

Blind-listening Group test

LUXURY STANDMOUNTS £2,200-£2,875

Luxury standmounts: the optimum solution?

In Britain's tiny rooms, are small high-performance speakers the best solution? **Paul Messenger** looks at six serious standmounts for discerning audiophiles

MOST OF US on this cramped island are stuck with fairly small rooms sizes. And with rooms having the greatest influence on a system's sound, shouldn't we all be looking for small, high-performance speakers? After all, without cumbersome multi-driver cabinets to build and finish, manufacturers can spend money where it counts, on drivers, mechanics and first-class build quality.

All six models in our group are beautifully finished and presented, as one would expect and on this occasion, half the complement comes from respected and well established British brands, while the other three represent Danish, French and Italian design expertise. Just where each model is actually made is, of course, much more difficult to say in these globalised times.

Five of our six are basically two-way designs, though the group is, perhaps, more naturally divided into three medium size and three significantly larger models: the former the Dynaudio, Monitor Audio and Opera; the latter the

Cabasse, the Sendor and the Tannoy. The main driver sizes seem to follow the enclosure sizes pretty closely, which

"Our six models each have their own approach to delivering high standards"

makes good sense, and all six have reflex loading ports, which is arguably less wise.

Some of the biggest variations are substantially cosmetic, in the way the enclosures are shaped and dressed. The Sendor is certainly the most traditional, but each of the others has succeeded in adding creative individuality, none of which have much in common with tradition or the others.

So just what will our Blind-listening panel think of our luxury boxes this month? Turn the page to see who rules the small speaker roost.



THE WINNER IS...



IT'S OFTEN VERY DIFFICULT to pick out an overall winner from a group of similar size and price loudspeakers, but on this occasion there was no disagreement amongst the listening panel that the Sendor SP2/3R2 was the pick of the bunch, sonically speaking. This was subsequently and very comfortably confirmed by the hands-on listening work and since the measurements are generally positive and the price is also below the group average, this is the obvious stand-out performer and, therefore, the overall 'group winner'.

It certainly won't win any prizes for stylish contemporary appearance, but the core technologies are bang up to date, with a new wide-surround tweeter and numerous audiophile elements amongst the crossover network and internal wiring.



RESULTS AT A GLANCE

						
Make/model	Cabasse Bora	Dynaudio Contour S 1.4	Monitor Audio Platinum 100	Opera Callas Diva	Sendor SP2/3R2	Tannoy Definition DC8
Price	£2,200	£2,495	£2,500	£2,875	£2,295	£2,500
Sound	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★☆
Value	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★☆
Build	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★☆
Practicality	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
Conclusion	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★☆
	Technically unusual and interesting, but the sound quality didn't really live up to the engineering promise	Very compact and surprisingly hefty, with clever styling, well judged voicing, but also a tendency to thump	Contemporary styling with classy drivers combines to deliver a smooth, open, if rather lightweight character	Exquisite cabinetwork and no fewer than five tweeters gives a spacious character with ample headroom	Fine sound quality with superior transparency and coherence fully vindicates the defiantly old fashioned styling	Lively coherence and fine voicing does much to compensate for a measure of midband coloration

Spendor SP2/3R2 **£2,295**



This speaker might look old-fashioned, but that's really the whole point of Spendor's Classic range

DETAILS

- ORIGIN:** UK
WEIGHT: 14.3kg
DIMENSIONS: (WxHxD)
 275x545x325mm
FEATURES:
- 210mm bass/mid driver with plastic cone
 - Thin-wall enclosure construction
 - Cherry wood veneer on six faces
 - Rubberised cabinet damping pads
 - Scandinavian wide-surround tweeter
- DISTRIBUTOR:**
 Spendor Audio Systems
TELEPHONE:
 01323 843474
WEBSITE:
 spendoraudio.com

Spendor arrived on the scene at the beginning of the 1970s, bringing a strong BBC heritage along with a number of interesting innovations that its competitors arguably didn't fully appreciate.

One of the most significant among these was a radical approach to enclosure design. The theory goes as follows: building an exceptionally stiff structure might serve to reduce the amplitude (ie relative loudness) of cabinet vibrations, but it also increases the frequency at which they occur, so that the enclosure coloration tends to occur in the midband where human hearing is most sensitive.

The alternative Spendor approach, originally inspired by the BBC's desire for accurate speech monitoring, is the 'thin wall' cabinet approach, backed by heavy damping pads, which pushes the cabinet wall vibrations down into the bass region where they're considered less intrusive. Although that technique sounds simple enough, in fact these enclosures are rather harder to make than the thicker variety.

The Classics are just one of Spendor's ranges and make every attempt to recreate the physical characteristics of those 1970s' models, albeit using more modern materials and manufacturing techniques.

This /3R2 variation is the latest version of the SP2 and is the middle model among five Classics. The shape, size and presentation are all nostalgically similar to its 1970s ancestor, so it's a quite large two-way standmount, finished in cherry veneer on all six faces and with the baffle and grille recessed behind

a 'picture frame' formed by extending the enclosure sides.

Set halfway up (or down) the front, in between a large port and the tweeter, the bass/mid driver has a 210mm frame and a transparent plastic cone 150mm in diameter. The tweeter is a relatively new and usual design, used in several recent Spendors. Described as a '22mm wide surround' type, in fact the central dome measures around 19mm in diameter, while dome-plus-surround totals 34mm.

Twin high-quality socket/binder terminal pairs are mounted directly through the rear panel, feeding silver-plated copper wiring and a crossover network with high-grade components.

SOUND QUALITY

We weren't all that surprised when the SP2/3R2 comfortably and unanimously topped the listening test rankings. We'd already given the various models a quick listen while carrying out the measurements necessary to determine where best to site them and that had provided strong clues that the Spendor would do well.

The paeans of praise recorded by each panelist actually became a little repetitive, at least two individuals reckoning that this was a speaker they could happily live with, especially in the way it

handled all six very different tracks without fear or favour.

This is also a speaker that knows how to rock. The bass could perhaps be tauter, tighter and punchier, but the overall timing and coherence is excellent, which is what matters most.

Some potential purchasers may be put off by this speaker's old-fashioned presentation, but I daresay others will welcome the nostalgic appearance. And anyone who takes the trouble to listen will surely appreciate the sonic superiority that justifies the thin-wall enclosure approach.

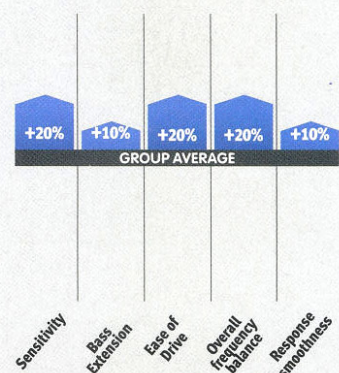
TECH LABS

The SP2/3R2 delivered a highly impressive in-room far-field 'power' response above 90Hz, holding within +/-4dB, in spite of the effects of room reflections and modes. Indeed it looks particularly well-judged above 500Hz, with just a touch of presence restraint (2.2kHz-4.5kHz) and a smooth top end.

Things are rather less even below 90Hz, due to room interactions and output from a rather enthusiastic port, but the overall average remains pretty good and the 38Hz port tuning ensures decent bass extension, giving useful in-room output down to below 30Hz.

Sensitivity is around 89-90dB, which is very healthy figure in view of an easy-to-drive impedance that stays comfortably above 8ohms throughout and is much higher than that above 700Hz. The shape of the impedance trace indicates that some subtle equalisation has been applied and a tiny resonance was visible around 700Hz.

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

- SOUND QUALITY** ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Lovely overall balance with fine voicing and transparency
- VALUE FOR MONEY** ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Rather bulky speaker lacks subtle shaping and fine finish
- BUILD QUALITY** ★★★★★ **WE SAY:** Not the prettiest speaker in its price class, but probably one of the best sounding
- PRACTICALITY** ★★★★★

OVERALL

