

WIRED FOR SOUND

These guys make sure you can hear it all...

Bristol, TN - Can you hear me now.....? For race fans attending this week's NASCAR action at Bristol Motor Speedway, the world's fastest and loudest half-mile, just having a conversation can be difficult.

"Due to the design of the track, 43 unmuffled stock cars produce audio levels comparable to those on the deck of an aircraft carrier," sound experts Steve Durr and John Horrell said Tuesday.

Faced with such an acoustical challenge, the co-owners of Durrell Sound and Broadcast Marketing of Nashville have provided audio and entertainment at the track for the past four years.

"Acoustically, Bristol is easily the most challenging," Horrell said. "When compared to Indianapolis, the sound here is contained within a half-mile area compared to the two and a half-mile area at Indy."

"Being outside is one set of acoustics and the bowl shape is another set of acoustics," Durr said. "When you put the two together, the sides are so tall, it's just like an indoor arena."

"During a Winston Cup race, with all 43 cars on the track, the sound level has been measured 138 decibels at the top of the grandstands," Durr said. "A jet measures 160 decibels, so anyone sitting out in the stands, or who has children in the stands without heavy ear protection is insane."

"Because the roar is so pervasive throughout the entire complex, the challenge is to keep the music, radio and public-address system at levels comfortable for fans in the grandstands, both when the cars are running and when the track is vacant," Durr said.

"We provide entertainment for the stands, which is actually the hardest job, because sound forces you to listen. It invades your space," Horrell said. "So we have to be conscious if the music is too loud, if there's



Above, John Horrell, left, and Steve Durr talk about the challenges of providing audio for the fans at Bristol. John Horrell, left at audio console.

too much advertising and that the amount of information is what the fan wants and needs."

"We do a lot of other things here, too," he said. "Besides the public-address audio to the grandstands and suites, we do separate sound for the media center, press box and interview areas; handle audio for PRN (*Performance Racing Network*) radio, Fox, NBC and TNT television; plus wireless sound to victory lane, the start-finish line as well as some paging systems and some parking."

Horrell is primarily responsible for controlling everything from an audio console inside a custom-made trailer in the infield. Durr and three employees, Andrew Gower, Tom Moores and Chris Horrell, work to make certain all aspects of the operation work correctly.

"The ultimate compliment is if people don't notice we're here," Durr said.

"Providing sound at the track compares to his previous experience working in the recording industry, making records and building recording studios," Durr said. He has worked with everyone from Tim McGraw and Faith Hill to Sonny & Cher, Tom Jones and Loggins & Messina.

Horrell previously owned an airborne traffic-watch business.

He and Durr met in 1997 while installing a sound system in a Nashville church. They started their business in the late 1990's and contacted BMS after Durr attended a race here in 1999.

"I'm a big race fan," Durr said. "I came to a race here and I thought this is a huge venue, but the audio needed some help. So we wrote (track President and General Manager)

Jeff Byrd a couple of letters and he called me back."

"I'd never been to a race in my life," Horrell said. "And I can still remember driving up here and seeing the track for the first time. It was huge."

"We did the spring race in 2000 as a joint venture with the former (sound) people, and the fall race that year was all ours. I still wonder how we did it. We were too stupid to be scared," said Horrell.

In the past three years, their success at Bristol has enabled them to expand their business to other facilities. The list includes Indianapolis Motor Speedway; Texas Motor Speedway; Atlanta Motor Speedway; Las Vegas Motor Speedway; the Nashville Coliseum, home of the Tennessee Titans; Gaylord Entertainment Center, home of the Nashville Predators hockey team; Arrowhead Stadium, home of the Kansas City Chiefs; Kauffman Stadium, home of the Kansas City Royals; and Churchill Downs, home of the Kentucky Derby.

While their clients now include some of the largest sports venues and events in the country, Durr said that Bristol Motor Speedway remains their favorite.

"By far, this is the most fun and exciting facility we go to," he said. "Everybody is so closely related to what's going on. When the crowd gets excited here, it's just overwhelming. This past spring was spectacular with all the patriotism and the patriotic entertainment. When the crowd was on its feet and the cars weren't on the track yet, I knew we'd done our job."

By David McGee / Bristol Herald Courier
Photos by Andre Teague / Bristol Herald Courier