

Where have all the young men (with ideas) gone?

The recent Innovation 2000 – “Exhibition of Inventions and Innovative Ideas” carried only one exhibit remotely related to noise out of a total of 140 on show. This was a simple concept to improve communication from front to rear of a noisy car. Microphones at the front pick up front seat speech and feed it through the car audio to reappear from the rear loudspeakers. It is straight amplification, without any pretence of complex signal processing.

Looking back over innovations in noise and vibration reduction, active control is an obvious leader, although there is still a cautious approach to its acceptance. Whilst there have been modest improvements in materials and hardware, passive control has changed very little. It's instructive to refer to some of the books which came out in the 1950s, to see how little has changed!

We understand a great deal more about sources, causes and responses to noise, whilst lagging behind in the control. Although an exception is transportation, where both public and

legislative pressure has focussed efforts towards reduction. Is there a moral in this?

Where are the inventors? The bright eccentrics, determined, focussed, crazy, or whatever it takes to have the idea, stick with it, overcome problems and develop it to a product. They are certainly not in noise and vibration control.

The French “Decibel d’Or” awards, encourage innovation and give publicity to the winners. Active control systems for worker protection (Active ear muffs) and for noise control in buildings (HVAC active silencers) have been winners, as have crunched rubber in bituminous concrete and other devices.

Innovation will be driven by increasing demands. It is well known that new technologies are held back during the time that existing technologies are able to satisfy requirements. So what we need is a new set of stringent criteria. Not only will the world be quieter, but the young men, and women, will be able to innovate – although by then, they may be quite middle aged!

noise notes

Take that

A 66-year-old man from Abeno Ward, Osaka has been arrested on suspicion of stabbing his upstairs neighbour to death, in what was apparently the final retort in a long-running argument over the noisy habits of the 25-year-old victim. Police said Michio Ichikawa has confessed to the murder of his neighbour. The victim, Toshio Sakane, a student at an art school, lived on the fourth floor, above Ichikawa's apartment. According to police, at about 12:45 a.m. on Aug. 17, Ichikawa visited Sakane and complained that he was making too much noise. After Ichikawa returned to his own apartment, Sakane came downstairs and kicked his door. In a fit of anger, Ichikawa stabbed Sakane in the stomach with a kitchen knife in the third floor corridor.