

Special Report*photo courtesy Kathy Munro*

The Strange Life and Bizarre Disappearance of **John Iverson**

At 9:30 on the evening of January 4, 1991, Charlie Downs heard a call go out on his police scanner about a possible kidnapping. The crime reporter for the Lake Havasu City, Arizona *Herald* jumped to his feet. Lake Havasu—a factory town and retirement village of 30,000 about three hours south of Las Vegas—was not known for frequent kidnappings. But Downs also recognized the address, 1770 South Palo Verde, as the home of the late Jerrold Munro, a well-known Havasu physician. The house was owned and occupied by Munro's widow.

Minutes later, Downs parked his car and walked up Palo Verde in the darkness. The Munro house was among the most promi-

nent on the suburban street. It was not particularly large, nor was the white stucco, Santa Fe ranch atypical of the local architecture. But its parcel was bigger than most and, unlike the others on the block, the house was set way back, atop a hill at the end of a steep driveway. There was also the tall cyclone fence surrounding it on three sides, and the ominous black electric gate which protected it from the street. It all combined to give 1770 an air of exclusivity not shared by its neighbors.

Downs arrived on the scene with the first police officer. They peered into the driveway and saw a motor home parked out front. As he listened on the scanner with his headphones, the dispatcher identified the victim

as 42-year-old John Iverson, and Downs instantly recalled the brusque engineer whose Electron Kinetics stereo amplifiers he had photographed eight years earlier for a product brochure. He remembered Iverson as an eccentric and difficult client, the kind who wanted Downs to “design the brochure, as long as it was exactly the way he wanted it designed.”

The reporter waited as more officers arrived and began their search. Inside the house, they found a broken door frame on the family room, as though the door had been kicked open. Everything else was in order, but the house was empty.

“Iverson Missing, Believed Abducted,” was the headline over the page-one story in the *Herald*, and it marked the bizarre disappearance of what may be the most enigmatic character in the history of the High End.

A truly gifted audio designer, Iverson first rose to fame pushing the envelope of solid-state electronics in the mid-70s under the Electro Research name, and later sold a more affordable line as Electron Kinetics. At the moment he dematerialized, he had a small but dedicated following—despite the fact that he’d kept a low profile in recent years, introducing no new designs and earning much of his keep doing upgrades on earlier versions of his amps.

Even in the High End’s sheltered world of iconoclastic brilliance, Iverson’s in-your-face manner had managed to alienate many who crossed his path. His supporters represented the remains of a long and rocky career largely sabotaged by Iverson himself. And when the news of his vanishing spread through the industry, they were concerned.

Many of these people had worked with Iverson in the past, or partied with him, or spent countless hours as one of his long-distance telephone acquaintances. Even those who had borne the brunt of his propensity for friction in business remembered him fondly. They recalled the stocky blond powerhouse from the industry’s early days—greeting people at his CES exhibit room, hotel mattresses stuffed into corners for room treatments and an omnipresent bottle of Jack Daniels in his hand. And they wondered if this was just another of John’s wild stories.

God knows, there were plenty of those.

Since first emerging in the world of hi-fi, Iverson had used his intelligence, his quick imagination, his taste for the outrageous, and his charisma in building his own myth. For reasons which can only be speculated—whether deep insecurity, the sheer sport of toying with his target, or both—he told his tales.

“When I first started to know John, I quickly realized he was capable of telling some stories, and in the later years I knew him, his yarns became ever more phenomenal,” recalls Dan Seifert, who met Iverson in 1972 and became both a friend and a technician for his first company.

Mel Schilling, an old business partner, remembers Iverson on several occasions telling Schilling’s young son that he’d been a member of the Olympic swimming team. “John always liked to tell stories, and one could never pinpoint as to whether they were true or false,” he says. “But you could be laughing in the aisles for days, because it was just John, and it all came out of his head.”

Coupled with his entertaining stories was a brashness that could also offend. “He was a loud, lewd, profane, utterly frank individual,” says audio writer Dan Sweeney. “Everyone who knew him had a vivid impression of him. You either loved him or hated him.”

Yet, while Iverson’s foul mouth added color to his personality, it went beyond simple profanity. In select company, he was known to go off about Jews, blacks, Asians, or homosexuals. “He was very bigoted,” says Charlie Downs, who kept Iverson as a photography client for about six months. “We would go out, and John would drink his lunch and I’d eat mine, and he’d talk about niggers and Jews and how they were the cause of all the world’s problems. Not in a loud or abusive way, but he’d talk about it.”

Sweeney remembers Iverson as “violently racist and anti-Semitic,” and recalls him carrying on during one interview about “niggers on welfare.” “I said ‘John, you tell this to a member of the press? You probably have black clients out there.’ He stopped for a second and said, ‘Yeah, you’re probably right, but any guy who would buy my product is not a nigger—he’s a good man.’”

And yet, despite the ugly persona he

projected, Iverson maintained business relations and friendships throughout his career with people from all these diverse groups—seemingly without ever demonstrating bias. Perhaps because they saw through his crass masquerade, or in appreciation of his transparency, people forgave him. Sweeney, who has an interracial family, was truly offended by Iverson's comments, "but I liked the guy anyway," he says. "There was sort of an innocence about him. He was childlike."

Mark Schneider, publisher of the High End newsletter *In Terms of Music*, and one of Iverson's phone friends, was another who saw through the exterior to someone beneath who was unique, likeable, and genuine. "I admired his honesty and I admired his products," he says. "He was the type of guy that everything he told me panned out. If he said use this wire instead of that, it usually worked. There aren't too many people like that around."

"John, under it all, was a very mild, warm-hearted person and had a hell of a lot of emotions," explains his aunt, Jo Fenn. "He never displayed them, though. He was

always rough and tumble and he could be belligerent. He'd say, 'I just love to get people rattled.'"

Iverson could be particularly loyal to friends. Stan Rosick, for example, who was close with Iverson until the two had a falling out in the early 1980s, remembers him driving three hours once to tow Rosick back home when his car broke down.

Nor was Iverson beyond thoughtfulness toward strangers. Transients knocking on the door to his shop in an industrial area of Lake Havasu found a friendly face. At the moment of his disappearance, he was allowing one to live in an old motor home he kept parked on the property, and, earlier that day, had taken him to shop for groceries. "I never saw John not act kindly toward his fellow man, particularly a man in need," says Russell Sherwood, another close friend who had worked for him in Havasu.

To those he knew, both in his business and personal life, Iverson fancied himself a genius, an Edison-like inventor who was incessantly tracked by "the Gov.," as he derisively coined the federal government. He

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claimed the FBI had picked his brain on at least two occasions, stealing or squashing his inventions by citing military privilege. These experiences had, supposedly, left him a bitter man and a strong libertarian, morally opposed to virtually all authority, from that of the local electric utility to the Internal Revenue Service.

With regard to his background, he liked to tell friends and acquaintances he had attended MIT, though he also alluded that he'd been thrown out for getting physical with a professor with whom he disagreed over a class lecture. He claimed to have worked for various military contractors before getting into audio design, and sometimes said he'd worked for NASA at the White Sands National Laboratory during the Apollo program.

In fact, many of Iverson's stories have at least some elements of truth behind them. But—as the police quickly learned—getting a firm handle on the man is like trying to shape a mass of warm Jello. The harder you squeeze, the more loose ends you come up with.

The Case That Wouldn't Go Away

At this writing (5/94), the Lake Havasu City Police Department has been trying to find John Iverson for more than three years. Detective Rich Funder and his associate Kris Knudtson have filled several large loose-leaf binders with documents, and spent many hours trying to make some sense of the conundra that compose the case.

Besides Iverson, there are several others involved in the drama, including Kathy Munro, Iverson's former wife as well as live-in girlfriend, and Jack Weber, a 51-year old machinist from Las Vegas who was supplying Iverson with cabinet parts. Both were present the night Iverson disappeared.

Another bit player is a former Los Angeles-area hi-fi dealer named Don Frick. Considered by Iverson's family to be his most-trusted friend, Frick had relocated to Havasu just a day or two before Iverson's disappearance to start a new business with him manufacturing and selling loudspeakers. Iverson vanished before the two could even meet. According to Lake Havasu police, Frick subsequently moved back to

California, then himself disappeared a few months later and left no forwarding address. They've been unable to find him since.

Also on the periphery is Sherwood, a former drinking buddy and employee of Iverson's who is now a freelance engineer in Kansas. After Iverson's disappearance, Sherwood bought the remnants of his lab from Munro. Around the same time, he says, he also purchased 18 new Electron Kinetics amplifiers for the modest sum of \$5,000—they were being held by a local bank in lieu of money Iverson owed on an outstanding business loan, and the bank was all too happy to dispose of the product.

Sherwood subsequently launched a company called Electron Kinetics Service Center to service existing Electron Kinetics amps and produce new products under the brand name. Coincidentally, it was Sherwood who, in July of 1990, hooked Iverson up with Jack Weber when Iverson found himself running out of cabinets for his amps. Sherwood had seen the remarkable work Weber had done for other firms Sherwood had worked with, and knew Weber's perfectionism would please Iverson. "When it came to making cases, he was Michaelangelo," Sherwood says.

Munro and Weber offer markedly different versions of the circumstances surrounding Iverson's disappearance. What's known for sure is that Iverson and Weber were talking business at the house that evening. Weber—an avuncular-looking man with owl-frame glasses—later told police that it was the fifth or sixth time during their six months of doing business that he had made the trip from his shop in Las Vegas.

That January afternoon, Munro says he showed up around 5:00 p.m. to drop off a special project he'd been working on for Iverson. Normally, when Weber visited, Munro would call Iverson at his own shop across town, and he would come home. But Iverson had stepped out and was nowhere to be found. The police later determined he'd been out food shopping with the transient. (The transient was subsequently cleared of any connection with the disappearance.)

Munro told this reporter that as she and Weber waited alone in the kitchen for Iver-

son to arrive, she poured him some coffee and tried to make small talk. But she found him unusually uncommunicative compared with the previous times she'd met him. "I just felt something wasn't right," she says.

Her feeling was compounded when Weber asked if she could open the remote control gate so he could pull his van close to the house; presumably, he had Iverson's project in the back and thought it would be more secure in the driveway than on the street. She agreed, but when Weber came back inside, she was further unnerved by the fact that he came in carrying a briefcase. "I thought it was strange—it was the first time I'd ever seen him with a briefcase," she says.

As the two talked, the subject of an outstanding invoice came up. Munro, who was also Iverson's bookkeeper, says she couldn't locate the bill from Weber that she'd had on her desk earlier in the week. But she took it upon herself to write him a check for \$1000, using one of several blanks with Iverson's signature that she kept handy. Weber's reaction, she says, was odd. "If you give somebody a check for that amount, normal-

ly they'd pick it up, look at it, turn it over, whatever," she says. "He didn't touch it. The only thing he touched was the chair and his coffee cup. He wouldn't even take it from my hand—I had to set it right in front of him."

Eventually, about an hour after Weber arrived, Iverson finally showed up, Munro says. She says they had a small but pleasant exchange, and she told him about the check she wrote; he told her that was okay, kissed her on the head, and sent her off to bed.

While the two men talked in the kitchen, she fell asleep. She awoke a while later and found them gone, but dozed off again. Then, around 9:30, she says, she saw a flashlight coming down the dark hallway toward her bedroom, and assumed it was Iverson, who worked at night at the shop and often used a flashlight to navigate the house on his return so he wouldn't disturb her.

But instead of Iverson, she says, the person behind the flashlight turned out to be Jack Weber, wearing a pair of green gloves and brandishing a pistol in his other hand. He claimed to have Iverson tied up in his

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The house at 1770 South Palo Verde, from which Iverson disappeared (1993 photo).

van, and demanded money, she says. "The first thing I thought was 'Oh my god, this is what the LaBiancas [Charles Manson's victims] went through. This is what they must have felt when they knew they were going to die.'"

Munro says she handed over \$4000 in cash she had in the house, but he wanted me to go in there and write out another check. He wanted to know how much money John had in his checking account. She went to the office to write him a check for \$2500. But she feared for her life, she said, and pretended to make mistakes in drafting the check, purposely writing three stubs with Weber's name on them as a clue to police before handing over the final draft. Weber then led her down a hallway toward the kitchen.

As she followed him, she said, she quickly ducked into the family room, locking the door behind her, and escaped through another door to the driveway. She ran screaming down the steep driveway, right past the van where Iverson was supposedly being held, and called police from a neighbor's home. They arrived to find Weber, the van, and Iverson all missing.

Later, when police looked in Iverson's motor home—the one parked in the drive-

way—they found a damaged table and a spot on the carpet of what appeared to be fresh household cleaner. The spot had been covered with a small throw rug. Doug Iverson, John's brother, who makes his living as a veterinarian, was convinced the spot contained blood. After arguing with police, he says, he proved his point by performing a common laboratory test he uses to check for blood in animal stools. But while the police did confirm a very minute amount of blood in the otherwise large spot of Simple Green spray cleaner, they were never able to get a usable hair sample from Munro to perform DNA matching to establish if the blood was Iverson's, or even human. Nor was it clear whether the blood was fresh.

What is clear, however, is that Munro had been in the motor home a day or two before to tidy it for a trip to CES they had scheduled for the very day after Iverson disappeared. She told this reporter she left a new, unused bottle of Simple Green spray cleaner in the RV, which had presumably been used by persons unknown to cover the blood, though the police, who took the bottle for evidence, suggest it had been there for awhile and was partially used.

Meanwhile, on the night of the disap-

pearance, Jack Weber had vanished along with Iverson, and on Munro's word, police put out an APB for Weber on suspicion of kidnapping and armed robbery. One day passed, then two. The Las Vegas FBI office was brought in, but was of no help in locating the fugitive Weber or his silver, 1985 custom Ford van. His phone calls to his wife in the days immediately following the disappearance provided no clues. Nor did the authorities learn anything from Weber's attempt to deposit, by mail, the check Munro had written into an account he held at a Colorado bank.

On February 1, about a month after the disappearance, Weber's van mysteriously turned up in a parking lot in a light industrial area 10 miles from his home in Las Vegas. Vegas police had acted on a letter he'd written to his wife pinpointing the van's location, and requesting it be returned to the bank so she would not have to continue payments on it. The postmark on the letter was illegible. Nor was there useful evidence or any signs of struggle found inside the van. Indeed, the van was so clean that it led the LHPD's Funder to largely dismiss the tiny

blood spot found in Iverson's RV. "If there had been a struggle [in the motor home], there should have been blood in Weber's van," he says, "and there was absolutely nothing to indicate that anyone had been in there but Weber."

Finally, on April 23, with Iverson missing for nearly four months, a tired Jack Weber turned himself in to the FBI in Las Vegas at the urging of his wife. He was extradited to Mohave County, Arizona to face the kidnapping and armed robbery charges, and remained behind bars, unable to make his \$140,000 bail.

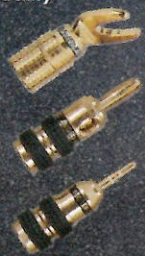
After securing an attorney, Weber gave his version of what happened the night of Iverson's disappearance. Through his attorney, Bill Porter of Kingman, Arizona, he declined to be interviewed for this article. "He's been through an awful lot with this thing," Porter says, noting that Weber still runs the risk of being brought up on new charges at any time. "All he wants is a little peace."

In his lengthy, handwritten statement to police, Weber described an elaborate sequence of events by which he claimed Iverson had actually played him for a patsy, set-

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ting him up to take the fall on bogus kidnapping charges before giving him the slip a few days later.

But there was more. At the same time he disappeared, Weber added, Iverson also made off with that special project: an exotic and deadly gun he had designed and commissioned Weber to build, and which Weber had delivered the night of the disappearance. The plans had vanished along with Iverson, though Weber did claim to have his own shop drawings.

The gun Weber described was the same one Iverson had bragged about to several people in the days prior to his disappearance. It was supposed to be a rapid-fire weapon that used no live ammunition. Instead, Weber wrote in his statement, "it worked more like a slingshot that would fire projectiles at a rate of 12,000 per minute with the velocity close to a .45 caliber bullet." Friends and family to whom Iverson explained the design say it was basically a kind of "rotoblaster," in which pellets from a holding bin would encounter a paddle-wheel device being spun at high speed. The pellets would be thrust through a series of interwoven barrels, which eventually joined into a single barrel and exit point.

According to Weber, Iverson had fallen behind in his payments for cabinet work. So when Iverson approached him in November of 1990 to build a prototype for his weapon, the machinist refused to touch it without payment up front. But Iverson convinced him that he'd settle up when the gun was delivered, and said he had a customer waiting for it. Weber said he finally called Iverson on Wednesday, January 2, 1991 to tell him it was complete, and Iverson agreed to square up with him that Friday on \$8400 in current and back payments due.

On Friday afternoon, Weber arrived around 4 pm, and Kathy greeted him in her pajamas. This was not unusual, he told police. In each of his five or six visits, he wrote, "no matter what time of day, she always stayed in bed and in pajamas while I was there."

It was true, Weber said, that Iverson was not available when he arrived at the house, and that Kathy, in her role as Iverson's bookkeeper—issued him a check for \$1,000 from Iverson's business account.

But when Weber deemed the amount inadequate, Munro grew visibly nervous, and began pacing back and forth between her bedroom and the kitchen, Weber said. "Finally, after about one and a half hours I told her maybe I should leave and go eat and come back in an hour, but she said no, that he should be home anytime," Weber wrote.

When Iverson finally showed up at around 6:30 pm, Weber said Munro walked straight to her bedroom without acknowledging his arrival. Iverson simply apologized to Weber for being late, and after about an hour of small talk, asked if he'd brought the gun. Weber said that he had, but refused to leave it unless Iverson paid up. While they were there in Iverson's kitchen, Weber said Iverson received a call from someone inquiring about the gun. He "told whomever he was talking to that I was there and that yes, I had brought the prototype of the gun with me, and that Tuesday or Wednesday would be a good time."

Weber's statement describes how the two then went out to the bottom of the driveway where Weber's van was parked, and swiveled the front seats to examine the weapon, which was laid out on the back seat. Iverson repeated that he had a customer for it, and offered Weber \$2,500 in good faith, promising to pay the balance he was owed the following week—after he'd had a chance to demonstrate it to the would-be buyer.

Weber finally agreed, and Iverson sent him back to the now dark house (using the flashlight they had used to make their way down) to ask Munro for another check. He left Iverson in the van, he said, studying the gun.

Weber made his way to Munro's bedroom door, he wrote, and she emerged at his call. She led him into an office, he says, where she made some calculations and asked him to return the \$1,000 check she'd written earlier to help cover the \$2,500 she was about to issue. He complied, and she handed over the new check. When she asked for a receipt, he reminded her that the invoice he had left on the kitchen table had been marked paid-on-account, and suggested that he could change the number and initial it.

They started for the kitchen, Weber said,

but when he got there, she was no longer behind him. He started back for the office when, suddenly, he heard Munro hollering outside in the driveway. He made his way back to the van and asked Iverson "what the hell she was doing, and he said he didn't know, and I asked him why he didn't stop her if she went running by there, and he said he didn't see her, that he only heard her just before I got there. So I asked him why she would do that, and he said he didn't know, but let's just leave and she will calm down and then I will talk to her" (sic).

Weber wrote that after picking up a box with unknown contents from his garage, Iverson instructed him to drive to Bullhead City, a gambling town on the Nevada border. Along the way, Weber said Iverson told him that he and Munro "had been having problems." Eventually, Iverson stopped and made a call, supposedly to Munro. He came back to tell Weber that the police had come to the house at Palo Verde, but she'd told them it was a mistake.

Weber said Iverson convinced him to sleep out that night in the van so they could fire the gun in the morning, which, he told police, he had not yet tested at this point. When Weber agreed and suggested he needed to call his wife and tell her he wouldn't be coming home, Iverson stopped him, saying he'd already told Munro to call her for him. He told Weber that since he'd built the gun, he just knew he would want to see it work. "It sounded logical, and believe me, this guy was a very convincing talker," Weber wrote.

The next day, Weber said, they tested the gun in the desert, and while it needed revision, it did work. Afterward, he claimed that the two "went around and picked up as many ball bearings as we could," which might explain why the police found no evidence of the gun being fired when Weber took them to the spot later.

Later that day, Weber said, he called his wife and found her sobbing—the FBI and police had been looking for him, she said, and there was a warrant out for his arrest. After assuring her that John was fine and was with him, and that "I sure as hell didn't kidnap him," he went back and complained to Iverson. So Iverson made another call, Weber said, presumably to Munro, and

came back to tell him that the police had returned later the night before and took it upon themselves to issue the warrant when Munro failed to confirm Iverson's whereabouts.

Weber says he then insisted they go back to Lake Havasu together to clear the matter up. But Iverson resisted, claiming that he would surely be thrown in jail for "violating his parole."

In fact, Iverson was on probation after having been caught out in the desert in March 1990 with Russ Sherwood, spooling up what they thought was abandoned telegraph wire. It turned out to be the property of the local utility company. According to Sherwood, he and Iverson each paid a \$2,400 fine, \$2,400 retribution, and were placed on probation. Since the conviction, Iverson had been visiting a probation officer once a week.

Iverson apparently feared some kind of backlash over this new incident, Weber said, and thought they should seek out an attorney before going to the authorities. But when Weber suggested they find one in Lake Havasu, Iverson resisted again, once more citing his "parole" and suggesting that it was in Mohave County, where "the sheriff was out to bust him for any reason." Instead, Weber wrote, Iverson promised to call an attorney he knew in Phoenix the next day, Sunday, January 6. To this Weber once again agreed, and they again slept in the van. The next day, Weber said, he stood next to Iverson as he made the call to the attorney. And when Iverson hung up the phone, he told Weber the meeting was all set for the following Friday morning—a full five days later.

At this point, Weber said, they hid the gun and the blueprints at a nearby construction site near Laughlin, and drove to Phoenix, arriving around 8 p.m. Sunday night. Weber wanted to go home to see his wife, however, so he dropped Iverson off at a street corner with several motels, where they agreed to meet the following Friday morning. Weber said he drove back to Vegas, walked right up to his home—despite the fact that the police were supposed to be looking for him—packed some clothes, and lived out of his van on another side of town until leaving for Phoenix on

Thursday night. Of course, Iverson never showed. Realizing he'd been taken for a fool, Weber drove back to Laughlin, and was not surprised to find the gun and blueprints missing from their hiding spot.

Weber told law enforcement officials that once he realized he was wanted in connection with Iverson's kidnapping, he went on the lam in the hope that their ongoing investigation would uncover Iverson's whereabouts. In the months that followed, he said he had travelled to California three times: twice to visit his 30-year-old daughter, who was suffering from leukemia, and the last time, on March 8, for her cremation. He was, he says, at his home in Las Vegas the rest of the time he was wanted, until his wife convinced him to face the charges. By the time he turned himself in, *America's Most Wanted* was hot on his trail, having contacted Iverson's brother and other family members just a short while before about doing a segment on the well-known crimestopper show. They dropped the story the minute Weber was taken into custody.

The fact that Iverson failed to materialize turned out to be good luck for Weber. There was no body, no weapon, no other witnesses except Munro, and nothing to hold him beyond her statement. That quickly disintegrated when she flunked a lie detector test police gave her to determine if she'd been truthful in her description of the events that night. Munro blames the outcome of the test on a bad reaction to medication she was taking at the time, specifically a combination of Prozac and Valium prescribed for her in the days immediately following Iverson's disappearance. She was asked by law enforcement authorities to stop taking the pills a day or two before the test was administered, she says, and had a withdrawal reaction during the exam. "I tried to tell [the tester] during the test that I was having a flashback; I can see [Weber] coming at me."

It's worth noting that, though lie detector tests are not infallible, and can be thrown off by a variety of factors, efforts are made at the start of every test to establish a baseline reading based on the subject's current physiology and mood; all answers are then referenced to the baseline. In any event, Munro was asked by Mohave County authorities to return for a second test, but refused to be

tested by the same examiner. Instead, she hired a private, certified examiner in California to conduct the test in her new hometown. The second test showed her to be truthful. But with no control over what questions were asked or how they were delivered, the DA viewed those results as unreliable as well.

Weber was released in June, 1991 and rejoined his wife in Las Vegas. That summer, the charges against him were dropped without prejudice, meaning that new charges may be brought should Iverson's body or other evidence be found. He has since relocated to another city.

More Questions Than Answers?

Weber's statement went into much detail, describing an Iverson easily recognized by his friends: a trash-talking anarchist capable of downing two pints of whiskey in a three-hour visit to Weber's home. But it raises many questions as well.

To wit: Why would Weber, recognizing that he was wanted unjustly in connection with the kidnapping, let the obviously unpredictable Iverson out of his sight? Why would a person with ordinary common sense who was in that kind of trouble agree to wait five whole days before seeing an attorney?

How could Weber and Iverson, who was not known for his patience under any circumstance, run around the desert picking up BBs emitted at 12,000 rounds per minute from the infamous gun?

Why did Weber say in his statement that he had never been to Iverson's shop, and that all meetings had taken place at his home, when Iverson's last employee clearly remembered meeting Weber at the shop at least once when he came to take measurements on a prototype loudspeaker Iverson was working on prior to his disappearance?

And then there's that nagging detail, seemingly irrelevant, about Weber's van. Remember the van? When it was finally picked up by police in Las Vegas, on Weber's own tip, it had been sitting for several days in a local parking lot.

By coincidence, that happened to be the parking lot of a gun shop. But not just your ordinary gun shop catering to run-of-the-mill hunters. Called "The Survival Store," it sells automatic rifles from as many countries

as most folks can name. Brochures distributed in the racks advertise the shop's indoor shooting range and junkets to the desert so you can "fire your favorite machine gun." (The law has been unable to establish any connection between Weber and the store.)

Even before her problems with the lie detector test, Munro's version also raises at least one issue. Note that she told police that as Weber led her down the hall toward the kitchen, she escaped through a side door and into another room with egress to the driveway. But anyone who's ever played cops and robbers as a kid can only wonder: If Weber really had a gun trained on her and wanted to command her to another room, wouldn't he have been standing behind her instead of leading her down the hallway? Munro's explanation is that Peg, the couple's black Lab, stayed between her and Weber the whole time, and wouldn't let Weber move around her.

Munro also moved to liquidate her assets and get out of town with an expediency that angered and puzzled John's family. Shortly after the disappearance, the house on Palo Verde and her commercial property were placed on the block; the motor home, after the police had chopped out the carpet, went immediately for repair and was subsequently sold. Within two months of Iverson's vanishing, Munro had relocated to a town in California I have been asked not to disclose.

By that time, she says she was at the end of her emotional rope, and suggests that her allergic reaction to the Prozac had turned her into a frightened recluse trapped in her own home. Finally, her sister came and rescued her. "My family wanted me out of there and I stayed two months... If I'd ended up staying I would have really been in the loony bin," she says.

But Iverson's brother, aunt, and cousin, all of whom keep homes in Havasu, or were there just prior to or following the disappearance, harbor suspicions about Munro's story. They question whether Weber would have raised a gun to Iverson over back invoices, and they doubt whether he would been any match in a confrontation with the powerfully muscular Iverson, who measured the same height at 5'8", but weighed about 50 pounds more.

Members of Iverson's family also told

me they found it odd that Munro, a woman who'd just lost her mate under the worst of circumstances and was periodically breaking into hysterics, showed so much interest in settling up who-owned-what and liquidating her assets during a time when finding out what really happened to John ought to have been her first priority.

One episode early on involved a discussion she'd had with Doug Iverson, with whom she squared off quickly. Doug had just flown in from Seattle to Lake Havasu, on the Sunday following the Friday disappearance, to assist in the police efforts. John's mother had passed away about two years before, leaving behind an estate, and despite the family's concern over John's welfare, Munro made it a point to ask Doug what her missing mate was entitled to. "Someone who's grieving and can't function all of sudden functions perfectly over money?" says John's cousin, Patty Rahmen. "Doug just lost it. He said, 'You will never get your hands on that. Never. Just put it out of your mind.'"

At this writing neither Iverson nor any new evidence against Weber has surfaced. But the case is still open and active, according to the Lake Havasu police. And in a case where alibis conflict and nothing adds up, all parties are suspect—including Iverson himself, whose wild past and wagging tongue have led more than a few to believe he may have staged his own kidnapping.

High End Renegade

Born in Seattle on January 14, 1948, John Gordon Iverson began showing remarkable intelligence early. According to his family, he was verbally sounding out the words on bus advertisements at two years old, having taught himself to read with the aid of children's blocks. Within a few years, he began to show his father's interest in all things electronic. "Our parents used to say that John wasn't born with an umbilical cord, but with an extension cord," says his brother Doug.

Al Iverson, John's father, himself an enigma, was a strong role model for John through most of his adult life as they continued to live and work together.

John was known to tell people that his father was a native German who had fought



He liked cars and motorcycles, which he drove fast.

in Hitler's army before emigrating to North America. It was an explanation to visitors who came to their office and listening room in Anaheim in the early 1970s and were shocked by the sight of a full-size Nazi flag on the wall. But while some who knew them both say Al clearly helped foster John's outspoken intolerance toward minorities, the truth is probably more tame.

According to John's aunt Jo, Al Iverson was born in Sweden and moved as a small child with his parents to a farm outside of Calgary, Alberta. He grew up and went to school for accounting, but taught himself electrical engineering by experimenting in a home workshop. During World War II, he was turned down by the Canadian air force for visual impairment, but ended up supporting the Allied effort by working as an engineer for Boeing Aircraft in Vancouver. While the war was still on, says Fenn, Boeing took advantage of relaxed immigration rules to transfer him and his new wife, Betty, to Seattle. John was born a short while later.

Eventually, Al moved his family to Garden Grove, California and with the dawn of television, opened a TV sales and repair shop. Al was both a loner and a driven

workaholic; two terms that would later be used to describe John. While his wife enjoyed socializing, Al despised it, emerging from his lab just long enough to greet her visitors before excusing himself to return to the next pressing experiment.

While John was in his late teens, Betty left Al for a well-to-do Seattle businessman, giving John the option of staying in California or moving with her and his younger brother back to Washington. He chose to stay with his father, and his bitterness over the split lasted up to his father's death in 1981, when John refused to allow his mother to attend the funeral.

The bad blood also carried over to John's relationship with Doug, whom he is said to have felt jealousy toward for living a life of privilege in Seattle while he and his father continued to struggle financially. And while John's estrangement with his mother lasted until his father's death, it was not until his mother's death in 1988 that a reconciliation was sparked in earnest with his only sibling—one that was abruptly cut short by his disappearance. Doug feels great pain over the loss, and has dedicated himself to finding John or the truth about what happened to him.

As a boy, Iverson showed an affinity for model rockets and worked constantly on a variety of homebrew electronics projects. But his life before joining the audio industry remains mostly a mystery.

According to his brother's sketchy information, John graduated high school and began attending a local college. While there in the late 1960s, he worked simultaneously as a technician at a military contractor, possibly Hughes Aircraft. Hughes, Doug Iverson says, offered him an opportunity to attend MIT at company expense in return for two years of guaranteed employment for each year at school. John may have gone to

Massachusetts to check out the school, but that's about as close as he got to MIT. Not a man well-suited to indentured servitude, and concerned about his father's recurring heart trouble, Iverson elected to stay in California. (MIT has no record of his attendance, and a personnel check with Hughes was inconclusive.)

As for John's suggestion to some that he'd been thrown out of MIT, an apparent seed can be found elsewhere. Kathy Munro was told by John about an episode at "some local college" where he was, she says, temporarily suspended for grabbing the collar of a professor he disagreed with.

John sometimes told a story, unverified, about working on a school project he built while still at Hughes that got him into hot water with the government for the first time. It was a missile guidance system, built for a model rocket, which supposedly used what was then relatively unproven heat-seeking technology. The story goes that when he and his father took it out to the desert near 29 Palms to test it, its trajectory toward the sun was deflected by the plume of a passing jet from a nearby military base, which it proceeded to follow. No damage was done, but the Iversons were taken into custody while collecting their gear. John was subsequently given the option of going to jail, going to Vietnam, or going to White Sands National Laboratory to work for NASA on the Apollo program. He supposedly chose the latter, and worked on navigation systems for the lunar module.

Another version of the same tale, also unverified, is told by his brother. It makes no mention of the ill-fated test launch, but confirms the existence of the missile guidance system, a stained, cracked photograph of which was obtained by *TAS*. In this version of the tale, knowledge of Iverson's school project somehow gets back to the authorities at Hughes—who may have suspected espionage. John is eventually paid a visit at home by the FBI, who insist on a full set of plans before leaving with the device and documents in hand. However, Dan Seifert, Iverson's friend and one-time employee, recalls seeing the nose-cone-shaped stack of circuit boards in Iverson's possession in the early 1970s, and hearing John's declaration that "he had tested it and had

proved to his satisfaction that it worked."

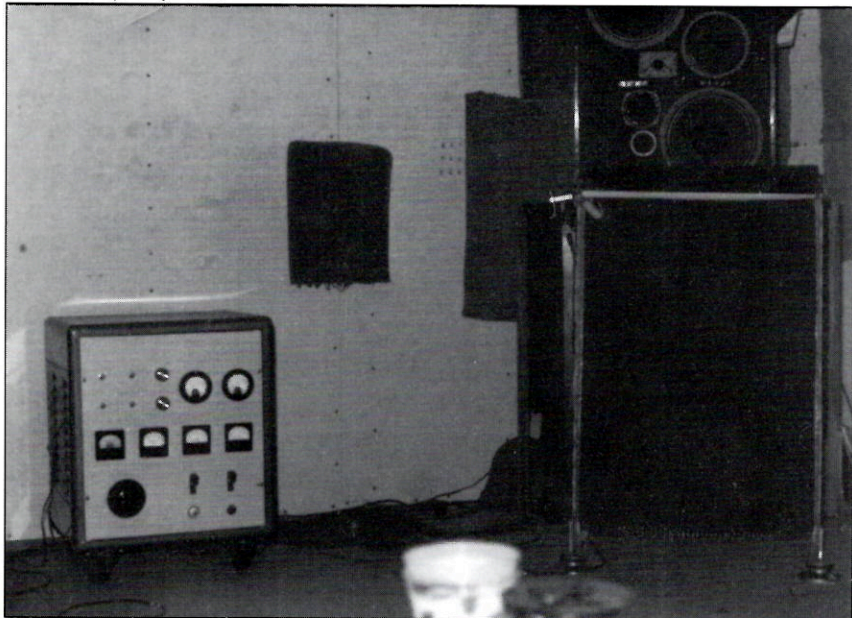
At some point in the early 1970s, Iverson segued into the audio business, where he eventually formed his own company after a stint at Marantz. At the time, the venerable firm was still owned by the Tuchinsky family, who had founded SuperScope. It was short-lived. "John's story is that he was too revolutionary for them," says Seifert. "Their story was that he couldn't be controlled."

Indeed. By his early 20s, he had grown into a kind of renegade genius the likes of which the industry hadn't really seen before. Though the baby boomer children of the Sixties would eventually deliver a handful of iconoclastic designers who partied hard and took no prisoners, neither the High End—nor anyone else, apparently—was prepared for the likes of John Iverson. He was foul-mouthed, always "right," and made no effort to hide his drinking or party habits. He had a well-known penchant for guns, and was not beyond flashing a piece now and then. And when all else failed, he knew how to use his fists.

Beyond the audio arena, he liked cars and motorcycles, which he drove fast. He was also an avid inventor who, even before his appearance in the High End, had built, among other things, his missile guidance system and a carburetor which he claimed would deliver 45 miles to the gallon in his 1965 Buick.

He also spent long hours over several years during the late 1970s trying to perfect a mechanism to prove that the forces of attraction and repulsion found in permanent magnets could be harnessed for a kind of perpetual motion machine. Many people saw the elaborate and finely machined device, which was to use a series of spinning magnetic armatures hooked to a gear train. "It was so complicated, you had to wonder where he dreamed up this thing," Seifert recalls. "It was really impressive."

His passion for tinkering didn't wane over the years, and in the two years prior to his disappearance, he had created one of his most remarkable inventions, at a total cost of about \$65,000. Dubbed the Toodler, it was a go anywhere all-terrain vehicle with independent hydraulic motors on each wheel. It had a joint in the middle that al-



A prototype of the Force Field loudspeaker and the experimental amplifier used to drive it.

lowed it to make incredibly sharp turns, and it could even spin in place. It could also climb extremely steep inclines, as Doug Iverson learned one day as John drove it up the steps in the pool area behind the house at 1770 South Palo Verde, concrete crumbling beneath the wheels. It was the Toodler that Iverson and Sherwood had used for collecting the wire in the desert the night they were arrested.

None of these wild inventions ever brought Iverson a stitch of wealth or fame. But in the High End, he made a name for himself that was, for a time at least, unparalleled in the business.

Pushing The Sonic Envelope

The years spanning the mid-1970s were surely Iverson's glory days as he began touting a series of his own products, including some bona fide breakthroughs. As an audio designer, he was the real thing in an industry full of wannabees, according to peers. "A lot of people in the High End are not designers, but techs who became heads of companies who never did anything but copy something and make a package,"

says John Curl, himself a trailblazer with his early solid-state designs. "John was a very fine engineer, one of the best."

Iverson's approach, say other designers, was to take conventional parts—for example, bipolar transistors as opposed to FETs—and wring every last bit out of them with clever topologies that drove them hard but kept distortion low. "His designs were conservative, but he was very knowledgeable about what components could do, and very good at making them perform considerably better than their book specs," says Andy Hefley, who worked with Iverson at one point and went on to help found Great American Sound in the mid-1970s with James Bongiorno.

"He was extremely opinionated and extremely powerful as an individual," recalls designer Bascom King. King was the star electronics designer for Infinity, working with the company on its early FET and servo amp attempts, as well as the working end of its gargantuan IRS woofer monoliths. He and Iverson became friends after the two had a "shoot-out" in a hi-fi salon where both had products on display. "He had an incred-

ible mind, but he had an attitude," says King. "This industry is full of big egos, and he was one of them. But he could sure make things sound good."

Nevertheless, Iverson's first High End products were not the amplifiers for which he later became known, but a grouping of three dynamic loudspeakers sold directly to stores under the brand name Omega. The largest model was known for its prodigious bass, provided by two 12-inch woofers stiffened with a white glue concoction the designer called Moose Snot.

His sales pitch, circa 1972, consisted of walking into a store, bragging loudly about his speakers, then insisting they be demonstrated with his own homebrew amplifier, a one-of-a-kind Class A affair housed in a discarded Hewlett-Packard instrument case. It had that unmistakable sheen of a fine industrial instrument, with the square push-button switches and lit meters. Though it only delivered 70 watts a side, it made a bigger impression than his speakers. "It didn't matter what you hooked it up to—it was a revelation," says Seifert, who met John in a stereo shop during one of those sales visits.

That amp—a precursor to the groundbreaking Electro Research A75—was too expensive to produce in quantity. Instead, Iverson designed a large Class AB amp which he sold in small quantities as the first product under the Electro Research name.

The A75, introduced around 1974, was indeed a revelation. It got rave reviews for its highly detailed and coherent sound, and clearly pushed the envelope of solid-state electronics with a then-unmatched musicality (though this magazine ultimately found it dark in character). It was only rated at 75 watts-per-channel at eight ohms, but it could handily drive a one-ohm load, and Iverson emphasized, fairly, that with any speaker these were "really big watts."

At \$2100, the A75 was incredibly expensive for the day and quite limited in supply, thus making it all the more desirable. Iverson liked to further amplify its High End mystique by suggesting that it had been adapted from a circuit he'd built for turning gun turrets on Navy ships. He was also fond of telling dealers that one particular unit had survived a fall out of the cargo bay of an airplane. In truth, the A75 had some wide-

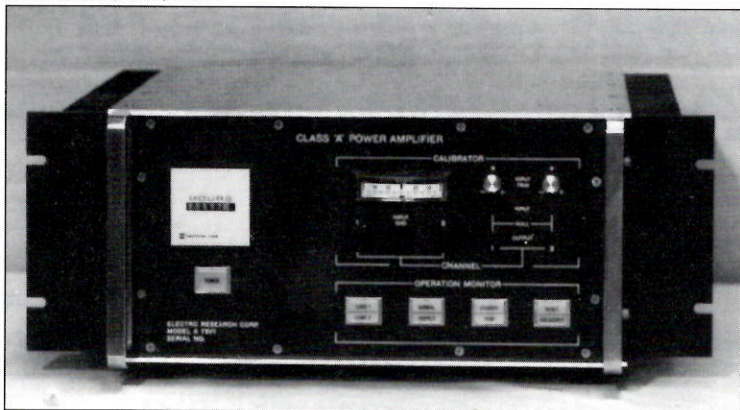
spread reliability problems, notably in earlier units. Nonetheless, it became a sensation, and left Iverson with a band of loyal admirers and customers who stayed with him throughout the years.

His legendary status was only enhanced during this time by his development of what he called the Force Field loudspeaker. Never sold commercially, it was a prototype for a dipolar, massless speaker said to be based loosely on the Corona Wind speakers of the 1950s, which worked by ionizing air molecules in an electric field and exciting them with the audio signal. But the Corona Wind concept had never been successfully applied to a wide-range speaker capable of significant volume.

Twenty years after the Corona Wind, Iverson designed huge amplifiers using mercury vapor tube rectifiers to generate the tremendous power required to make such a speaker listenable. The speaker itself consisted of a series of vertical rods mounted in a stainless steel frame. From 1973 through '77 or '78, he pushed the Force Field through three successively larger iterations. The last was about as big as a Quad electrostatic and put out levels of 70 to 80 dB. Because of the high voltages involved, it was prone to corona discharge, and flooded a room with ozone. "You could see the blue spots forming near the rods and you'd have to go over and blow them out," says Hefley, one of the many friends who watched and heard the speaker evolve in Iverson's workshop. "If you got too close it would jump to your nose and shock the hell out of you."

Seifert also spent long hours with Iverson listening to the Force Field, usually in a dark, closed, hot room. "Later on, when I got into the physics of how it worked, I realized why we liked it so much," he says. "The primary by-product of that speaker was nitrous oxide. I think as the evening progressed we just got mellow and mellow."

Of course, like any speaker, the Force Field had its sonic faults. It had no bass and had to be augmented with a subwoofer below 200 Hz. It also beamed like a laser. "It was so directional you could bounce it off the wall and listen to the reflection," says John Curl—and consequently, it tended to favor soloists over orchestral recordings.



The ground-breaking Electro Research A75 amplifier.

But if you were in the sweet spot, Seifert says, "You could hear all kinds of detail and depth of imaging you couldn't hear from any other speaker, and I had heard just about everything at that point. To this day, I still consider it the most accurate loudspeaker I've ever heard."

As for what happened to the Force Field, well—no one knows for sure. Iverson's most entertaining explanation was that the government found out about his invention when he applied for a patent, and the FBI, once again, visited his workshop, this time collecting the inventor and spiriting him off to a debriefing room. He was shown some strikingly similar and highly sensitive particle beam technology being worked on by "the Gov," and was warned not to market his new device, lest it fall into the hands of foreign countries, and Iverson himself take a much longer trip.

As preposterous as all this sounds, Martin DeWulf, an attorney who publishes the High End newsletter *Bound For Sound*, avows that Iverson once sent him a copy of a patent application clearly showing the device "denied by U.S. Government intervention." Stan Rosick, meanwhile, recalls seeing parts of the Force Field lying around Electro Research's Chatsworth facility, where he believes it was disassembled in preparation for another upgrade and just never put back together.

In any event, Iverson's business dealings proved to be equally high-voltage. He

was a talented salesman, but a poor entrepreneur who preferred the laboratory to the front office. In 1977, at the height of demand for the A75, he formed a partnership with Mel Schilling, then one of his dealers, in a new marketing company called Electro Research Audiooptics. The idea, says Schilling, was that Iverson would design while Schilling sold product and helped run the Chatsworth plant. "The basic fact was that John was brilliant in the field, a great designer," says Schilling. "Whether or not we had difficulties, our discussion was always about whether a concept was marketable, not about whether it was good."

Difficulties they had. Iverson could be intractable when it came to his ideas, insisting, for example, that his new EK-1 preamp be built in a solid casting instead of a sheet metal case. Schilling warned it would take too long to develop the casting. "But John thought it would be so unique, that no one had done it, and he was adamant," says Schilling. "That killed it in terms of getting it on the market, because the casting was never right."

Iverson was typically a dedicated, indeed, driven worker. Says Seifert, "He would obsess on a project and that's all that mattered—he wouldn't eat or sleep until it got done." But he could also be unpredictable in an enterprise where many activities focused around him. He was known, for example, to update circuits without properly documenting the changes for the production



The "Shack", Iverson's longtime laboratory, Lake Havasu City, Arizona.

line. Or, "We could be in the middle of designing an amplifier, and he would decide right there that he needed a motorcycle trip, a little R&R," says Schilling. "And off he would go, disappearing for a week, and the plant would just stop."

The relationship with Schilling didn't last long, but not because of Iverson's work habits. Shortly into the partnership, Iverson met David and Phillip Tan, two successful High End importers in Singapore with an interest in manufacturing and substantial capital to back it up. They agreed to fund development of the EK-1, and Iverson made arrangements—without consulting Schilling—to sell them the Electro Research name and transfer production to Singapore, where tax incentives and cheap labor would allow him to build the product the way he wanted it. The plan was for Schilling to stay in Chatsworth and continue to do the marketing. But A75 production was phased out, and the EK-1 continued to be plagued by delay. With no product to market, Electro Research Audioptics was shut down, leaving Schilling out in the cold. Yet, he harbors no animosity. "The closest people John had to him were me and my family," Schilling says. "He probably ate at my house more

than he ate at his own."

After hooking up with the Tans, Iverson spent the next four years shuttling back and forth between Chatsworth, Singapore, and Lake Havasu City, where he had earlier set up a small workshop after moving there with his father. The Singapore trips lasted for months at a time. Early on, Seifert went over to assist in development of the EK-1, but failed to last more than eight weeks before he had a falling out with Iverson over their grueling work schedule, which allowed Seifert neither a life outside the shop nor a normal sleep pattern.

"His idea of a day of work was that you wake up in the morning and of course, coincidentally, you were already on the bench," says Seifert. "You'd spend the morning drinking coffee and talking about how great things were going to be when all of this stuff was done. Then you went to lunch and slowly wound up to some work. By late afternoon you were working, and you'd work till you dropped. When you got tired, you'd just clear away the bench and go to sleep."

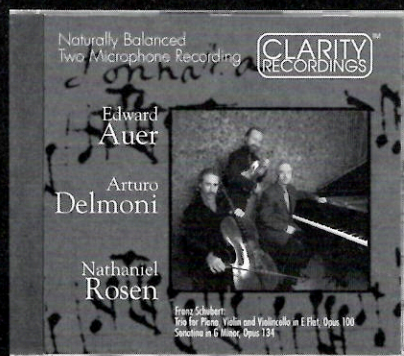
After three years of development, the EK-1 was finally released in the US in 1980 at the outrageous price of \$3000. It was actually a system, including a Panasonic-built

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strain-gauge cartridge and Iverson's factory-tuned preamp. While it was said to image better than any playback system on the market, the lack of inputs for any other cartridge in a preamp that costly restricted its appeal. It proved little more than a minor commercial success.

Not long after that, in early 1982, Iverson and the Tans had their own falling out. Rosick, a close friend of Iverson's dating back to his Omega loudspeaker days, had by then been hired as general manager of Electro Research in Chatsworth. Rosick says that Iverson simply sucked money from the Tans while incessantly delaying the EK-1 with his intractable design approach and his unwillingness to let the Tans impose any practical limits on him. Iverson's view, as told to friends and family, was that the Tans took his design for the EK-1 and then, no longer needing him, forced him out.

Rosick, meanwhile, was kept on by the Tans as they subsequently formed Robertson Audio, fueling a rift between himself and Iverson. Robertson began selling amplifiers shortly thereafter which were rumoured to be Iverson's designs, although Rosick says they were the work of David Tan. Rosick continues to this day to draw salary as general manager of Robertson Audio's US operations, though the firm has not offered any products here for some time. (Through Rosick, the Tans declined to be interviewed for this article.)

Iverson was known throughout his career to be mistrustful of banks and notoriously contemptuous of paying taxes. "Dammit, I earned this money—why should the government come and take it away?" he would complain to his aunt Jo. One time, his shop in Lake Havasu was burglarized while he was in Singapore, and Rosick sent some workers to Arizona to secure it. He says they found \$800 in gold Krugerrands missed by the thieves. The coins had been stuffed into an upholstered chair.

Eventually, Iverson came back to Lake Havasu and formed Electron Kinetics. In 1983, he approached Art Ferris, whose company Apax Marketing distributed a variety of electronics-related products, to sell his new Eagle 7 amplifier, a 300-watt behemoth. "I said, I can't sell that boat anchor," Ferris remembers. "It didn't even have a power

photo courtesy Kathy Munro



John Iverson and Kathy Munro, about a year after their wedding, in 1988.

switch. I mean, the house lights would sit there and pulse with the switching of the amplifier."

Nonetheless, Ferris agreed to take the amp on the condition that Iverson design a smaller, more saleable piece. He returned with a prototype of what became the Eagle 2. Ferris was pleased enough with what he heard to sell 70 units to dealers in advance of production. But when Iverson came back and asked him to get dealers to pay up front to finance their manufacture, Ferris cut his losses. "My problem with John was that he would make agreements and then just change direction on you, and in business, that's death," he says, adding, "I did the best I could to get him started. Printed up invoices for him and everything."

Iverson did get the company off the ground, and the Eagle 2 became his first popular success since the A75. By the mid-1980s, Electron Kinetics was occupying a 9,000 square-foot plant on Empire Drive in Lake Havasu and employing as many as 19 people. As a local businessman, Iverson enjoyed keeping a low profile—"He was not the type of guy who got his picture in the paper for volunteering to help with the London Bridge Day Parade or donating \$2400

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to the Boy Scouts," says ex-*Herald* reporter Charlie Downs. But he grabbed the spotlight anyway in 1986 when his fight with Citizens Utilities, the local power company, made headlines in the newspaper.

Iverson was irked over the poor consistency and high rates of his power. So he obtained a surplus diesel generator which he claimed to have modified, improving its efficiency to where he could create his own juice at lower cost than he could buy it. It seems unclear if there was really anything unique about the generator. But the lengthy write-up in the paper no doubt embarrassed Citizens.

Eventually, the matter was settled when Iverson left the location. According to Russ Sherwood, who worked for Iverson, his refusal to pay \$22,000 a year for liability insurance forced the landlord not to renew his lease. While that may have been a factor, Munro says, Iverson was also looking to downsize at the time in the wake of their marriage. "He told me he hadn't been a child, he had worked all his life and was never able to really play, and now he wanted to play with his woman."

But Iverson's power trip against Citizens was one that would come back to haunt him. Years later, when he and Sherwood got picked up in the desert for spooling up cable, it was Citizens Utility that pressed the charges, landing Iverson Friday visits with his probation officer. Iverson called her "that bitch." Says Doug Iverson, "John and humility were not generally put in the same sentence. It was a situation he said many times he found unacceptable."

For whatever reasons, Iverson left the plant at Empire. He was also in debt by then to a local bank, from whom he had borrowed "at least \$100,000," says his brother, to expand the business when it was still at Empire. It was a rare and singular move for Iverson, who despised borrowing, and, justly, expected to be paid in cash. "My brother never liked to owe anybody anything, and he expected people to pay up what they owed him. I give you this, you pay me this much. That was how he thought," Doug says. John still owed the bank a portion of that loan when he disappeared.

Electron Kinetics moved from its grand factory into Iverson's 1500 square-foot, one-

room brick workshop, dubbed "the Shack," and generated revenue by selling existing inventory and upgrading older products for customers in the field.

Sometime before that move, however, Iverson had begun changing, say his friends and family. The death of his father softened him, says his brother, and when his mother and stepfather took up a home in Lake Havasu, John moved in with them and matured further. "Up till then, it was like John had been raised by lumberjacks—he had no social graces," Doug says. "My mother really took this lump of clay and molded it."

It was around this time period that Iverson married Kathy Munro. Jerry Munro, a prominent Havasu physician and Iverson's close friend, had in fact worked for NASA at White Sands National Laboratory during the Apollo program, where Kathy believes he and Iverson were introduced. Iverson's family thinks the connection was made when Munro became Al Iverson's doctor. But wherever they met, they built a strong friendship as Iverson, who suffered fools badly, found one of the few people in Havasu with an intellect that matched his own. Like Iverson, Jerry Munro was a heavy drinker, and the two spent long nights talking and packing it away.

Munro's wife Kathy was a spunky California native. After Jerry died of a heart attack, Iverson confessed his love for her, proposing for four hours. "He told me, 'I've been in love with you for 10 years, ever since I met you.'" Munro says. "I said 'What?!' I never had an inkling. He said, 'I would never come on to my best friend's wife.'"

The two exchanged vows in February of 1987, marking the occasion with a memorable cake fight. It was Munro's third marriage, Iverson's first.

Munro also enjoyed the sensitive side of John that few people saw. He called her Honeylamb, and she referred to him as her "diamond in the rough." "What John lacked in social abilities, Kathy made up for," says Kathy's sister Judy Gagnebin. "They complemented each other, and Kathy somehow understood this crazy man."

"John was really in love with her," says Iverson's cousin Patty. "Every time we'd see him he'd say, 'I've got myself a woman. I



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Iverson and employees with Eagle 7a amplifiers at the Empire Drive plant.

can't believe I'm so lucky. I've never been so happy in my life. My Honeylamb spoils me."

In the wake of the wedding, Electron Kinetics was still on Empire Drive and appeared to be climbing. Friends who saw John and Kathy at the CES show in Vegas in January of '88 say he looked the best they'd ever seen him. He told at least one acquaintance he'd stopped drinking.

Within a year, however, Iverson had shuttered his factory, and he and Kathy took to the road. They would load up the motor home with their Labrador retriever and their cat, and travel around the country peddling Electron Kinetics amplifiers to High End dealers.

Mark Schneider remembers meeting John for the first time as they pulled up to a store he managed in Chicago in 1988. "He was sort of like Hemingway," he says, "a hard-smoking, hard-drinking, two-fisted kind of guy. When I shook hands with him I barely got my hand back in one piece. The next morning, I knocked on his door and got dragged in for the strongest cup of coffee I've ever had. It kept me up for three days."

As for he and Kathy, "They looked like the model couple to me. He seemed really happy with her."

And yet, though John and Kathy got along well, the two were divorced shortly afterward. The move was said to be a kind of divorce-of-convenience to protect Kathy's assets from John's liabilities, be they tax, bank, or otherwise. "John didn't believe in paying taxes," says Funder of the Havasu Police. "So rather than her being at risk, she just divorced him, but they were still living together." Subsequently, John also transferred whatever modest assets he had—his shop building, his motor home—into her name.

After Iverson moved Electron Kinetics into the Shack, the company officially became an inactive corporation, but continued to plug along at a lower volume. John hired a worker or two—basically high school students—to handle the upgrades and repairs while he worked on new designs and other projects.

Kurt Peters was one of those high school students, and, along with a buddy, was one of the two remaining employees of

Electron Kinetics when Iverson disappeared. Now a student at Arizona State, he calls his ex-boss a "very, very carefree" individual who usually showed up wearing shorts and sandals. As a boss, Iverson was generous with his knowledge, and seemed to enjoy the paternal role. "It was very much a learning experience," Peters says. "He'd have me come in after hours and teach me different things I could do with the equipment. I learned a vast amount about audio."

Of course, working for Iverson in close quarters could be a learning experience in more ways than one. Peters says he drank Jack Daniels frequently at the shop, and smoked about four packs of cigarettes a day, often lighting a new one before the one in his hand had been fully exhausted.

Furthermore, Iverson's interest in guns extended to his workplace, where he would occasionally pick up whatever weapon was lying around and fire it into an old speaker. One night, Peters left Iverson at the shop, drinking with some friends. When he came back the next day, he noticed there was a manhole cover missing from the street. It turned out to be inside, where John and his buddies had used it as a backstop for target practice. "There was glass all over the floor, and empty shell casings everywhere," says Peters. "The whole bathroom ceiling and door were just shredded with lead."

Another time, Iverson accidentally drove the Toodler onto the hood of Peter's car, though he apologetically paid to fix it. "Working for him was a real adventure," Peters says wistfully. "There were a lot of trying times, but I have to admit, I'll never have a job like that again."

In the last year before Iverson disappeared, Electron Kinetics' customer base had shrunk to about five loyal dealers. Iverson took frequent trips to California, each time bringing back amps for upgrade. The firm sold new pieces as well, taking one of the 50 or so boxed amps from the Empire Drive inventory, upgrading it to the current generation Eagle 2c, and shipping it out. And Iverson developed a bridging circuit for the Eagle 2, allowing him to introduce a powerful monoblock, the Eagle 400a.

He continued to work hard, and began developing a series of dynamic powered loudspeakers to bring to market. The two-

and three-way designs were to use bandwidth-limited amplifiers built by Iverson to take the place of crossovers and maximize the performance of each driver. At the time of his disappearance, the prototype for the first model was essentially complete. Iverson started talking with Don Frick about a partnership on the new speakers. Iverson would focus on new product while Frick, whom Iverson had known since his teenage days, could handle the repetitious work of running the business. "It was a good idea," says Doug Iverson. "Don was someone he could trust completely."

Iverson was also at work on a new pre-amp, says Peters, and was gearing up for a new production run on his amplifiers. The company had exhausted its supply of pre-built amps, and business was picking up significantly. Peters and his friend had just begun building new amps from scratch; Iverson had gotten the necessary papers to reactivate the corporation, and was in the process of lining up suppliers. He sat Peters down to have a talk about the future.

But not all was well. His relationship with Kathy was apparently souring. Though Kathy claims that things were picture perfect at the time of Iverson's disappearance, several sources suggest otherwise. The breaking point was supposedly a serious fight the two had just prior to Labor Day weekend, when Kathy was said to have lost her temper and viciously dressed Iverson down, attacking his character, Doug says. "The bubble's been broken," John told him. "Either she's going to accept me, or I'm leaving. I've told her by January 1, she either decides or I'm out."

For her part, Munro acknowledges a serious fight she had with John that summer which resulted in him taking off in his motor home for three days before returning to make amends. But the dispute had not been over John's character, she says, rather over a specific incident in which he was attempting to show off to a friend by ordering her about. That, she suggests, was the only argument of any significance the two ever had.

On another note, Iverson was also having doubts about Kathy's handling of the household account, and told his brother about that as well. In the last conversation

Doug had with John before he disappeared, they agreed by telephone to sit down the next time they were together and work out a budget.

In the last few months prior to Iverson's disappearance, Rahnem noticed that Kathy was no longer accompanying him when he came to visit, and he had stopped using any terms of endearment to describe her. Peters heard Iverson fighting with her on the phone at the shop. Doug heard him complain that she spent day after day at home in her pajamas. "He said, 'This is ridiculous. She doesn't want to get out of her bedroom.'" While some observers suspected her reclusive behavior might be a sign of clinical depression, Munro told *TAS* she was emotionally well, but chronically troubled by a bad hip which had a tendency to keep her homebound.

But Iverson's biggest problems may not have been with Kathy. Though the IRS will not discuss Iverson's case or confirm the existence of any investigation, there are indications he was in debt to the government when he disappeared. He had already been audited by either the state or the IRS in 1989, says Peters. Then sometime in mid-1990, Iverson asked him to rummage through the files at the shop to look for receipts and other documents. "I heard him say something about a corporate audit," Peters says. "He said, basically, 'I'm going to get screwed again by the IRS.'" Patty Rahnem simply says, "Oh yeah. Big bucks, they wanted."

Munro confirms that the state of Arizona had indeed come calling shortly before Iverson's disappearance. The authorities suspected he had been selling amplifiers without the state without paying the appropriate taxes. In her role as Iverson's bookkeeper, Munro had compiled the necessary documents to prove otherwise, and had shipped off the packet to the tax bureau just a few days before Iverson vanished, she says.

During the work week that led up to the Friday night that Iverson disappeared, Peters observed him in a series of odd behaviors that later became significant for him in light of Iverson vanishing. First, he came into the shop one day with a little plastic bag.

"He pulled out this wad of cash," Peters says. "He made the comment, 'You'd be

amazed at what money can buy.' And he made a cynical laugh about it and put it away. I'd personally never seen that much money before." The money was later thought to be the remainder of John's inheritance from the sale of his mother's estate in Seattle, which had been delivered to him shortly before by his brother. John's portion came to about \$50,000. Iverson had used a portion of it to pay off the mortgage on his workshop, then subsequently signed the property over to Munro.

What's more, Peters thought it curious that Iverson was pressuring him to process several remaining customer-owned amplifiers before the week was out. At the time, he and a helper were quite busy building new units. "At the stage we were at, it would have been normal procedure to finish those up, then get to the customer units as soon as possible," Peters says. But when the young men failed to meet a UPS deadline on Wednesday, Iverson "was quite upset about it. And he said to make sure we get it off by Friday."

Also earlier that week, Iverson came into the shop very excited. He had talked to Weber about the gun, which Peters also knew about. "Most of the time he shared his projects with me," Peters says. "He said, 'Kurt, kick ass! The gun works! It's awesome.' He was very enthusiastic." Peters had met Weber and his wife at the shop on at least one occasion, he said, and "every indication had led me to believe they were friends."

Another curiosity, Peters says, was that payday came twice in as many weeks. While that may be normal at some businesses, Iverson's protocol was to wait for his two charges to ask before settling their hours. That was generally once every couple of weeks. But Iverson went out of his way to pay the boys the Friday he disappeared, though he had just done so a short while before, Peters notes. After settling up, Iverson left the shop, telling Peters he was going to meet Jack Weber. That was the last time Peters saw him.

Dead or Alive?

Several of John's old friends firmly believe that Iverson was capable of staging his own kidnapping or disappearance. That is

also what Peters believes, and what the Lake Havasu Police think, though they aren't ruling anything out.

It was learned that Iverson had gone to visit Stan Rosick in California in the waning days of December, just a week or two before he vanished. They hadn't seen or spoken to each other in many years. So at Iverson's urging, Rosick met with him for dinner. They reminisced about the old times, and Rosick says Iverson inquired about David and Philip Tan, his old benefactors in Singapore. Patty Rahnem, meanwhile, says her father, who was close with his nephew John, had once heard him brag that he had money buried somewhere on that tiny island country, though it may have just been another one of his stories.

Also curious was the subsequent disappearance of Don Frick. Frick, whose divorce had apparently precipitated his move to Havasu, may have been in a good position to drop out himself. The Lake Havasu police are also wondering about the significance of a call they got this past November, involving the house Frick was living in while he was there. He had planned on purchasing the home, but a few months after Iverson's disappearance, he walked away from it, sacrificing his deposit and leaving furniture behind.

Then, last fall, a neighbor reported seeing a strange car pull into the driveway, and watching someone get out and start digging in the backyard. When the police checked it out, they found a now-empty hole about four feet square and four feet deep. It had been shored up with pressboard, and the female end of an extension cord was sticking out from beneath the sod. The cord ran, fully concealed, beneath the grass to the side of the house, where it ended near an outdoor power outlet.

The police determined that Frick had laid the sod over what had previously been a dirt yard while he still lived at the house. "I could have a whole lot of questions for Frick," Funder says.

Those who believe in the foul play theory point to different things. Munro, for example, notes that Iverson had sent her to buy liquor during the week prior to his disappearance; the state liquor tax was about to go up so he had her stock the cabinet to the

tune of \$1500. This, she says, was not the behavior of a man who was not planning on sticking around. Others suggest that Iverson had too many projects he was excited about to simply walk away.

On the other hand, look at what was pushing him.... His relationship with Munro was supposedly crumbling, and he had signed over all his assets to her. His business may have been audited, suggesting that any success he had with his new products would be enjoyed only by "the Gov." He was stuck with a seemingly limitless bank loan, and weekly visits to a probation officer he despised. It is not unreasonable, when you add it all together, that he might want to escape. Of course, only a certain type of man would actually do it. Iverson certainly could be one of them.

And yet, dead or alive, however the story ends, John Iverson's saga will always remain a tragedy of wasted talent. On the surface, Iverson's life is, or was, a monument to survival and individual expression, taken to the *nth* degree. But on close inspection, it is more a series of near misses—great flashes of genius denied to the world of hi-fi and elsewhere by a man unable, or simply unwilling, to play the game by the rules. Given his history, that seems unlikely to change, even if Iverson were to turn up tomorrow, healthy as a mule.

For most of his professional career, John Iverson played the role of the High End's own Icarus. Like the fabled mythological character who flew too close to the sun, Iverson climbed again and again, only to self-destruct on each pass, just when success was knocking loudest. Until finally, his luck or his time ran out, and in the way of so many brilliant High End designers, he simply disappeared. ➔ —Rob Sabin

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J. Gordon Holt,
The Audio Glossary, 1990