

# Spendor A3 loudspeakers



By Alan Sircom

**S**pendor has carved a name for itself in recent years. Not content with simply being the custodian of BBC designs, it has also delivered a range of loudspeakers that retain much of the original Spendor clarity and definition, but with a look and sound that attracts a modern audience.

The A3 is fairly typical of that approach. It's a short, slim and elegant two-way ported floorstander that owes a lot from previous models like the SA1, as well as bigger fish in the A-series. It's not at all like the wide-baffle, thin-walled sealed box designs of its classic line, but will instantly appeal to people who look at such designs as preserved in 40 year old aspic.

It features Spendor's clever wide-surround 22mm tweeter, coupled with a 150mm ep38 cone woofer. The ep38 material is unique to Spendor, even though it looks like the semi-transparent TPX that was all the rage for mid-bass units a decade and a half ago. This driver is deliberately wide-range and rolls off at a healthy 4.2kHz. Originally foam bungs were supplied for the rear ports, but reacting to market feedback regarding bass-lightness, Spendor recently re-visited the low frequency alignment of the A3. The port length has been changed and the foam damping eliminated. The result, says Philip Swift of Spendor, "is a noticeable increase in low frequency output and articulation with no compromise to the clear and natural mid and treble. Some listeners have even described the latest Spendor A3 as 'more fun'".

The rear panel also features a single set of WBT terminals. Unlike the larger A-Series models, many of which feature a cast metal base that not only houses the port but creates an almost impossibly rigid structure for the spike housings, the rigidity plate baseboard of the A3 is MDF, and the spike housings are small discs designed to hold the spikes

in place. It's effective, but doesn't give the speaker the same sense of a rooted in the ground solidity of the metal bases.

I can't help thinking these loudspeakers do all the right things for the typical UK/European audiophile. They are small enough to fit into our microscopic living rooms, yet not so small they get lost in larger spaces. They don't have so much bass that they can set off our solid brick walls, but not so little that they sound like steroid-enhanced tweeters. They are reactive enough to allow you to hear the difference between good and great amplifiers, but resistive enough to mean you don't have to search out a small power station to drive them. They work comfortably as the most expensive link in the chain, but don't sound out of place bolted to the end of some seriously esoteric stuff. And yet, despite all this, they aren't just a safe pair of hands. They sound exciting, detailed and even fun.

OK, so the loudspeaker doesn't plumb the depths and it doesn't have the sort of dynamic shading that will set the world alight. It's not the perfect partner for extremists; the three-watt club and the kilowatt support group will go looking elsewhere. Those who want metal dome zing or paper cone waffle will not apply, either. Instead, this is the speaker for the most of us. It's the sort of sound you could confidently spend decades with.

There's an interesting potential theoretical limit reached here. This isn't the biggest sounding loudspeaker around, but for the money you trade scale for transparency. A bigger sounding speaker that is just as tonally neutral across the midband exists, but not at this price. And possibly not with anything like the A3's dimensions. There are some excellent loudspeakers at roughly the same price that deliver a bigger sound, but with a bit more oomph to the mids and top, or more warmth across the broad midband or even some additional thickness to the bass.

All of which gives this speaker a sublime sense of 'poise'. It's unfazed by most music – granted, Slipknot might not be its strongest

point – thanks to its ability to get out of the way a lot. Paradoxically, although it gives an excellent stereo presentation with noticeably good soundstage depth, I found myself being unconcerned with albums that highlight good imagery or fine detail and was quite content reaching for re-issues of some really gnarly pre-1910 Charley Patton blues hollers and some classic 1940s Charlie Parker Be-Bop. In other words, music with some real torque behind it and played by a couple of right Charlies. With a speaker that delivers this sort of open midband, it's easy to get right to the heart of the music and not get bogged down in the ephemera of the quality of recording. Bringing the speaker right up to date, it made a fair fist of a couple of over-compressed, over-limited casualties of the Loudness Wars, but was of course far better when fed a steady diet of well-massaged sounds.

It's odd. There are a lot of loudspeakers that don't put a foot wrong, but very few that command such respect from practically everyone in the business. "Oh yeah, they're good speakers" and "they are a bit bass-light" is the closest you get to criticism of the A3, even from archrivals. And the nearest I can get to criticism aside from that is the rear port. Compared to the vent on the bigger models, the port is more noticeable, and means the speaker needs to be used in free space. Even this seems like picking holes in an otherwise flawless performance like some TV talent show judge playing the bad guy for the sake of the ratings. I kept listening to these speakers and thinking them basically a SA1 without the need for a stand.

A sensitivity of 86dB is slightly below average today, but a nominal impedance of eight Ohms coupled to a 6.2 Ohm minimum impedance means it poses absolutely no problems for any modern amplifier design (except low power single-ended triode designs). Like all designs that are even remotely flavoured by the BBC school, the loudspeaker is going to be a benign load to amplifiers feeding it, and not troubled by excessive running in or synergistic compatibility issues. Better electronics sound 'better' here, but the A3 is a great leveler and good systems sound excellent through these speakers. ▶





## TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

**Type:** Two-way, rear ported floor standing loudspeaker

**Tweeter:** 22mm wide-surround dome with fluid cooling

**Woofer:** Spendor 150mm ep38 cone

**Crossover point:** 4.2kHz

**Frequency Response:** 70Hz-20kHz± 3dB anechoic

**Typical in-room response:** -6dB at 45Hz anechoic

**Sensitivity:** 86dB/W/m

**Impedance (nominal/minimum):** 8 Ohms/6.2 Ohms

**Terminal:** 4-way binding posts, single wired

**Finish:** black ash, cherry, light oak, dark walnut

**Dimensions (HxWxD):** 75x16.5x25cm

**Weight:** 12.4kg each

**Price:** £1,295 per pair

**Manufactured by:** Spendor Audio Systems

**URL:** [www.spendoraudio.com](http://www.spendoraudio.com)

**Tel:** +44 (0)1323 843474

For my part, the speaker was such a natural partner with the Sugden A21SE (driven by both an Audiolab 8200CDQ and a Mac with an HRT Streamer II+), I felt no urgent need to chop and change. That said, I tried it out with a Devialet D-Premier and a Naim Supernait (going through its good day/bad day part of its early life), and it sang well with both. And, while I prefer to make such statements based on direct personal experience, I know several people who have used this with the excellent little Rega Brio-R, as the perfect 'shut up' riposte to the any 'soaring price of audio' comments.

It's easy to get a distorted sense of perspective in this game, especially if you spend most of your working life playing with goodies that cost more than most people's kitchen, bathroom and car combined. Making a good loudspeaker is seldom an easy task, but released from the constraints of price or size must make the job less of a struggle. Making a good loudspeaker that falls within the price and size of the A3 is something wonderful.

This is also the kind of speaker that proves the virtue of listening at length. A two-minute burst of music through the A3 will do nothing apart from make for an uninspiring burst of sound. This is because we tend toward the bright, shiny things at first flush. Spend(or) a week and a day with the A3s and you'll be hard pressed to find a bad word to say about them. However, after the same time period, the more immediate sounding "mug's eyeful" loudspeaker will start to grate and wear the listener down.

The best thing I can say about the A3 is that it's a keeper. It might be on the light side of things, bass-wise, but I think as many people will fall for its deft midband. Moreover, it's the kind of keeper that helps you build a wide and catholic interest in music of all stripes (Slipknotwithstanding). They are few and far between, at any price. +