

# Lava Cable

When he walked into a local guitar store one day in early 2004 to listen to some new amps, Mark Stoddard walked out with a new passion – and avocation.

Having just plugged a guitar into a boutique amp with the help of a \$150 cable, he had a few questions for the salesman—not about the guitar, nor about the amp, but about the *cable*. Within a few weeks, Stoddard, a U.S. Army Major stationed at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, had decided to build a high-end cable for himself. A former electronics assembler in the defense industry, he knew he could make one of equal quality for much less than \$150. So he did some research, spoke with fellow musicians, and built himself a cord using Canare GS-6 cable and Neutrik connectors.

“When I plugged it into my Mesa Boogie Mark IV, I noticed an immediate difference in sound quality,” Stoddard said. “I switched it and my old one back and forth several times, just to make sure. But there was no doubt the amp was more responsive. The notes were clearer and crisper, like someone had turned up the volume, bass, and treble.”

Pleased with what he had created, Stoddard decided to build more cables and enter the commercial market. A short time later, he was reassigned to a Special Forces battalion deploying to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. “So I quickly designed a logo, decided how I wanted my cables to be packaged, and ordered two rolls of Canare GS-6,” he said. “Fortunately, I was able to take my assembly kit and a roll of the cable – and my Mesa – on deployment. I made some cables before I left, and my wife packaged and took them to my first dealer. Meanwhile, I sold cables to fellow soldiers. Making them was a great way to kind of forget that I was in a combat zone.”

We recently spoke with Stoddard to get the full story.

**Vintage Guitar:** So this is obviously something you do on the side. Any thoughts about going full-time with it?

**Mark Stoddard:** Yes, I hope to make it full-time when I retire from the military. But that’s several years away.

**How did you go from making just one type of cable to carrying so many different brands of wire, connectors,**

**etc.?**

Soon after I redeployed from Afghanistan in December, 2004, I realized that if I wanted to run a successful cable company, I was going to have to offer more than just six cables of the same brand. So I expanded the line to include Canare microphone and speaker cable with several connector combinations. In late March, 2005, I added Belden AC power cord to the line. And in January ’06, I added multiple brands, including Evi-



Mark Stoddard at his workbench.

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dence Audio, Klotz, George L’s, Mogami, and Gotham Audio. From March through June, I also added the Sommer, Cardas Audio, and van den Hul lines. Probably the most exciting addition, though, has been my own brand – the Lava Extreme Low Capacitance, or ELC cable.

**What sets you apart from other cable makers?**

My concept is to be a one-stop custom shop, filling a niche for musicians looking for great built-to-order cable. I strive to always offer a diverse selection of cable



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my work as an assembler in the defense industry was rigorously inspected. And all of my terminations are closed with industrial heat-shrink tubing.

And then there’s the fact I respond to each purchase with a personal e-mail, and do my best to respond quickly to questions or concerns. The part I enjoy most about my business is receiving daily e-mails and phone calls from satisfied customers.

**Are you a one-man shop?**

Yes, but demand is growing, so I may soon need to hire an assembler. My wife has been real supportive, also, and she often helps package cables for shipment.

**What are your hopes for the future of the industry?**

There are many good high-end cable products in the marketplace. My hopes are that more and more musicians will discover the benefits of a good cable, and that they’ll discover my shop and the products I offer!

**What are your goals for Lava Cable?**

Well, in the last year and half I’ve sold more than 5,000 cables to musicians in 20 countries and all 50 states. My goals are to introduce a new guitar cable based on lessons learned from the Lava ELC, showcase it at the NAMM show in Los Angeles, and increase my presence by adding dealers for my lines, along with increasing my visibility amongst musicians around the world.. I also hope to get more high-profile musicians onboard. I hope to continue to do well – just like any other business person.