

▶ LIVE SOUND **FANE**



Fane and able

As British driver brand Fane returns to prominence, **Rob Hughes** looks at how its fortunes were reversed under the Barnes family and alongside Precision Devices...

We make high-quality components where performance is the key criterion.

Neil Barnes
Fane

That Fane has been re-launched with no small amount of success should come as little surprise when you consider that the father and son team behind it, the industrious Arthur and Neil Barnes, have had it in their crosshairs since Barnes senior was last at the helm of the company in 1989. As managing director, it was he who skippered the firm through its glory days in the 70s, before watching it fall on hard times under Wharfedale, despite a resolute attempt to buy the firm.

The pair pressed on within the driver sector and two decades later, after successfully establishing Eminence outside its native US and building up enough clout to buy the then obscure

British speaker maker Precision Devices, the Barnes family at last found itself in a position to acquire Fane and, in a well deserved fists in the air moment, did just that. Less than a year after it had triumphantly re-located Precision Devices nearly 250 miles from Cornwall to Castleford, taking on Fane, a business that was just a short drive from its new factory put the wind in the Barnes' sails after many years of sheer hard graft to establish the family as a major force in the industry.

"When we purchased Fane in 2007 it was a perfect fit for us," explains Neil Barnes. "The manufacturing plant was in Leeds, just 12 miles from our new factory at Wakefield.

This had several positive advantages – one of the biggest problems we encountered after the re-location of Precision Devices was the training and retention of staff that had the necessary skills to perform the assembly and intricate production techniques involved. Fane had a team of skilled employees with years of experience and the skills required for the manufacturing of high-quality loudspeakers. They also had an OEM customer base, which aligned with our PD order book and gave us a strong foundation on which to build a sustainable UK manufacturing operation.”

In the wake of the acquisition, Barnes and his father discovered that some of the original workers they employed during the firm's halcyon days were still at the company. This included the lady that oversees the winding of Fane and PD voice coils, who was originally employed to wind the coils by hand in 1974. Although the process is now fully automated, there are still a number of operations that require skills that take many years to perfect and, with over three decades of experience, she is perfect for the job.

Technical director Mark Oldroyd has been working for Fane since he was just 16 and production manager Susan Goodyear is now back at the company after leaving during the previous ownership. The Barnes' managed to sell their vision of the future Fane and she rejoined the team. She is now in charge of the entire production process, falling back on experience gained at the firm in the 70s and 80s.

“Having both Fane and Precision Devices under the same ownership really assisted us in driving the business forward and developing a sustainable and successful future for both brands,” continues Barnes. “They each complement each other perfectly, yet have their own flavour and identity, which allows us to offer loudspeaker solutions for both the mid and high end sectors of the market.

“Although they are manufactured in the same facility, we ensure that each retains its established character.

“We handle sales and admin from the same office, but each brand has its own website, sales lines and suite of marketing materials designed specifically for their respective market sectors.”

Fane, of course, has the longest, most colourful heritage of the two, as well as the broadest target market, offering drivers for cabinets of countless descriptions. The company was founded in 1958 at the birth of rock n roll and during the early 1960s, as the electric guitar was still forming its global influence, took the decision to specialise in high-power loudspeaker manufacture. It soon became the largest UK manufacturer, supplying more than 75 per cent of all speakers used in the UK at this time. Its drivers often found in backline made by the likes of WEM and Orange.

Today, Fane targets both the high and middle sectors of the loudspeaker market. Its famous Colossus models, something of a Fane legacy, still have a fanatical following and the firm has acknowledged this and demonstrated its commitment to the brand with the development of second-generation versions of the driver. In fact, the Barnes' feel that the Fane component catalogue now offers the finest range of components in the company's history. Not only that, but after many months of development it has launched its own range of complete enclosure systems that will launch in the UK in September. The company is also in the process of establishing an international distribution network for the range and will soon be looking to establish a UK sales network.

Not exactly a contrast, but positioned very differently nonetheless, Precision Devices is, as its name clearly states, what Barnes likes to describe as the ‘Rolls Royce of loudspeaker driver manufacturers’. The products are targeted at high-end applications that require components built via a painstaking manufacturing processes using the finest of materials.

PD was originally founded in 1987 to manufacture loudspeakers for Turbosound and, unlike any other loudspeaker manufacturer, it was purposely established to produce



loudspeakers for the touring market.

Every component apart from the magnet is manufactured in the UK and, perhaps unsurprisingly, it is the first choice of revered loudspeaker manufacturer, Funktion-One.

While Precision Devices' products are manufactured exclusively in the UK, production of

Fane is split between England and China, where the Barnes family made a major financial investment to establish a second facility in 2009. This allows the company to achieve high volume manufacturing at price points that some OEM clients require, without compromising quality, since the same processes – and predominantly the same components – are involved.

All the drivers that emerge from the Chinese facility are manufactured on Fane chassis, mostly utilising British manufactured cones. This investment is considered chiefly responsible for Fane regaining its market share and once again becoming a major player in the international market. Barnes makes no bones about it; he will happily tell you that, since 2009, business has pointed skyward.

“We have complete flexibility,” he says. “We can now supply from our China factory direct to our OEM partners also located in China and other markets. But we are tremendously proud of the fact that Fane and Precision Devices remain British, family-owned businesses that, despite the changing economic and commercial landscape, continue to manufacture in the UK.

“At our West Yorkshire facility, we have the opportunity to manufacture high-quality components where performance is the key selection criterion. Price is always an issue, but we have a team that prides itself in producing the finest loudspeakers in the world without compromise. We are able to work with very high-end companies that need their own unique products and we can achieve this without the need for the high manufacturing volumes that are required when manufacturing in China. And we have the manufacturing capacity to continue our development.”

> faneinternational.com

> precision-devices.com

Every component of Fane's drivers apart from the magnet is manufactured in the UK

