

Noise Ordinance: Restricting Rights or Fixing a Problem?



Joshua Landau of JML Audio says that wording on the original St. Louis noise ordinance was extreme; the law that has passed is softer but still leaves speculation for retailers as to real parameters for installs.

Joshua Landau, owner of JML Audio in Chesterfield, Mo., spoke with *Mobile Electronics* Editor Solomon Daniels about the proposed St. Louis noise bill that would have impacted specialist shops by crippling their ability to sell and install multi-subwoofer and high-wattage systems.

Daniels: How did you first hear about the proposed St. Louis noise ordinance?

Landau: The father of one of our technicians is a judge for the city and he actually found out about it. We then saw it in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

Daniels: What steps did you take to try to get the word out and intervene?

Landau: First I tried getting in touch with the person who wrote the article to clear up things with him. When I couldn't get a hold of him, I started calling some other people. I also talked to some of the local car dealerships, figuring that it would affect them since many of their high-end cars, such as those with the Mark Levinson system, have more than 10 speakers. I even called one of the managers at the the local Circuit City. They didn't even know about it. I figured that since they are a large company they would be able to put some muscle behind making sure it wasn't passed into law. So I let them know, as well as some other local shops.

Daniels: What did you think about the justification to essentially go after the autosound industry?

Landau: I thought it was created from a standpoint of ignorance, because as you know, the type or amount of equipment you have has nothing to do with what you do with it. If you have a 500 horsepower car, does that mean you're going to go 200 miles an hour? No. We do a lot of sound quality systems, and they have either more equipment or wattage because you need a lot of power for clarity. So in essence, my clients who just have really solid system and don't blast it would still be violating the rule.

Daniels: Which vehicles have OEM systems

that violate the bill as it was originally proposed?

Landau: Lexus is one of them, the Ford Mach 1000 system is over the limit with both amps and subs, and there are a number of other manufacturers that it affects. I guess they could have exempted stock systems from the rule, but I didn't see anything to that effect in the wording.

Daniels: As you know, many ordinances have popped up using the standard of the system being heard a number of feet from the vehicle, and many people in the industry think even this is tough to enforce.

Landau: As far as the actual number of feet I think that's more on the right track. They did pass a bill now, just passed a revision of this law, which has to do with so many feet. But you can hear most factory systems from 35 feet or more away; granted, it's all distortion. Unless you put an SPL meter or something like that in a police car, how are you really telling how loud it's going to be? I understand that no one wants a car booming through their neighborhood at two in the morning. At the same time, if you are on a highway or an interstate and you're going 80 and you want to crank it, are you really bothering anyone that much? I don't know.

Daniels: What do you think of MERA's reaction to the ordinance?

Landau: I got a call within two days of the article coming out. The woman I spoke to informed me that she had just spoken to the writer and was looking for more information, and asked if she could use myself and the shop as a reference. It was definitely a lot more noticeable than I thought it would be. It wasn't a huge article and I probably would have missed it if it hadn't been brought to my attention. I was definitely glad of MERA's involvement. I'm glad to see that our membership is being put toward something other than the basic things that you'd expect from MERA.

Daniels: If the law had passed, how do you think it would have affected your business?

Landau: Since we're not in the city it wouldn't have probably at first affected us too much. But when things go to the city they'll probably go to the county next, especially since you're talking only a 15-to-20 minute driving difference between us and the Arch. Long term, I don't know. I was concerned until I realized that some factory systems violate the ruling. How are you going to tell every Lexus owner in the last three years that their car is now in violation of this new bill? And these are the people who have never had an upgraded stereo system.

Daniels: With the softer version of the bill being approved, is that something you can live with?

Landau: I guess. It's one more thing against us to a point, but it's better than the initial version. I don't have too much of a choice. As far as I'm concerned, if my clients did not blast their systems that would be an advantage to us because that means less replacement of equipment. Unfortunately some people interpret sound quality as loudness instead of clarity, which is where real sound quality is. Because of that we have clients who say "Okay, this factory system, whether it's a Lexus, BMW, Mercedes or whatever, it sounds great but it doesn't have the volume." So they come to us for the great sound at higher output. I very much know going into the situation that it's going to be too loud for my personal preference but it's going to be okay for theirs. And pretty much what they do with it is up to them." ⚡