



Inside Gale: An Interview with David Lyth

Quality control, Bruton Place, and the making of an icon

Interviewee: David Lyth

Interviewer: Matt Shepard (Vintage Gale)

Origins: From Jordan-Watts to Mayfair

Matt Shepard: How did you first come to Gale?

David Lyth: I was at Jordan-Watts and often delivered speakers to the GEC Research Laboratories in Wembley. A contact there said Ira Gale was hiring. I met him at 24 South Audley Street, Mayfair, a prestigious address. He was loud but friendly, offered me the job, and I accepted.

At that point Reslo Microphones (Romford) were building the 401s. The Bruton Place facility (the old Norman Hartnell site) came shortly after. Much early coordination happened from Ira's flat or Nick Pilbro's place at 39 Upper Brook Street, Nick was the finance lead. Ray Churchhouse joined as Sales Director; I was the first employee.

"By the time I joined, and when Bill Woodman joined, the engineering was already Ira's. Our job was to ensure every single speaker met the standard."

What We Actually Did: Testing, Not Redesigning

Matt: There's a lot of myth about who engineered the 401.

David: Ira had done the engineering and the speaker was already in production at Reslo. My role was quality control. I designed a small anechoic chamber for 23 Bruton Place with a B&K rig. Each loudspeaker was measured against a reference and set flat. Early on we even took every unit to GEC Wembley.

We also built crossovers in-house and tested every one on a bridge: reference network and unit-under-test into dummy loads, sweep the audio band, and watch for any imbalance. Nothing left untested.

Matt: Were they sold as matched pairs?

David: They didn't need to be. Because each speaker was individually set flat to a reference, they were, in effect, matched to the standard. "Matched pairs" is often marketing, if matching is essential, something's drifting.

Bruton Place: The Factory in Mayfair

Matt: Paint the picture of Bruton Place.

David: I was the first one in. It didn't look like the photos online. The entrance was left-hand side, plain white doors. Below were big black sliding doors into a garage, gold dust in Mayfair even then. We parked a small fleet under there: my Audi 100, BMW 5 Series, TR6, Bill Woodman's GT6.

The street in '72-'73 was quiet, a couple of galleries, and the Guinea pub packed at lunchtime (excellent meat pies). Once saw Fiona Richmond's E-type outside with the plate FU2, should have taken a photo.

Styling & Build: Film, Chrome, and Chipboard (on Purpose)

Matt: Early models and finishes?

David: When I arrived, the styling was set and Reslo were producing. The chrome ends were the tricky bit, had to be perfect. Polishing sometimes left a brown scorch mark where an electrode clipped on. The front film was by APW, punched, then warmed and stretched to remove creases.

Matt: Who made the cabinets, and why chipboard?

David: Ira researched materials heavily. He settled on what was essentially construction-grade chipboard: hard-faced outside, soft inside, a natural sandwich that made it dead. He used an accelerometer to place stiffening buttons internally. People argued for plywood; it's more resonant. The chipboard approach was quieter.

Matt: And the horizontal format?

David: The mid and tweeter are vertically aligned, so no need for mirror-imaging. The bass sitting to one side didn't matter with a low crossover (~400–475 Hz); integration was maintained.

Matt: The fibreglass fill is... memorable.

David: Nasty to handle, yes, but it dissipates energy because air flows through it. We had a dedicated room with extraction, and people wore gloves and masks.

Controls & Restoration: Don't Bypass the Rheostats

Matt: We refoam, recap, and service the level controls. Thoughts on bypassing?

David: The back-panel Colvern rheostats were chosen so a flat position exists in their operating range. Bypassing effectively runs mid and treble full up, you'll lose flatness. I wouldn't do it.

"Amp Killers", Loads & Drivers

Matt: Did the 401 really kill amps?

David: Mostly myth. Two 8-ohm woofers in parallel gave 4 ohms when the domestic norm was 8 ohms (Jordan-Watts even did 16 ohms for valves). It was a departure, not a death sentence, provided the amp was capable.

Matt: CTS woofers are the hardest part of restoration.

David: Ira brought in Chuck McShane (likely Acoustic Research). I worked with him to develop a UK-made equivalent; Gale ended up making its own. We had a magnetiser and sourced voice coils from Lamina Dielectrics (Sussex) back then. The Gale woofer was simple, not exotic. If you speak to Catherine and Steve at Volt, they might suggest an 8" chassis that physically fits, several suppliers exist.

"The Volt B2202 was conceptually close to the Gale 8-inch: rigid cone, 1.5" high-temp coil, decent winding length, probably more efficient with a bigger magnet."

Leaving Gale: ATC, Martin Audio, and a Smooth Production Line

Matt: What came next for you, and for Bill?

David: Bill Woodman left to set up ATC. We still saw Ian Dampney and Nigel Hobden socially. Through Bill I met Dave Martin at Martin Audio, applied, and left Gale. By then, the speaker line ran smoothly. We fussed over the wooden version and cloth, but nothing matched the impact of the black-and-chrome 401, huge power handling, real sound pressure, and a bold aesthetic in a world of stodgy teak boxes.

Across the Atlantic: Quality Slippage & American Variants

Matt: After you left, Ira went back to the US. I've seen Made in USA 401s and some poor crossovers (reportedly Mexican-made).

David: I wasn't involved then, but in the UK era Ira was obsessive about quality, looks, build, and sound. Later poor examples don't square with that.

Matt: Did Gale ever do black end caps?

David: I only ever saw chrome. If you've got black, I'd assume aftermarket.

Matt: Any truth to the "supplier trouble" stories?

David: There was always a bit of that. Once Ira sent me and a driver to Reslo to collect stock; the manager refused, went to lunch, and the storeman told us to help ourselves. We loaded a van of bass units and left. Draw your own conclusions about cash flow.

Provenance, Reference Listening & The Move to Huntingdon

Matt: Was Ira a musician? A physicist? The lore is endless.

David: No idea formally. At my interview there was a grand piano with a dehumidifier running "to keep it in tune" so he likely played. He certainly researched deeply: we had Celestion Ditton 66, a Rogers BBC-type monitor, and an Acoustic Research LST as references. Later, the company moved to Huntingdon, names like Alan Coleman and Donald Wong appear, aligned with a bookshelf-speaker phase. That was after my time.

References & further reading

Manufacturing & facilities

- Reslo Microphones (Reslosound Ltd, Romford), Early contract builder of Gale 401s; documented addresses and history. [Radiomuseum+2Science Museum Group Collection+2](#)
- GEC Hirst Research Centre (Wembley), Anechoic-chamber testing; history overviews. [lintech.org+2Science Museum Group Collection+2](#)

Components & suppliers

- Colvern (rheostats / level controls), Colvern line now manufactured by Blore Edwards; datasheets. [Blore Edwards Precision+1](#)
- Lamina Dielectrics (voice-coil formers / sleeves), Maker of Nomex®/kraft laminate coil formers. [lamina.uk.com+1](#)

Drive units (original & analogous)

- CTS (Chicago Telephone Supply / CTS Corp.), Historic US driver manufacturer used in early 401s. [The Gear Page+1](#)
- Peerless K040/KO40 midrange, Era-typical sealed-back mid; service notes/spec references. [The Speaker Exchange+2Repair Your Speakers+2](#)
- Celestion HF2000 tweeter, Period documentation via Ditton 66 materials and technical discussions. [JK Wynn+2diyAudio+2](#)
- Volt Loudspeakers (modern 8" analogue), B220.2 info; cited by David as conceptually close to the Gale woofer. [Volt Loudspeakers](#)

People & related companies

- ATC (Acoustic Transducer Company), Founded by Billy Woodman (1974); official profile & histories. [ATC Loudspeakers+2ATC Loudspeakers+2](#)
- Martin Audio, Founded by Dave Martin (1971); official history and anniversary materials. [LSI Online+3Martin Audio+3Martin Audio+3](#)

Unverified but mentioned (call for info)

- APW (grille film punching), Period plastics converter; identity not yet verified. If you have invoices/packaging, we can confirm.
- "Kensal" polishing, Chrome finishing house recalled by David; trading name unconfirmed (likely London NW10 area).