

JOHN KLEIS OF READING

BY STEVE FRYER

For many people Reading is a place part way on the rail or motorway journey from London to South Wales. For Berkshire people Reading is their county town, and it has now achieved nationwide fame for its newly-promoted Premiership football club as well as the annual Reading Festival. In the car audio & security business Reading is famous as the town where John Kleis has his shop.



John opened his first shop in Reading in 1977 and moved four years later to his current site on the Basingstoke Road from where he has traded for the past 25 years, which is amazing because John Kleis does not look old enough to have been in this industry for more than a quarter of a century. (No, he hasn't promised me an order to say so!) If the car audio industry has failed to take its toll on John's looks it has certainly taken its toll on his personal life with two failed marriages and the tragic death of a son. Most self-employed business people know that long working hours never leaves enough time to spend with family. Reading can be described as an ordinary town. Yes it does have a university, but it cannot be described as a town with a high disposable income, yet it has three car radio retail businesses including John's, and both of the other two car audio shops (as well as others in nearby towns) include one or more former John Kleis employees amongst their current staff members. So what has kept John Kleis Car HiFi trading for all these years? According to John the success of his business is due to two things: customer satisfaction and staff training. The large community of regular customers is a result of the first

point, and the professionalism of John's support staff proof of the second. John also has a very high advertising spend and is currently running a campaign on the local radio station which certainly helps to create store traffic. Spend an hour or two in John's shop watching the steady flow, often flood, of visitors – potential customers, John calls them – coming through his front door. John's selling skills undoubtedly account for much of his success. These potential customers seldom escape without having made a purchase, or had their car booked in for an alarm fit, stereo install or speaker upgrade!

No-One Does Business Like You Do

Each member of the front-line team, including John himself, has a sales

target to achieve; John is very often Number One Salesman. Perhaps this is why there has never been a second John Kleis shop, despite opportunities arising in nearby towns such as Slough and Bracknell. 'No-one does business like you do' is an adage that is very apt as far as John Kleis is concerned. Certainly, John spends virtually all of



his time working in the business, actually behind the shop counter whenever possible.

The John Kleis support team consists of shop manager Mark, salesman Connor, three full-time engineers plus a part-time book keeper. A sizeable complement in a time when many businesses in our industry are virtually momma-poppa stores. It would be wrong to assume that John has some amazing magic formula to avoid the current difficult trading conditions, but it is true that he is weathering the storm better than many business are doing. He had his best ever year in 2003, but has not been able to top that year's figure since. A recent experimental period of Sunday trading resulted in reduced Saturday turnover and a weekend's result broadly similar to a Saturday-only result. So now John Kleis once again opens

Monday to Saturday.

FACT FILE

Date established: 1977
Owner: John Kleis
Number of employees: 7
Size of site: 3,500 square feet

Location, Location, Location

Has John's prominent position on the Basingstoke Road helped the business over the years, Undoubtedly yes. The three most important things in retailing are location, location and location. However, Basingstoke Road is no longer the A33 main route south out of Reading, a new dual carriageway opened some years ago and took much of the passing traffic away. Even before that, a bizarre local authority decision to make a ten yard stretch of the main road just before John's shop a 'buses only' road forced traffic heading towards Reading to seek a different route, and not past the shop. But then let's not get started on just how helpful local authorities are to retail businesses!



It is difficult, even impossible to summarise the business and the man behind the business, but you cannot argue that John Kleis is a good old-fashioned retailer. He knows how to buy well, his shop is fully stocked with regularly changing merchandise and there is little free space in his stock room. (You often find a sales rep waiting to see John knowing there is a strong chance of an order.) Customers are greeted with a friendly professional service, they can park outside the shop and are reassured by the on-site workshop which very often contains an expensive vehicle. Further proof of John's attitude to traditional retailing is the fact that he has made a conscious decision not to have an on-line retail presence, preferring to stick to what he knows best – being one of the country's top in-car audio & security specialists.