

Figure of speech



Spendor has updated its legendary S3/5R2. **Ed Selley** finds out if the classic character has survived the improvements

Few speakers have a pedigree quite as long or distinguished as the LS3/5 standmount speaker. Originally designed for the BBC to monitor outside broadcasts, it's impressive performance won many fans. So when the BBC requirement ceased, Spendor took over; a success record that has resulted in the latest iteration, the S3/5R2.

Given the classic nature of the design, the basics remain unchanged. The Spendor is a whisker over 300mm tall and mounts a 140mm mid-bass driver, with a 22mm tweeter in a sealed enclosure. With the cabinet dimensions and design somewhat 'sacred', the main areas that Spendor has focused on are the drivers and the internal bracing.

Wide surround

The tweeter is a version of the Spendor 'wide surround' design that features a thick surrounding ring of material, that acts as both resonating area and mount. This is partnered with an all-new bass driver produced from EP39 (engineering polymer variant 39), with a magnesium-alloy basket to allow greater driver excursion.

This excursion is important because as the Spendor is a sealed cabinet, the only real way of improving the bass response is to increase the driver travel. When combined with a stiffer and more solid cabinet, Spendor claims that the R2 has a considerably extended bass response to the previous model. This is combined with further changes to the crossover to improve the midrange.

A simple business

First impressions of the Spendor are good. This is a

solidly constructed and very attractive loudspeaker. The fit and finish of both the cabinet and drivers is excellent and the S3/5R2 feels worth the asking price. Speaker connections are via a hefty pair of binding posts and the only area where the Spendor could be said to be less than perfect (cosmetically) is in the use of lugs to secure the grilles, rather than magnetic trim tabs.

Partnering and placing the S3/5R2 is a simple business. The sensitivity of 84dB/w initially sounds alarming, but as the impedance never drops below six ohms, it is an easy load for most amplifiers. With no port or other perforation, the Spendor is happy to be placed close to walls or indeed on shelves. In any normal UK room, there should be no issues placing them effectively for good results.

Trade-off

Owning any version of the 3/5a was historically a trade-off between superb midrange lucidity and the limitations of the bass response. The latest changes to the S3/5R2 go

DETAILS

PRODUCT: Spendor S3/5R2

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: Two-way standmount loudspeaker

WEIGHT: 4.6kg each

DIMENSIONS: (WxHxD)

165 x 305 x 190mm

FEATURES:
• 22mm wide surround tweeter

• EP39 polymer mid-bass driver

• Multiple panel thicknesses to reduce coincidental resonance

DISTRIBUTOR: Spendor

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further to eliminate this than ever before. This is still an astonishingly communicative speaker. Voices and instruments are handled with an effortless accuracy that has very few equals in terms of tonality under £1,000.

The careful design of the drivers pays dividends in terms of avoiding undue harshness as well. The SE/5R2 can be pushed very hard without hardening up or becoming aggressive. At room-filling levels, it still sounds firmly in control. This also translates to a forgiving nature with poor recordings.

Where the old design would acquiesce to the laws of physics with low end material, the new model is made of sterner stuff. Absolute bass response is still limited by the design, but the S3/5R2 accompanies that addictive midrange with a tight, fast and tuneful bass performance. The difference is subtle, but gives the Spendor a wider appeal than its predecessor, without losing the traits that made it popular with so many people in the first place.

Size limitation

The S3/5R2 also has excellent timing that gives up-tempo music the underpinning required to enjoy it, while never forcing slower pieces. Its soundstage is well formed and easy to follow with a believable sense of the space a recording was formed in.

With smaller pieces, it's astonishingly competent and can show more expensive designs a trick or two. As the scale of pieces increases, the limitations of its size become more apparent, but never alarmingly so.

If you require your speaker to give you a visceral thump in the chest above everything else, this latest version of the 3/5 series is still unlikely to appeal. For everyone else – especially those in smaller rooms – this upgrade of a British classic is the most complete yet. ●



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY



LIKE: Detailed and expressive sound, fine build and easy placement

VALUE FOR MONEY



DISLIKE: Absolute bass response still limited

BUILD QUALITY



WE SAY: A superb performer that takes the classic attributes of the design and adds further all-round ability

EASE OF USE



OVERALL

