

# Sextons of Portsmouth

BY STEVE FRYER

IN PREVIOUS ARTICLES FOR THIS SERIES WE HAVE TRAVELLED TO ETEN-LEUR IN THE NETHERLANDS, TO LEEDS AND TO READING, A TOTAL OF AROUND 1,300 MILES. FOR THIS MONTH'S ARTICLE WE DECIDED TO TAKE IT EASY, SAVE ON THE DIESEL, AND TRAVELLED ALL OF 1.9 MILES FROM THE OFFICE TO VISIT ANT STRUDWICK AND HIS TEAM AT THE LONG-ESTABLISHED SEXTONS OF PORTSMOUTH.

Portsmouth and area is full of contrasts. You can stand on scenic Portsdown Hill with its panoramic views across the Solent towards the Isle Of Wight and look down at the row upon row of tightly packed terrace houses built for sailors' families. You can take a walk along the 19th century Southsea pier, or you can ride to the top of the Millennium Tower built within the last few years, and just like its home city, Sextons of Portsmouth is a business of contrasts. Long-established, having traded under several different names for over 30 years, but now with a young and enthusiastic management team.



In recent times many businesses in our industry have changed ownership, and Sextons is one of them. During 2006 Joe Winning, a long-standing Sextons customer bought the business. You could use the classic line 'I liked the product so much that I bought the company' and certainly Joe has been a big spender at Sextons, having had equipment fitted to a variety of cars over the years including his two current vehicles, a Ferrari and an Escalade. So how did Sextons of Portsmouth begin? The shop first opened in 1974 as HR Knight trading from premises at 71 Tangier Road, a short distance from the present shop, and now a small private house in an area of Portsmouth that suffered heavy bomb damage during World War Two. Today it is hard to visualise how a car audio business could have operated from there, and after the first five years, new and much larger premises were found in Milton Road. (Do we detect a pattern emerging here – so far all

the businesses we have looked at in previous issues relocated within a few years of starting up). A change of ownership in the 1980's also meant a change of name to Roadsounds and when the new owners eventually sold to Toad the name changed yet again. Later the redoubtable Dick Beal, one of our industry's most memorable characters, owned the business. Dick sold the four shop group to his general manager who sadly failed to make a go of it and in 2001 the Portsmouth shop became independently owned by partners Paul Marlow & Carl Smith. Earlier this year Paul decided on a career change and sold the business to Joe Winning. Carl stayed on at Sextons for a short time and it is interesting to note that during the Roadsounds era, Carl's father Mike Smith had been the shop manager until his early death.

## Apprentice Engineer to General Manager

In 1999 Sextons employed as a young apprentice engineer one Ant Strudwick who left after five years of making the tea and being given the worst jobs to do. However, when Joe bought Sextons the first thing he did was to invite Ant to return as General Manager, so Ant now has leapfrogged his former colleagues and is in day-to-day charge of the running of the business. Joe's perceptiveness in recognising Ant's management potential has really paid off as it is quite apparent to any observer that Ant runs this business very much as though it is his own and with an enthusiasm and energy to match. This is important for Joe because he has another business in a different industry, which he has relocated to the shop premises, and this inevitably means that he is unable to work full-time at Sextons. Chatting with Joe it is clear that he has many radically new ideas for promoting the business including a tie-up with the local radio station's coverage of Portsmouth Football Club's home games. Working alongside Ant at the shop full-time are salesman/installer John

Sykes who has been at Sextons since 1996, and newcomer installer Carl Shakespeare. (Should Carl have written this article?) There is also



part-time engineer Chris Harris, whose other job is as a fireman for the City of Portsmouth. It is always interesting to look at how long-established businesses have changed with the years, and Sextons has certainly followed the recent trend of downsizing. For instance in the mid-1990's this business had a full-time staff of ten people including four salesmen in the shop, three engineers in the workshop, two mobile engineers and a book-keeper. Now trade work is down to about 40% of total turnover, outwork accounts for one day a week, and the shop doesn't need a full-time salesman, let alone four. It is also interesting to note that during those times Portsmouth and surrounding area boasted five, and at one time, six car radio businesses. Now there are just three. In addition to Sextons there is Stirling ICE run by Kevin Bainbridge, whose business we will take a look at in a forthcoming issue, and a franchise of Road Radio recently taken over by Neil Rixon. On reflection, perhaps Sextons of Portsmouth is not a business of contrasts after all. It has merely done what so many other businesses in our industry have done over the years and constantly evolved to adapt to the times we live in!

### Fact File:

Date established: 1974  
 Owner: Joe Winning  
 Staff complement: Three full-time and two part-time  
 Size of site: 2,000 square feet  
 Number of outlets: One

**Next month's profile: Car Audio & Security of Hayes**