



Sami Penttilä, Penaudio & Fast Cars

Oct 5, 2010

Kari Nevalainen



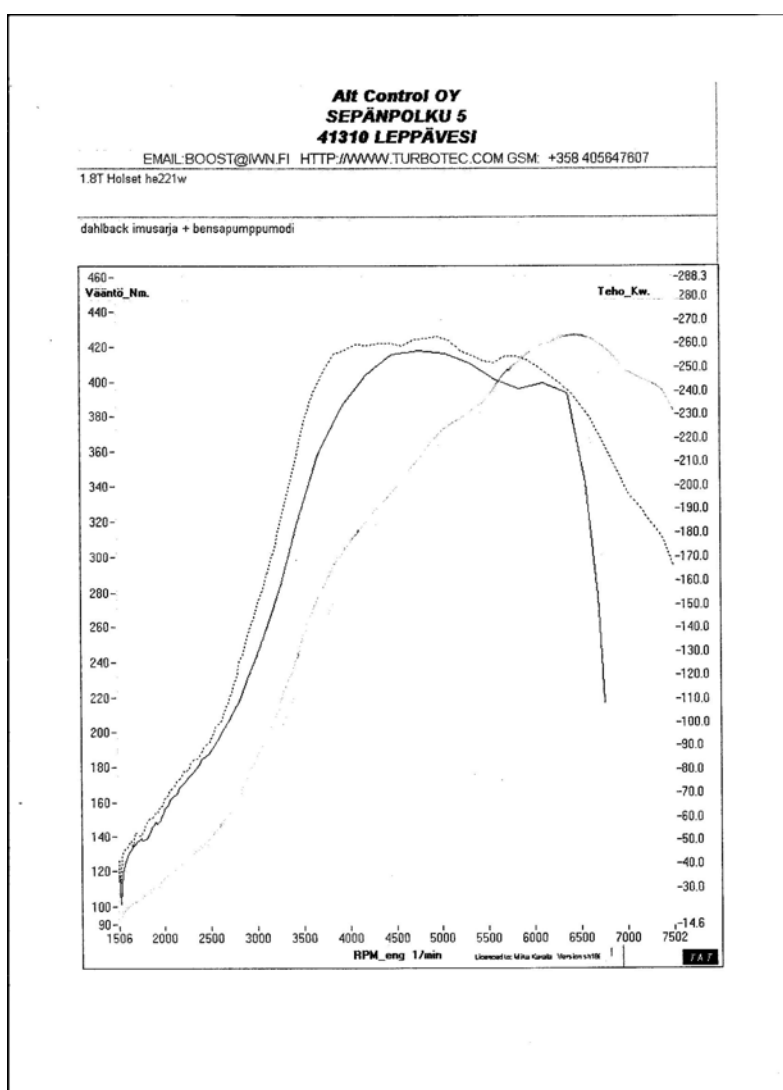
Sami Penttilä (b. 1975) is the principal designer of PENAUDIO loudspeakers. An engineer by training, Sami lives in Jyväskylä, in the central Finland. He's been playing guitar, bass and piano since 5. He records and mixes, eg. he did the live mixing for Lost Madison in 2007. In addition to music, he loves cooking and fast cars.

I-A: Sami, let's fasten the seat belts first, and focus on fast cars. Tell us more about this hobby of yours, and how it goes with good music and cooking?

SP: I have always been keen on fast cars. The feeling that fast acceleration cornering and braking does. I have four cars. One is my dog/winter car, Opel Tigra 1.4-16v, where backseat is taken away that my mastin del pirineos (84cm and 80kg) puppy can travel there. It is the only car that hasn't been tuned. Then there is the family wagon, Opel Vectra C caravan. It has 2,8 litre V6 turbo engine with a remapped ecu and larger exhaust pipe. It has 300HP and 440Nm of torque. It should do 0-100km/h in 6 seconds. Then there is my hobby car, Seat Ibiza 20VT that is totally remade. It has new suspension, brakes, seats, harnesses, tires, engine, aerodynamics etc., and I have been building it for 8 years for track use although it can be used in normal traffic also... a bit awkward though. It has 365 HP and 480Nm and weighs only 1100kg so it should beat even fastest road cars available. I have been driven 5-8 times per year in tracks, some speed parties and 1/4mile. Last but not least... last spring I bought something that I have been dreaming of for my whole life - a supercar. Maserati 3200GT. It is a piece of state of art, leather from top to bottom, 3,2 litre V8, 48 valves and twinturbo. It has also gone thru tuning: remapped ecu and exhaust. It has 442HP and 600Nm. With this one I am planning to do a trip to Italy to see where it was built. It howls for German Autobahns. Its speedo have 320km/h rating...maybe I can try to reach that figure during the trip. In standard mode with 371HP it should do 280km/h.



Cars, music and cooking...how do they relate? I like to tune my cars, getting them better with high quality components. With music it's the same. I play piano, bass and guitar ... by changing better parts, strings for example, makes them better sounding. The same goes with food. You buy fresh subsidies, cook them with gas using high quality pots and knives and so on. But it is not just using expensive stuff, you have to know what you want. In track you have to know your driving, to what direction you want the abilities to go. In music you have to know what kind of sound you want from your instruments and in cooking you have to know the taste you're lookin for. And still it is all about your taste... subjective. That is why they all are so interesting.



Above some specs on Sami's Ibiza.

I-A: It's generally accepted that certain meals require certain type of wine. But do meals require certain type of music too?

SP: I think yes. I have been studying red wines and they are usually required for certain type of food and usually Italian wines goes well with pasta and lighter foods and for example Argentinian wines are good for grilled, more spicy food. When I'm planning a good dinner, right music is also part of it. It boosts all your senses and perfects the dinner. And vice

versa, if you are just hanging around with friends in the evening eating some salad and pie you may need more powerful music to create a tasty mixture of all. And special nights with your love one may require some smaller... maybe some string quartet, or maybe some Italian food and Italian wine with a solo violin... live.



I-A: When you guys at the Penaudio factory listen to your new speakers models, what kind of music you choose on the platter? Does that also include music that you don't like that much?

SP: In our factory when I listen to new prototypes I usually listen to all sorts of music: finnish pop/rock, classical stuff: solo piano, cello, violin, some blues and jazz. I always try to pick something from every genre that includes some pieces I like. Otherwise it will only be irritating, if one has to spend hours and hours by listening to speakers there must be some music that one likes and that would be used other times too. Actually my selection of test music has no pieces I don't like. I also listen to some "crappy" recordings but with good music, just to check certain things.

I-A: Penaudio is known for its policy of seeking sonic improvement by making use of better and more expensive drivers. For example, Chronos was recently updated with the same OEM Excel drivers that already are inside Charisma and Serenade. What is the share of the drivers in the final sound quality?

SP: Drivers make speakers as well as the cross-over. You cannot do anything by using drivers that dont' behave like you will or have certain undesirable tunes in the test bench. I can't say exactly how much of the final sound is due to the drivers but if I say 50% I wouldn't be completely off the track. For me if I cannot get some tunes I require from the drivers in the test bench I let them go. But with "good sounding" drivers one can do some magic with appropriate cross-over parts, stuffing, cabling and cabinet. So a big part of my research work is to find good drivers.



I-A: Penaudio has long been quite popular on the Japanese market. Apart from the sound, is it the cabinet design that shows the plys of the veneer that attracts Japanese customers or some other feature?

SP: In Japan or in Asia in general where we are selling most of our products they are really keen on plywood stripes there. That they do is natural in their culture, the way in which they use bambu etc. They are also familiar with Alvar Aalto whose design and style was our guideline while doing Penaudio Plywood finish. It was actually first time that loudspeaker manufacturer used plywood stripes that way. We introduced it in 2002 in the Frankfurt Highend show... almost 9 years already, time flies when you have good time. Simple lines, small, narrow cabinets and being an odd Finn fascinates there. That is something that you cannot copy. For the same reason I like Italian design in for example my cars; rims, pedals, steering wheel... also their clothes fascinates my eye. You cannot copy that... maybe pizza though.

I-A: What do you mean by "each individual Penaudio product must earn its own design value"?

SP: Each speaker has to be different yet meet the same Penaudio sound criteria for design, performance and lifestyle.



I-A: I know that in the past you've had to answer several times to the question how much a small standmount 2-way speaker should or should not cost. Is that discussion still going on, or has the situation changed?

SP: In my opinion a 2-way standmount speaker could cost... 6000€ per pair. Then its performance would be perfect in the room where you just cannot install a floorstander. For more than 6000€ I would require some custom things... say extra high gloss finish, some rare finish etc. As to parts, 6000€ should be enough to achieve a "perfect" performance.

I-A: Penaudio's philosophy stresses that "listening to music should be as effortless and free-flowing as the notes themselves", and that "natural sound combined with ease of access will make one happier and more relaxed" promoting one's "auditional wellbeing". Could you elaborate a bit on the idea of effortless and easy-going yet natural sound?

SP: Effortless means that Penaudio speakers are easy to place. Sound is excellent and "right" in any environment excluding of course so small rooms that you should listen to music only with headphones. Many speakers require precise placement and positioning. With the new cross-over design and initial wiring Penaudios speakers "mate" with any amp and simply play music. They sound natural and allow me to intend the music and not the equipment.



I-A: As of 2010, internal cabling of all Penaudio's speaker models is provided by Jorma-cable from Sweden, replacing Analysis Plus Blue Oval and Goertz MI1 cables. What sort of change in sound did you expect from this change or were there other reasons for the manoeuvre?

SP: As I mentioned we are putting a lot of R&D to searching new better sounding components. Internal cabling has been one of them. For long we've been using Jorma Design cables as speaker cables in many equipment combinations. They sound pure, natural and balanced for me so we started to make prototypes with them. We noticed that they sounded better in every combination. They didn't have any problems with integration that other cables had. And from Sweden... if I had

had any other choice I would have taken them from other place, believe me.

I-A: To the best of my knowledge the new mid-level Sara is the first 2,5 way speaker by Penaudio. How much more difficult it was to design a functioning crossover for Sara? Other obstacles in developing this speaker?



SP: Designing a wee-working cross-over for Sara wasn't easy. I tried 3-way, pure 2-way, D'Appolito and ended up with using 2,5-way. I got the sound I preferred more easily and the way I like to tune filters. Also, I can control a little bit directiveness of the speaker in the area it is most needed, 100-500Hz and also the baffle step.

I-A: You know how audiophiles dispute about the best amplification for a certain speaker. You've used eg. Sonneteer's amplifiers and sources. Is that a good match?

SP: Best amplification...that is true but it is like finding a great wine for certain food. Expensive ones are usually good choices but you can find a good one also from less expensive products. Sonneteer has good solid state and Class D amps and they are our R&D tools. We have noticed that if speakers play good with them they will also perform good with more expensive and less expensive ones. Some may think that there other extra reasons why we use Sonneteer but it is I who decide what components we are using inside the speaker and with the speakers. They must sound excellent and fulfill my references. I make tests with the electronics we're using with our speakers and if there is something better than what we have now I'll start using them. By better I mean a better sound. We use Almarro amps as our tube reference, and Denon and Yamaha to test our speakers with home theatre amps.

I-A: You've open slightly Penaudio's future by telling that this autumn we'll see a new flagship model coming ... Can you give us a bit more info?

SP: No. ha ha ...

I-A: Thanks Sami.

www.penaudio.fi