

GROUP TEST & LAB REPORTS: PAUL MESSENGER

# LUXURY STANDMOUNTS

*A stunning range of speakers that'll give floorstanders a run for their money*

This month we're focusing on high-quality standmounts, in the broad price range of £1,000-£3,000 per pair. The initial plan was to look at the larger examples of the type, preferably with 200mm main drivers, but it seems precious few such models now exist. The once ubiquitous '8-inch' (200mm) driver has all but disappeared, replaced by the 6.5-incher (165mm in modern parlance).

Meanwhile, standmounts as a breed have also declined steadily in favour of floorstanders. However, there are signs demand for them has begun to increase again. Standmounts actually have several potential performance advantages over floorstanders, and stereo-music lovers may be starting to recognise the fact.

That said, there are just as many variations in performance among the six models gathered here as in any other group of speakers, and as usual we'll try and sort them out on your behalf.

To avoid compromising performance unpredictably, we're using high-quality stands – Kudos S100s (500mm and 630mm versions) and 600mm Partington

Heavis. The Guru, however, has its own specific decoupling arrangements, and uses a stand based on the Kudos S50 with a large wooden top plate.

There's plenty of variation in this group. The cheapest model is the £1,000-per-pair JBL LS 40, ironically from the same range as the most expensive model in our last loudspeaker group test, the LS 60. Amphion's Argon<sup>2</sup> Anniversary has much in common with the company's Helium 520 and Prio 520 floorstanders, including a comparable price tag.

Reviewed in *HFC* 313, the Guru QM10 is an intriguingly different loudspeaker, well worth a second look here. Recently updated with the latest drive-unit technologies, Spondor's SP3/1R2 is very much part of the respected British/BBC tradition, with all that implies in performance and presentation.

DALI's Helicons, with hybrid dome/ribbon tweeters and classy cabinetwork, have been among the company's most successful products. Hopefully the new Mk2 models will continue the tradition. The Magellan Duetto SW2 might be the

most costly speaker in our group, but it's the least expensive in Triangle's six-strong flagship Magellan range. **HFC**

## EQUIPMENT USED

- ⊕ Naim CDS 3/555 PS, Meridian 808.2 CD players
- ⊕ Linn Sondek LP12 (modified)/Rega RB1000/Apheta turntable/arm/cartridge
- ⊕ Magnum Dynalab MD 106T tuner
- ⊕ Naim SuperLine, Rega Ios phono stages
- ⊕ Naim NAC 552, XTC PRE-1 preamps
- ⊕ Naim NAP 500 power amp
- ⊕ Cables from Chord Company, Vertex AQ, Phonosophie, Naim
- ⊕ Speaker stands from Kudos, Partington
- ⊕ Equipment supports from Mana, Vertex AQ, Naim, Townshend

## MUSIC USED

- ⊕ Alison Krauss *Forget About It*
- ⊕ Ennio Morricone *The Soundtracks*
- ⊕ Various artists *Heartworn Highways*
- ⊕ Mavis Staples *We'll Never Turn Back*
- ⊕ Laurie Anderson *Strange Angels*
- ⊕ VPO Maazel *Sibelius Symphonies*

## ON TEST



Amphion Argon<sup>2</sup> Anniversary  
£1,200

DALI Helicon 300 Mk2  
£2,054

Guru QM10  
£1,695

JBL LS 40  
£1,000

Spondor SP3/1R2  
£1,600

Triangle Magellan Duetto SW2  
£2,995

£1,600 per pair ☎ 01323 843474 🌐 www.spendoraudio.com

## SPENDOR SP3/1R2

*A classically styled compact monitor from a venerable British firm*

One of the most famous names in the history of British speaker design, Spendor was founded by an ex-member of the BBC Research Department around 40 years ago, primarily to make broadcast monitor loudspeakers, though its speakers quickly won a cult following amongst the hi-fi fraternity too. The company has maintained its early reputation, and since the current management took over at the beginning of this century, Spendor has gone from strength to strength, with a mixture of ranges catering for both contemporary and traditional tastes.

As the name suggests, the Classic R series, most of whose models curiously carry an SP prefix, is very much of the latter type. The five speakers in the range are all standmounts with 'picture frame' front baffle edges, and cover a wide range of enclosure and driver sizes.

This £1,600-per-pair SP3/1R2 is one step above the bottom rung and is described as a compact two-way monitor. Some may consider the presentation somewhat old-fashioned; others will find its classically traditional appearance, nicely finished in an understated real-cherry veneer, attractive, discreet and commendably restrained.

The SP3/1R2 is, logically enough, the successor to the SP3/1R, which itself followed the SP3/1. The size and type of enclosure – roughly 16 litres in capacity and employing the classic BBC damped-thin-wall technique, albeit now executed in MDF rather than birch ply – remain basically unchanged. The extra refinements introduced at each stage reflect the latest developments in drive-unit design and crossover networks.

A two-way design loaded by an unusually large rear port, the model shares a new 180mm Spendor bass/mid drive unit with the even newer A6 floorstander. This unit has a 120mm ep38 polymer cone, a wide surround and a high-excursion motor with a powerful magnet, and (perhaps most significantly) it operates up to a relatively high 3.7kHz. Twin terminal pairs feed the drivers via a new type of inductor and heavier, higher-quality wiring.

### SOUND QUALITY

The bass, frankly, isn't the SP3/1R2's best feature. It doesn't have much in the way of low bass weight and the alignment proved tricky under our room conditions, tending to favour the midbass port output over the upper bass. Best results were obtained with the speaker well clear of walls, though experimentation is advised to suit individual circumstances.

If that's a weakness, it's probably the only one, because the SP3/1R2 has a midrange to die for – beautifully neutral and essentially free from coloration with an exceptionally wide dynamic range and negligible boxiness. Excellent overall coherence attests to the fine integration of the two drive units, as well as the natural sweetness of the new tweeter, ensuring fine stereo imaging with good depth perspectives, especially with massed choirs in a proper acoustic environment.

While the SP3/1R2 isn't best suited to providing the sort of drive demanded by some rock or dance material, its subtlety in handling the tonal colours of acoustic instrumentation as well as the expressive character of the human voice is more than fair compensation. **HFC**

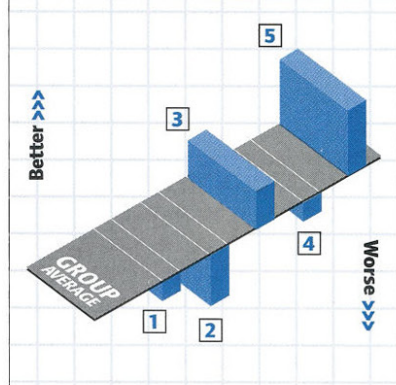


### LAB REPORT

Above 120Hz, the SP3/1R2's in-room far-field 'power' response is highly impressive. Although it could, perhaps, be a little smoother, it looks beautifully controlled right to the uppermost limits of human hearing, with just the odd unwanted 'wiggle'. Below 120Hz, things looked less happy, presumably because the speaker's bass alignment didn't match our room particularly well. However, with the speakers mounted well clear of walls, the net bass output above 40Hz comes out pretty well, since the lack of 70-120Hz output more or less matches the recorded 40-70Hz.

Sensitivity is around 87dB, which is a respectable enough figure in view of an easy-to-drive impedance that barely falls below 8 ohms throughout and is much higher than that above 700Hz. However, the 58Hz port tuning means that bass extension is effectively restricted to 40Hz. The pair match is particularly good.

### HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> -10%
- 2] Bass extension >> -30%
- 3] Ease of drive >> +20%
- 4] Overall frequency balance >> -10%
- 5] Response smoothness >> +40%

### SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	88dB	87dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	8/5.7 ohms	8/7 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	-	37Hz

### VERDICT

<b>SOUND</b> ★★★★★	With attractively traditional styling, this offers superb neutrality and coherence with very low coloration, fine imaging and a wide dynamic range – more than making up for a modest degree of bass weight and drive.
<b>PRACTICALITY</b> ★★★★★	
<b>BUILD</b> ★★★★★	
<b>VALUE</b> ★★★★★	<b>HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE</b> ★★★★★

# CONCLUSIONS

*These exceptional standmounts all have something to offer, but one rises above the rest*

Expectations were high when plans were laid to cover a group of good-size, high-quality standmounts. As it turned out, large standmounts have become very thin on the ground, and most of those models that did arrive fall broadly into the '15-20 litre with 165mm main driver' category – larger than the miniatures, but much smaller than designs that were commonplace 20 years ago.

Though some of the models in the group did demonstrate the benefits a standmount offers over a floorstander, few if any of

our contenders delivered a good in-room bass alignment under our conditions, which was rather disappointing. It's a shame none have followed B&W's 'hollow bung' retuning lead, and it may be relevant to point out that the Amphion fared best here, and has the smallest-diameter port.

Particularly underwhelming on the bass-alignment front was the £1,000 JBL LS 40. It had a decent midband and looked like fine material value for money, but was marred by indiscretions at both extremes of the audio band.

Although Amphion's £1,200

Argon<sup>2</sup> Anniversary isn't such obviously good value as the Helium 520 we reviewed in HFC 314, it's nevertheless a fine performer with genuine transparency that illustrates the strengths of the standmount format.

The Guru QM10 (£1,695) remains a decidedly quirky proposition, but it's an undeniably interesting and very involving one, even though strict neutrality isn't at the top of its agenda.

The real star of the show, though, was the £1,600 Spondor SP3/1R2. It might lack some bass weight, but it more than makes up for

this with its lovely open midband neutrality, well-suppressed box effects and fine dynamic range.

Although the £2,054 DALI Helicon 300 looks quite delicious, this Mk2 version was sonically a shade disappointing. While it's unquestionably easy on the ears, tension, drama, transparency and focus all seemed a little weak.

As for the £2,995 Triangle Magellan Duetto SW2, it could hardly be more different. Ignore the oddball measurements and simply embrace the superb dynamic life and expression – they just sound so real. **HFC**

## TRY THEM WITH THESE

### AMPLIFIERS

**SUGDEN A21AL SERIES 2** £1,399

Not the most powerful amp, but a true classic, with super-sweet Class A sound.

**NAIM NAC 122X/NAP 150X** £1,615

A musically rewarding pre/power combo offering outstanding grip and insight.

### CD PLAYERS

**CYRUS CD 8 SE** £1,200

Its radical CD platform delivers a sound that's civilised and musically convincing.

**REGA SATURN** £1,298

Top-end sweetness and transparency are superb, and it excels right across the band.

## HINTS AND TIPS

» Floor-coupling spikes should have tight lock-nuts, but don't over-tighten these or you'll strip the socket threads.

» Finding the right place to put the loudspeakers acoustically is extremely important. Do take the time and trouble to experiment before you fit the spikes.

» Moving a speaker from a free-space location until it's close to a wall will substantially boost the midbass.

» Expect speakers to improve steadily over the first 100 hours or so.  
» Use good-quality speaker cable if you want your system to perform at its best.

## STANDMOUNTS AT A GLANCE



MAKE MODEL	Amphion Argon <sup>2</sup> Anniversary	DALI Helicon 300 Mk2	Guru QM10	JBL LS 40	Spondor SP3/1R2	Triangle Magellan Duetto SW2
PRICE	£1,200	£2,054	£1,695	£1,000	£1,600	£2,995
SOUND	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
PRACTICALITY	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
BUILD	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
VALUE	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
OVERALL	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
CONCLUSION	Sharp art-deco styling and fine voice-band coherence, with excellent image focus.	Beautiful presentation and sound that's very easy on the ears, but a little bland.	A quirky but interesting and very involving proposition, despite the lack of strict neutrality.	A fine midband and good value for money, but marred by indiscretions at both extremes of the audio band.	It might lack bass weight, but it has a lovely open midband neutrality with fine dynamic range.	Sounding far better than its bizarre measurements suggest, this offers superb dynamic life and expression.
<b>KEY FEATURES</b>						
SIZE	19x38x31cm	20.8x43.5x35.6cm	30x23.2x25.2cm	22x49x34cm	22x40x28cm	25.4x46x35.1cm
DRIVER CONFIG	2-way	2.5-way	2-way	3-way	2-way	2-way
MAIN DRIVER SIZE(S)	1x165mm	1x165mm	1x102mm	1x165mm	1x180mm	1x160mm
STAND/ FLOOR	Stand	Stand	Stand	Stand	Stand	Stand
CABINET FINISH	Painted	High-gloss wood	Painted	High-gloss wood/textured	Real-wood veneer	High-gloss wood veneer
BI-WIRE	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>LAB CONCLUSIONS</b> E = EXCELLENT • G = GOOD • A = AVERAGE • P = POOR						
SENSITIVITY	85dB P	89dB G	88dB A	88dB A	87dB A	91dB G
EST. BASS EXTENSION	24Hz G	23Hz G	26Hz A	27Hz A	37Hz P	28Hz A
IMPEDANCE (NOM/ MIN)	8/7ohms G	8/6ohms G	7/5ohms A	7/5ohms A	8/7ohms G	6/4.5ohms A
FREQUENCY BALANCE	+20% G	+30% G	-10% A	-20% P	-10% A	-10% A
RESPONSE SMOOTHNESS	+20% G	+30% G	-20% P	-20% P	+40% G	-40% P