

Crib Death

Our birth announcement for a new English-manufactured tube in the November issue (“New Approach to Tube Design,” p. 6) became a victim of the worldwide financial downturn. Micro Tech Solutions of Blackburn, England, has declared bankruptcy (www.blackburntech.com). The news arrived after the issue of *audioXpress* had gone on press. Deep sadness prevails in the town of Blackburn, since the old Mullard plant had been a major employer in the town with more than six-thousand employees at peak production in 1961. The remnant company was still a minor em-

ployer as a supplier of CRT guns even though that technology is now disappearing. This is nothing new in Blackburn, which was once the largest source of cotton cloth in the world.

At first glance this may look to most people as just another tragedy of the downturn which is closing businesses of all sizes everywhere. I am told that Teradyne in Boston, one of the world’s primary chip testing companies, laid off half its workforce after one quarter in 2009 produced no sales at all, none. But this closure in England snuffs out a possibility that had the Blackburn enterprise succeeded, it would have produced

not only 12AX7/ECC83 type triodes, but would have been followed by the 12AX cousins, as well as EL34s, EL84s, and eventually KT88s, even possibly the GZ34s with their slow turn-on time.

Those enterprising few fortunate enough to have paid their £50 for one of the new E8133C tubes have posted glowing, incredulous reports of reduced hum levels and quality of the sound as “the ultimate ‘tubeness,’” to quote one (<http://www.head-fi.org/forums/f5/mini-review-blackburn-microtech-e813cc-vacuum-tube-443651/>). Other sources have reported problems of microphony, despite high fidelity in reproduction.—ETD



Reliable Reviews

More Mono Matters

By Tom Krehbeil

Here’s an idea for headphone manufacturers. I’m offering it free of any obligation.

We need a music-quality single on-ear phone or in-ear bud that uses a stereo plug and blends the two channels into a mono signal for one-ear listening. I know this because I see MP3 player-toting office workers putting one earpiece in place for listening and tucking the other one into the neckline of blouse or shirt.

They’re solving a problem as best they can: listening with both ears blocks conversation and makes using stereo earphones extremely inconvenient in a work (or, for that matter, social or recreational) environment.

That ad-hoc one-ear solution has an obvious flaw. The listener must do without the music carried by one stereo channel. Mono earbuds and mono earphones exist, but they don’t combine two stereo channels. A few sport three-contact stereo plugs, but those may or may not have a connection

between the ring (right channel in a stereo set) contact and the driver. One website, in fact, specifically states that for mono use the ring contact is left unconnected.

So I believe that there’s a place in the market for a proper music-quality stereo-to-

piece will be mute. It will, however, still be hanging around and will need the usual neckline tuck. Or, you could just snip it off.

CAVEAT: Since drafting this piece a year or so ago, I’ve found at least one MP3 player that craps out when the channels

“There’s a place in the market. . . for a proper music-quality single-channel earbud or earphone that has a fully connected stereo plug that feeds a combined signal to the one driver.”

mono earphone or earbud.

In the meantime, you can accomplish pretty much the same thing by inserting a stereo-to-mono 1/8" headphone adapter between your stereo phones and the jack on your personal audio device. Radio Shack’s item number 274-374 for \$2.69 would do the job.

With such an adapter in place, you’ll get a combined left- and right-channel signal from the left earpiece, and the right ear-

are combined at the jack. It mutes or quits, probably an impedance mismatch issue of some sort. No damage was done to the player or to the earbuds, but a manufacturer who decides to design a stereo-to-mono solution may need to do more than simply parallel the channels in the plug to guarantee full compatibility with all MP3 players. (Portable CD players seem to be immune, but who uses those these days?) **rr**