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Sales & Operations Director, Engineering Director
and Research & Development Director at
Linea Research



Can each of you outline your background and how you first entered the professional audio industry?

PW: I was an electronics hobbyist from the age of 12, almost exclusively in audio related projects. After working in electronics design for a few years, I started my own audio design and manufacturing business, which then opened doors for me in the professional world. BSS Audio was my first pro audio position.

BV: I was also an electronics hobbyist as a child and, again, like Paul, was mostly interested in building audio equipment. Professionally, I designed radio equipment, mainframe computer hardware and industrial instrumentation before finally coming home to audio, initially by working at BSS Audio.

DS: I grew up in a musical family, but I'm an engineer at heart and, in pro audio, I found a path to bridge my technical and creative sides. I trained as a software

engineer but that promising career path wasn't nearly as attractive to a young man as a life in rock 'n' roll, so I spent my early 20s in rentals, developing my own service company and enjoying a frenetic combination of one-offs, tours and music festivals. An opportunity to work with some of the world's finest engineers at BSS Audio was irresistible, in 1996 I crossed the bridge and began my career in making rather than operating the equipment.

What led to the decision to form Linea Research in 2003?

BV: As I progressed to more senior positions in Harman, the focus was less and less on products, performance and customers. At heart, I am a designer, and I like pushing boundaries and solving problems, something that despite their marketing, multi-nationals are not keen on doing, if rehashing last year's models will do.

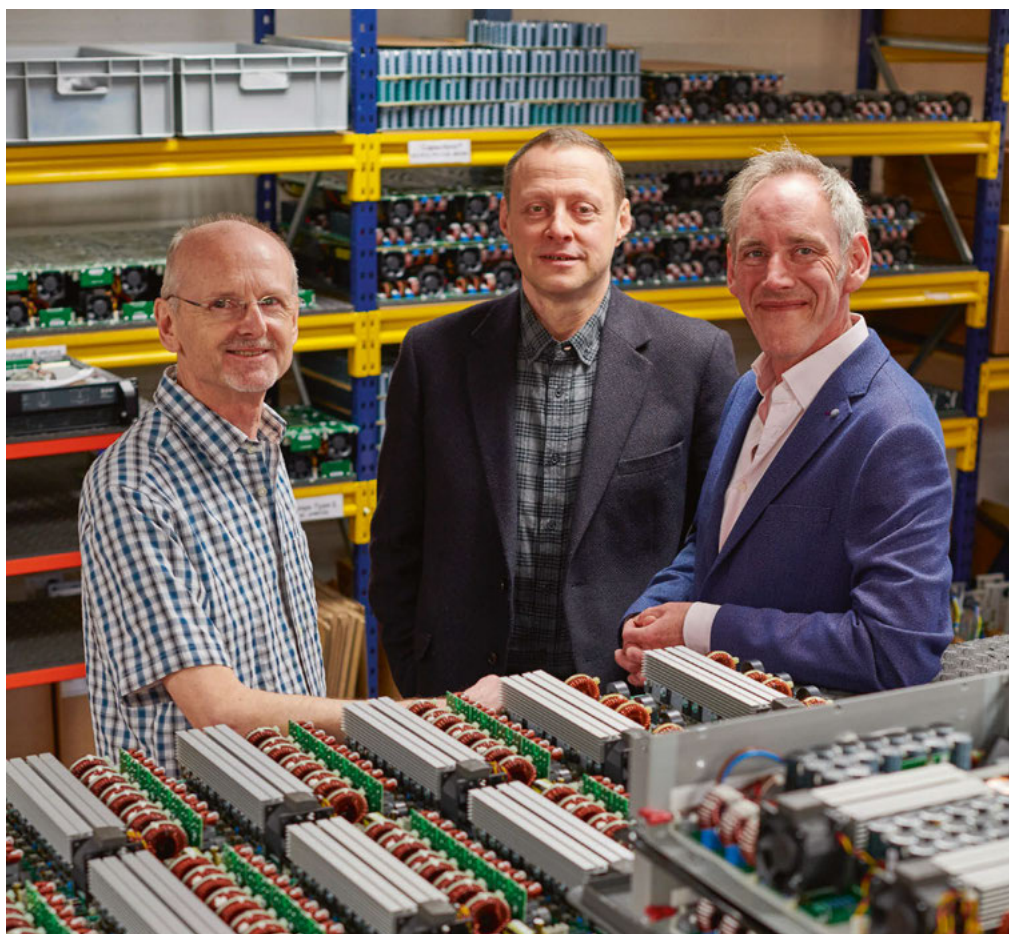
• Above Davey, Ben and Paul at HQ.

PW: My senior position within Harman meant that I was spending more time in corporate meetings than doing what I love - engineering. I desperately wanted to get back to innovating and creating. I had too many ideas to be constrained by a meeting room.

DS: I clearly recall the late night 'we should do this ourselves' conversation with Ben. That moment marked the end of our era at BSS Audio. The wonderful team that revolutionised audio processing with products like Omnidrive and Soundweb was now falling apart under the pressure of the corporate world. We needed an independent vehicle where our ideas could flourish without compromise.

What were the key factors when you were trying to establish yourselves a new manufacturer back in the early days?

BV: 15 years ago, amplification technology was at a crossroads, in that



• Above Paul, Ben and Davey in the warehouse.

it was just beginning to be possible to create good sounding Class-D designs, something that I had a lot of experience with. Paul is an industry renowned expert in all things DSP, and together, we saw a huge opportunity to combine these things and create some truly revolutionary products.

PW: We had identified a niche market for products which combined Class D amplification, DSP and networking; all areas we were expert in. It turns out this market wasn't so niche after all.

DS: As Paul and Ben describe, the emerging technologies were coming together, and we were perfectly placed to integrate them into our designs. This path seems obvious now, but we really were cutting new ground and I'm very grateful the pro audio world supported our ambition to bring these ideas to market.

Can you outline a typical day at Linea Research HQ?

BV: I am actually at a different site. I run a dedicated design facility in the leafy Surrey countryside, but don't tell everyone, we like to keep it a secret.

PW: Busy, busy, busy! I start the day with good intentions, but the company often has other plans for me. However, I am still able to do the engineering activities that excite me, writing software and developing DSP algorithms. I even get the soldering iron out now and again.

The three of you each deal with a different arm of the business - sales and operations, engineering and research and development - how do you all work together in harmony and what advantages does having that differentiation bring?

BV: Initially, all three of us worked out of our homes, so from the start all communication had to be electronic. In this respect we unwittingly created the decentralised structure for a true 21st Century company. Even though we are now located primarily in two locations, we still maintain that decentralisation and this helps no end when effectively dealing with customers, suppliers and subcontractors who are located all over the world.

PW: We are all very different people, but we are like three pieces of a jigsaw, each bringing our own range of expertise to the table. Having worked together in various guises for many years, we pretty much know each others views on any given topic without the need for endless discussions. We are a very efficient team.

DS: Our complementary partnership has been absolutely critical to creating a harmonious company. We also share a common view of the world, one that means we treat our engineering, staff, suppliers and customers with care and respect.

Are there any specific milestones for Linea Research that you could highlight?

BV: I think when our first product, the X-Pod won a double blind shootout powering the monitors at a very prestigious recording studio.

PW: Getting our very first order was very exciting (and a huge relief). It's always a great thrill getting sound out of a new product for the first time. Measurements are all very well, but getting that tingle listening to a song whose essence is conveyed so perfectly by something you have created is what drives me. I remember this very clearly when first listening to the ASC48 DSP controller.

DS: In the last few years we've become the leading manufacturer of amplifiers in the UK, which is something we're particularly proud of.

Which markets are the strongest for the company, geographically speaking? Are there any markets you would like to infiltrate more?

DS: As you would expect we're successful in our home European market, however, combining OEM and Linea branded sales it's actually the USA which represents our largest sales territory. Another ex-BSS Brit and long-term Linea friend, Rik Kirby of Allied ProTech, has built our sales and support network in the States. Traction in North America is notoriously difficult to achieve and, in my view, represents a key differentiator between the regional and truly international manufacturers. Working with the right partner has been key and means the US office feels very much like an extension of the Linea Research HQ in terms of the care and attention it can offer our clients.

Typically, what type of installation projects are Linea Research products ideally suited to?

BV: Basically, anywhere that requires high power, high quality and modern monitoring. Our products are used in very diverse situations from giant sports arenas to Dolby Atmos reference facilities and everything in between.

DS: Linea is most suited to situations where absolute performance is paramount. From precision beam steering in mass transit to the neutral purity of theatre and recording studios we can perform at the highest standard and we find our customers are normally those with equally high standards.

With a 15-year anniversary to celebrate this year, how does the company compare from then to now?

BV: Well, we are somewhat larger than when we started and continue to grow ➤



strongly but the same ethos of premium performance is threaded through everything we do.

PW: Working from a spare bedroom in complete isolation allowed me to create vast volumes of work very quickly. The company couldn't have survived the first year if this hadn't been the case.

These days, with a department to run, of course I don't get to do quite as much engineering. It's a lot less lonely though!

DS: Although the scale is different the fundamental approach is the same. We try to match our engineering expertise and the available technology with the market requirements as accurately as possible. The results are delivered with consideration and integrity.

This formula has sustained us through a global revolution in electronics. So, whilst everything has changed in many respects nothing has changed.

What make Linea Research different to any other audio manufacturer?

PW: Having forged close relationships with many OEM clients over the years, it has allowed our product features to be steered by many top professionals in the industry, resulting in a tight, well crafted, relevant feature set. We love what we do, we have a great team with a family atmosphere, far removed from the corporate attitude.

DS: I find the more people understand about our products and the deeper they dig the more impressed they are.

How does it feel to be part of a British-manufacturing community and does that shape the business in any way?

BV: Very proud, although it can be difficult when the majority of our

competitors manufacture their products in China and elsewhere. We believe, however, that when it comes to delivering a quality product that with careful design and strong partnerships we can prevail. There is plenty of life in British manufacturing, the key is to play to our collective strengths.

PW: Britain has a great audio heritage which we are proud to continue.

However, we are serving a competitive worldwide market, far removed from the niche cottage industry which characterised early British audio.

DS: The UK has always been a leading light in music industry and performing arts more broadly and we're very pleased to be part of the industry which supports their endeavours. Although the names and owners of many companies have changed since the burgeoning days of 'PA systems', the people and passion which drives them are as strong as ever in this country.

Tell our readers something they wouldn't know about Linea Research?

BV: We design and build all our automated production line test equipment ourselves, quite a feat in itself.

PW: We design everything in-house. This is an essential part of our approach to engineering; we understand it all implicitly.

DS: If you unwind all the transformers and inductors we've used the wire could stretch to the moon and back.

Are there any plans in the pipeline for Linea Research that you can share with us?

BV: You really expect the head of engineering to tell you that? Actually, I

• Above right
The Linea
Research
website in
2008.

• Above left
The LR44c10,
LR 44M20
and LR
ASC48.

can share with you that it will involve audio amplification.

What are your hopes for the long-term future of the company?

BV: That we can keep growing organically without needing outside sources of funding, which is the only way we feel we can have total control of our destiny.

PW: We have a clear plan for continued, steady growth. We haven't run out of ideas yet.

DS: As Paul notes, when we've exhausted the ideas we should hang the tools up but that's a long way off. Why stop doing what you love?

If you hadn't started a career in the audio industry, what path do you think you might have gone down instead?

PW: I have always known audio was my destiny. I can't imagine doing anything else. Fundamental research perhaps; helping to answer some of those big questions.

DS: Music is my guiding light but perhaps architecture would have been interesting, and I'd love to have the time for a bit more teaching.

What is your desert island disc?

BV: Alchemy by Dire Straits.

PW: The Haunted Man by Bat For Lashes.

DS: E2 E4 Manuel Göttsching.

What possession could you not live without?

PW: My clutch pencil - all my best ideas flow from it.

DS: Hearing. 