



# Humminbird

Since the mid-1970s, a small device manufactured in the picturesque Alabama town of Eufaula has put fish all over the globe on notice – the world’s fishermen are coming to get you.

*By LOYD McINTOSH*

This small, hand-held device called the Humminbird Fish Finder has revolutionized the fishing industry and has led to more and more fish finding themselves yanked from lakes and ponds to a final resting place on walls across America and beyond.

The marvel is the brainchild of Eufaula favorite son and fishing legend Tom Mann. A group of investors came together in 1971 to form Fulton Electronics in order to manufacture the device for mass market. Working out of a garage-like warehouse near Lake Eufaula — a great testing ground for the device — the first Humminbird Depth Sounders were produced by modifying Heath Kits electronic devices.

Those initial depth finders were popular among avid fisherman. However, the company hit a gold mine in 1975 when it released the first waterproof depth finder, the Humminbird Super Sixty, which became one of the largest selling fish finders ever produced. The company changed its name to Techsonic Industries in 1977 as it continued to remain on the cutting edge of technology.

In the 1980s, Techsonic introduced the first fish finder that utilizes Liquid Crystal Display technology and the first color display fish finder – the LCD-4ID – a product that, according to longtime public relations director Larry Columbo, created enormous waves in the industry.

“This product completely revolutionized the fishing industry. We sold every one of the devices we could make,” Columbo says. “I don’t think we ever had many of these in inventory. We sold them as fast as we could make them.”

Techsonic’s innovations continued into the 1990s and the 21st Century as satellite technology became available for the first time. In 2003 Techsonic introduced the new Matrix Fishing Systems with sonar and Global Positioning Satellite (GPS) capabilities. These new devices have once again put the Eufaula-based company at the forefront of a culture that is becoming increasingly tech-savvy.

“We’re appearing in magazines and newspapers that we’ve never been in before,” says Columbo.

In 1994, Johnson Outdoors acquired Techsonic and the Humminbird brand, and the company is poised for the

future. According to Columbo, Technosonic is set to introduce the first GPS color unit in 2005, a far cry from the mom-and-pop outfit, by comparison, that first launched Humminbird in the early 1970s.

Mann was bought out of the business he helped found in 1977, but continues to be active in the depth-finder business. He says he hopes to launch a new product in 2005 as well. But it was his Humminbird brand that remains one of his biggest legacies, and the product's name has become something of a legend over the past 30-plus years as well.

The Humminbird brand is spelled without the letter 'g', which allowed Mann to copyright the name. The story of how the name came to be spelled without the letter has several interpretations.

"It is my understanding that Tom Mann and some of the initial investors were sitting around trying to think of a name when Tom mentioned the hummingbird," Columbo says, "but he didn't know how to pronounce it correctly. I've always heard that the name was spelled without the 'g' because he didn't know how to pronounce it."

Mann tells a slightly different story.

"I left the 'g' out on purpose," he says. "I knew if I put the 'g' in it, I couldn't register it [with the copyright office] because you can't register one of God's creatures."

Mann adds, "By leaving the 'g' out and registering the name 'humminbird' I could register all of the sound-alike names. I cut them off at the pass. I just tell people I didn't know how to pronounce it." ■

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