



One-on-One with Mr. Bling Daddy Himself

Lloyd “LL Bling Daddy” Ivey wears many hats in both his professional and personal life. He is the founder and chairman of Mitek Corporation, a leading manufacturer of car, home, professional and commercial audio products with plants in both the United States and Canada, as well as currently playing a key role with the CEA (Consumer Electronic Association).

When not hard at it, Lloyd is also an active pilot and avid car and bike collector, and is generally considered one of the key originators of car audio. Beyond that, “LL Bling Daddy” is definitely a one-of-a-kind sort of guy. We recently had the opportunity to go one-on-one with this legend of the audio industry and true to form, he was at no loss for words...here is the *condensed* version of our conversation.

RPM: *To begin with, can you explain what the CEA is and what your involvement is in it?*

Lloyd Ivey: CEA (Consumer Electronic Association), which I have been the Chairman of since January of this year, is a very vibrant organization with over 2,400 members which produces the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) each January in Las Vegas. The CEA and CES represent more than 119 billion dollars of consumer electronics product that's sold in the United States on a yearly basis. Our growth of 20 percent is absolutely tremendous. The CES show this year had 140,000 plus visitors and we have rarified that visitor group by improving the quality and not the quantity. At 140,000, we want the people that have affinity with our industry; we don't want just tire kickers and sightseers.

RPM: Is the role of the CEA exclusive to governing over the CES show or is there something else that CEA does?

LI: The CEA represents all of the manufacturers, importers, distributors and retailers and has a big position on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. We're advocates of the recording rights of our consumers, to use the devices we manufacture and sell for their own personal use. We support peer-to-peer file sharing like the Betamax case that is coming up in the courts in early April. Some of the associations, such as the moving picture industry and music associations, want to overthrow the Betamax case. That's 20 years ago that the Supreme Court ruled that the Betamax is a legal device and could be used to record a program and content to be replayed for non-commercial use in your home or shared with your family and friends. The CEA just filed a brief with the Supreme Court, (that cost over \$100,000 to file), in which we are the spear carrier to protect the rights of our consumers. That's what the CEA is all about, setting high standards and protecting the consumer from unscrupulous companies.

We also make position statements on things such as mobile video. We came out a long time ago and said 'mobile information in the front seat and entertainment in the back seat'. The CEA will do everything we can to educate the consumer, installer and retailer to not, under any circumstances, put any type of entertainment or driver-distracting devices in the front (of vehicles). There have been two deaths that resulted in lawsuits being filed, one in Louisiana and one in Canada, I believe, for mobile video. We believe in protecting consumers' rights, but we also believe in protecting consumers from themselves and making sure that none of our members' products are unsafe or can be used in an unsafe manner.

RPM: So a big part of the CEA is to direct policy as well?

LI: Each year at CES there are over 200 public policy makers and legislators, senators and congressmen, as well as the chairman of the FCC. We make sure that all of the public policy makers are very aware of who the CEA is and that we're there to help them and inform them how our products bring quality to life.

RPM: How did you get started in the industry?

LI: In 1971, I started at Northwestern University in Illinois, building Hi-Fi speakers and speaker enclosures for the college kids. Not for car audio, because there was no car audio then, but for home audio. The business really started one day at a time. A lot of lonely hours. The lonely hours is when everybody else goes home and you have passion, a vision, you know, you have a dream. Right now I'm looking at the bracelet on my wrist that says "dream". A goal is really a dream with a deadline and you have to be able to achieve that.

RPM: Where do you see things going in the industry right now and in the near future?

LI: The convergence is absolutely awesome. About five years ago I coined the phrase 'Trunk-Forward Selling.' What I'm talking about, is when someone walks into a retail audio store after he buys a new car, and wants to improve the sound. The (sales) guy says "you got to rip out the radio and you put this new Alpine in." Well, this was back in the day - you don't do that anymore. Stuff now is so well integrated and what you see today are things that we showed at the IASCA finals five years ago, ten years ago...they're integrated. I just picked up my new 300C



Ivey and Tyson Beckford show off Beckford's Method Man Van.

Chrysler, with the Hemi, cool Vanilla, with only 19-inch wheels (he's going with 24's because "Bling Daddy" has gotta have some wheels!) One thing about it is that you're not going to pull off the dash that's a complete Harmon nav system. It's got everything but it doesn't bump, it bings and whips. So what the audio stores have to realize is their opportunity - so the keys to their future and the keys to their opportunities are the keys to the trunk. You see the big producers have CAFE rules that they operate under regarding weight, performance, gas mileage. They cannot put large systems in the cars. There's where the opportunity is. You don't have to reinvent the wheel, you just have to take the wheels and bling them up a little!

RPM: *We understand you have quite a collection of vehicles yourself. How many do you have and which is your favorite ride?*

LI: I guess if you look at my toybox I've got maybe 60 or 70. My favourite is kinda the one I'm in, you know, whatever the day is.

RPM: *Care to elaborate on some of the vehicles in your collection?*

LI: I've got a Dodge Viper and SRT-10 that match (red) which are really cool and I really like my '70 SS 454 Chevelle. It's maroon with the white stripes, white interior with a white convertible top. 454, 4-speed with 4 11's, it's a 100-point car. I also have a '60 Cadillac Eldorado Biarritz convertible with a parade package. There were only a hundred of them built. Cars have always been a passion with me, I just love them.

RPM: *Sounds like we could do a feature on your collection alone...*

"It's like bacon and eggs in the morning, most people are like the chicken, they're involved in the breakfast, but the pig is really committed!"

LI: Yeah, but I would probably get my friend involved. He's got around 100 million dollars worth of cars. He's my neighbour and I just sold him 12 acres next door to me. He's building a museum called Wheels and Wings which is next to my private airport. He's got every car in the world. It's incredible; he has a 1964 Ferrari GT Daytona. That's got to be worth a million bucks! He says, oh, there's another one over there, I bought two of them. I said "Why did you buy two of them?" Well, he said, there are only 38 of them in the world!


RPM: *What's the craziest car you put a sound system in?*

LI: Let's see, we've put systems in helicopters and airplanes, but recently we built Metallica's lead singer, James Hetfield's F-150. We took it down, shaved the doors, it's actually on the cover of several magazines as well as being at CES, SEMA and at the

Chicago Auto Show. It was the focal point of the Ford booth. It is like a real cool vehicle.

RPM: *Finally, how are things going in Canada for your company and is it an important market?*

LI: We're very, very happy to have Mitek Canada as our partners. We continue to invest in Canada with a manufacturing plant in Toronto now, and our strategic partners up there like Future Shop and A&B Sound are great. We're really pleased with the way things are going and our involvement in the Canadian market. You know, it's like bacon and eggs in the morning, most people are like the chicken, they're involved in the breakfast, but the pig is really committed!

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