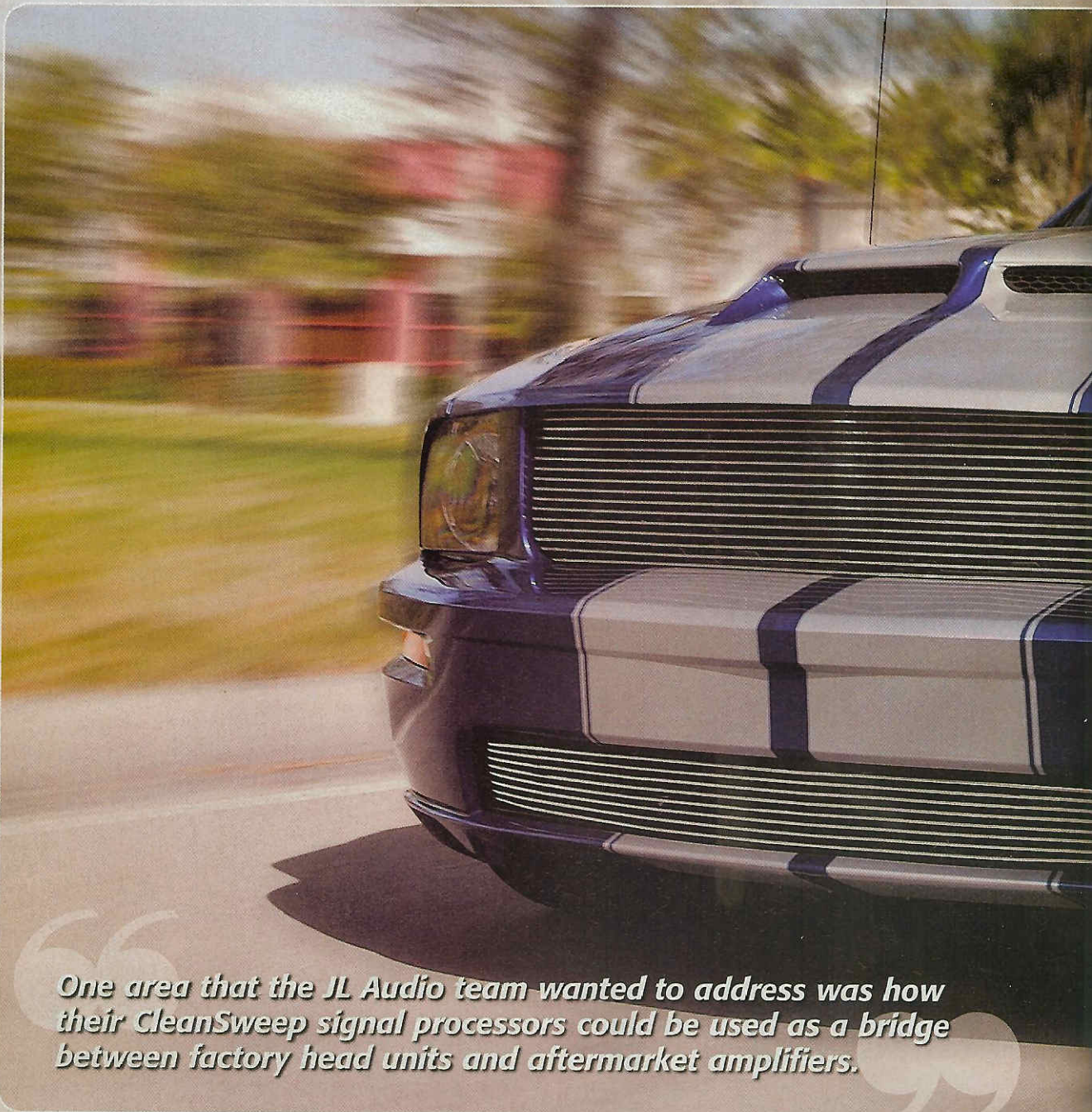


# SUPER SONIC 'STANG

JL AUDIO PUTS THEIR MAGIC IN A MUSTANG

Text and photography by Richard Truesdell



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For more than 20 years, the JL Audio brand has stood for accuracy in sound reproduction in the mobile environment. It dates back to the eighties when James Birch and Lucio Proni founded the company, building its foundation on providing the finest subwoofers to leading edge competitors who dominated soundoffs. In the early days of car audio competitions, the winning combination was an Alpine head unit, an AudioControl signal processor, Precision Power amplifiers, MB Quart full-range satellite speakers, and subwoofers from JL Audio.

Over the years the equation has changed a bit, but the respect for JL Audio has deepened. From its base in subwoofers, JL Audio has introduced products for every other link in the signal chain.

Every year, for the Consumer Electronics Show, JL Audio builds a show vehicle to showcase their new products. For 2008, JL Audio turned its attention to a 2006 Mustang that

not only clearly demonstrated how good our favorite pony can sound, but showed a superior premium approach to how the interior could be restyled, giving the Mustang a much more upscale look.

Think about the interior quality level you'd like to see in a GT500 or the next generation Mustang expected in 2010. If Ford's interior stylists would like to see how it can be done,





they need to look no further than the JL Audio JL 350; it's simply stunning.

As always, there's a theme for all their demo cars and the JL-350 was no exception. "As with all our demo cars, the primary objective was to have outstanding sound quality that would highlight the performance capabilities of our products," says JL Audio's VP-Marketing Manville Smith. "Secondarily, we wanted to take the Mustang's interior up several levels of quality. The three of us involved in the build which also included our in-house installation team, thought the stock interior was cool stylistically, but used very low-rent materials and had some really ugly touches, like the silly looking 8-inch speaker grilles in the bottom of each door. We wanted to craft an interior that would look at home in an \$80,000 car, while retaining the Mustang's retro influences."

The project was assisted by Shamrock Auto Trim in Miami, Florida. The workmanship of the door panels was flawless, inspired by the first Mustangs. Now it is unreasonable to expect Ford, in a car that has to be competitively priced for as low as \$20,000, to utilize the same grade of materials, but this car has a higher quality of molded panels, some soft-touch trim, and the judicious use of chrome accents. The Mustang's interior trim can be upgraded without incurring excessive additional

cost. Ford, are you listening?

One area that the JL Audio team wanted to address was how their CleanSweep signal processors could be used as a bridge between factory head units and aftermarket amplifiers. Since the 2006 Ford Mustang's source unit lacked navigation and satellite radio capability, they installed a different Ford premium head unit, out of the Expedition, in a totally-reconfigured center stack. At the same time, to buy space for a separate Pioneer DVD transport, the HVAC controls were relocated to above the rear view mirror. The result is both unique and factory-look and allows all the infotainment components to be located logically together.

The relocation of the HVAC controls weren't terribly difficult as wires were extended and run to the front of the headliner. The tough part was fabricating the headliner and machining the bezel to make it all look really OEM grade. Due to a pinch in the Mustang's factory harness, a lot of post-installation troubleshooting was needed to get it all to work flawlessly.

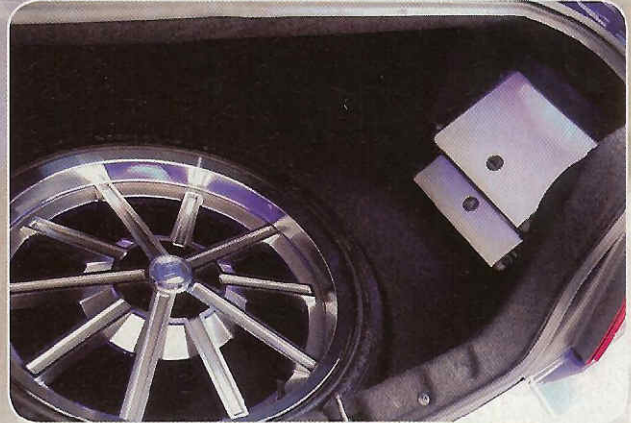
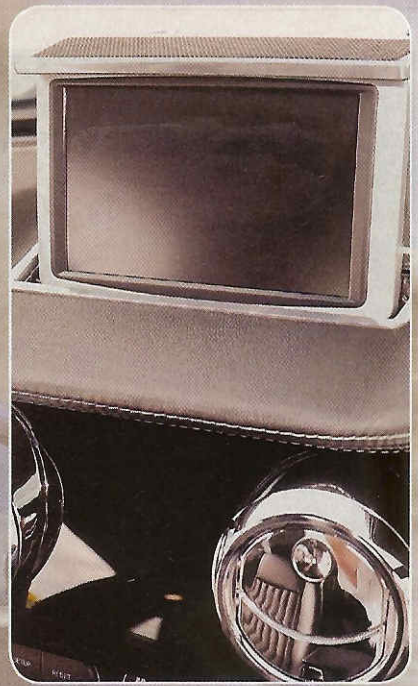
When it comes to the actual signal path, Smith tried to explain it as simply as possible. "The Ford head unit feeds the OEM inputs of the CleanSweep CL441 dsp. A CL-SES source expander switch feeds the AUX inputs of the CL441 dsp. Connected to the CL-SES are a hard-wired iPod cable, an RF-controlled iPod



## NON A/V UPGRADES

The exterior look and stance of the JL-350 is an integral part of the project and for this, JL Audio turned to Ultimate Autosports in Oakland, Florida. They were responsible for the suspension and exterior styling of the car. And like JL Audio, they subscribe to a less is more philosophy. Here's a checklist of their modifications.

- TEIN coilover suspension (adjustable height)
- Carroll Shelby 20-inch wheels
- BFGoodrich tires
- Flowmaster cat-back exhaust
- Cervini ram-air hood, billet grilles, ducktail spoiler, tri-color badges throughout, custom painted stripes
- Unique JL-350 badging



interface and the DVD changer. A screen motorizes up out of the dash to display video and automatically lowers when the vehicle is shifted out of 'Park'. The outputs of the CL441 dsp feed an AudioControl DQL two-channel digital equalizer located under the front passenger seat. The outputs of the EQ feed the two JL Audio HD600/4 four-channel amplifiers in the trunk and these feed the speakers and subwoofers. The signal path is actually very simple and minimalist. I subscribe to the KISS principle (Keep it Simple, Stupid). As for the speaker wiring to the amplifiers, two channels feed the front speaker system (150Wx2). The remaining six channels are bridged down to three 300W channels, each bridged pair feeding one of the three 13TW5 subwoofers in the rear deck."

Smith wanted to make a point about upgrading a late model Mustang. "You can get 75 percent of the sonic quality of the JL-350 by installing a pair of our C5-650x coxials in the lower door position – where the factory 8-inch speaker is installed – and blocking off the upper speaker location. Add an application-specific Stealthbox subwoofer system, which are available for both the coupe and convertible, along with a couple of JL Audio amplifiers. The cost is a lot less than you might think and it makes driving a whole lot more fun, without affecting your trunk space and without drawing attention to itself in parking

lots as your Mustang will look 100 percent stock."

Over the years, *Mustang Enthusiast* has reported on many competition-level Mustang A/V systems but I can say without equivocation that the system in the JL-350 is finest that I've heard in any Mustang and that with more than 30 years in the industry as an installer and retailer, as well as a journalist covering the industry, it is one of the five finest systems I've ever auditioned, bar none. Even with compressed audio from the iPod, the sound was rich and full, the bass was super tight without a hint of boom.

One of the hallmarks of any JL Audio demo car system was the impressively wide soundstage as the presentation extended well beyond the A-pillars giving the illusion that I was listening to a live performance, not a mere car audio system. For a generation of music listeners who have grown up listening to music through computer speakers or ear buds, it has to be a sonic revelation to hear sound reproduce with such accuracy and with such dynamic range. The system has to be listened to, to be believed.

With the JL-350, this very special Mustang can take its place among the very best, a truly spectacular achievement. It is, in a few words, absolutely the best, most accurate, best sounding Mustang I have ever heard. It's as simple as that. ■