



Creature comfort

Spendor's new A2 is a wonderfully accommodating compact floorstander, **David Price** settles in for a listen

There's something rather reassuring about Spendor loudspeakers. Rather like a good pair of shoes that is comfortable yet rugged, the brand makes utilitarian-looking speakers to do the job you bought them for. They're not exactly fashionable yet have timeless style that ages better than most. They don't sound showy, yet you really take to them over time. It's a clever approach – because by choosing not to fight it out in the fray, you rise above it. This is, in my view, why the brand has done so well.

Above all, Spendor has a sound that many people really like. It's a tad soft and all the better for it. In a world of

Music that ambles on the wrong speaker, suddenly acquires a new sense of joy

boom-tizz and crash-bang-wallop, Spendor's A range is creamily smooth and subtly musical. The A4 is the star, but is considerably more expensive at £2,195 – whereas the dinky A2 is perfectly suited for today's small listening spaces. Its cabinets won't have your windows rattling, and nor does it throw large amounts of bass energy into the room, setting off the resonant modes. It is ideally sized and – as we shall see – voiced, to work in challenging surroundings.

The A2 is a two-way floorstander with a bass reflex port – strictly speaking then, it is thoroughly conventional. The 150mm mid/bass unit has an EP77 Engineering Polymer cone, which is said by Philip Swift to have a “different molecular structure to basic polypropylene”. The 22mm polyamide dome tweeter isn't radical like the ribbons you see on some rival designs, but – as auditioning shows – matches the bigger drive unit rather well. The crossover happens at 4.2kHz,

which is a little higher than some, but not especially daring. No cloth grilles are supplied, but there's a mesh over the tweeter to stop the kids or creating havoc when the grown ups aren't paying attention. Philip Swift says very few mid/bass units ever come back to Spendor, so doesn't feel the need to mesh it. The crossover is populated by precision-wound high linearity inductors and high linearity audio-grade capacitors, and there's a single pair of connectors on the back.

The cabinet has been asymmetrically braced and the dense 15mm sidewalls have Spendor's so-called Dynamic Damping inside. These are small, low mass constrained polymer dampers at certain energy points within the cabinet; bonded viscoelastic damping panels are also used to dissipate vibration. At the base, there are four machined steel stabiliser inserts, which secure directly into the main structure of the cabinet and offer up a thread for the spikes. All woodwork is done in the company's own cabinet manufacturing plant – Timberworx in Sheffield. It is of a very good quality and there's a choice of three real wood veneer finishes – black ash, dark walnut and natural oak.

With a claimed sensitivity of just 85dB, it is not the natural 'go to' choice for those treasured Black Uhuru reggae records, nor can it recreate nineties rave culture in your listening room. Yet any Spendor buyer wouldn't expect it to. The company claims a frequency response of 36Hz to 25kHz, although the bass begins to roll off rather sooner than this, as we shall see. Spendor recommends an amplifier of between 25 and 125W RMS per channel; I find Exposure's 3010S2D (HFC 397) ideal. Punching out 110W per channel, it delivers decent sound pressure levels with consummate ease. It is very easy to get the A2 working well in my room – slightly toed-in and placed 200mm from the boundary wall is ideal.

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Spendor A2
ORIGIN
UK
TYPE
2-way floorstanding loudspeaker
WEIGHT
12kg
DIMENSIONS (WxHxD)
150 x 756 x 250mm
FEATURES
• 1x 22mm dome tweeter
• 1x 150mm EP77 mid/bass unit
• Quoted sensitivity: 85dB/1W/1m (8ohm)
DISTRIBUTOR
Spendor Audio Systems Ltd.
TELEPHONE
01323 843474
WEBSITE
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Having reviewed the larger A4 floorstander in our sister title *Hi-Fi News*, the sound of this entry-level floorstander isn't a complete surprise. The Spendor family character is very much there and you get a very cosy, pleasant and cossetting performance. It's the hi-fi equivalent of snuggling up under the duvet on a cold, wet and windy night. This stands in marked contrast to many other similarly priced designs, which are voiced to be a good deal more explicit or designed to make more bass. The little A2 knows who it is, what its limits are and doesn't try to overstep the mark.

Sound quality

Kicking off the listening with REM's *Talk About The Passion*, this speaker instantly reveals its strong point. Michael Stipe's distinctive lead vocals are very well rendered, with a really clean and direct feel. They're pretty close miked as it is, but sound even more intimate than I expect, and very pure. It's obvious that the designer has married the drive units well, because this is often where two-way speakers fall down. This makes for a very emotional and direct rendition of the song, and the lovely backing guitar work from Peter Buck shines through too. Bass guitar is tuneful,

An ideally sized floorstander for smaller rooms



Q&A

Philip Swift

MD, Spendor Audio



DP: Who is the A2 aimed at?

PS: Someone with a small listening space and a modest budget who wants a slim, modern, mini high-performance floorstanding loudspeaker that delivers clear, natural sound with good bass extension when combined with a modestly priced amplifier/streamer. It's quite likely someone who really enjoys music, but has no desire to become a hi-fi expert. We think it sets new class standards for musical clarity, coherence and balance. It's one of the smallest, slimmest, serious floorstanding loudspeakers available. Unlike most contemporary rivals it's extremely easy to position in small rooms.

Where are all of the A2's component parts sourced?

We design and manufacture every key component in every Spendor loudspeaker inhouse in the UK. That includes Spendor drivers, cones, cabinets and crossovers through to winding our crossover inductors (coils) and thermo-forming EP77 cones.

Did you opt for more extended bass, rather than sensitivity?

Yes. Many loudspeaker designers lift midband output to get a high sensitivity figure. A resonant reflex port or line is used to add back missing bass. Unfortunately the extra bass is usually out of phase/time with the original bass and listeners find that very distracting. By contrast, the Spendor A2 consistently delivers articulate, coherent bass. The freedom from spurious cabinet or cone resonance is important. Dynamic contrasts, from silence to loud, are reproduced very accurately. That makes the perceived sound output noticeably (2-3dB) higher than simple sensitivity measurements would suggest. A 4ohm loudspeaker will measure more sensitive than an 8ohm equivalent. Many loudspeakers are awkward-to-drive 4ohm designs. We engineered the A2 to be an easy-to-drive 8ohm load.

IN SIGHT



- 1 22mm dome tweeter
- 2 150mm EP77 mid/bass unit
- 3 Bass reflex port
- 4 Binding posts



B&W's new 704 S2 is a little pricier at £1,990 – but is a three-way design with B&W's new 25mm carbon dome tweeter, 130mm Continuum FST midrange driver and twin 130mm Aerofoil bass units. It's bigger has a wider frequency range and serves up a larger sound. There's a great amount of detail, especially at the frequency extremes where the A2 falters. It goes louder and compresses less, too. Yet the Spendor still sounds more beguiling in some ways, giving a sweeter and more intimate midband at the expense of bass weight and treble clarity. Both are great speakers, but many may find the A2 works better for them.

and the nicely detailed percussion work makes the song bop along.

Moving to some more dense electronica from the nineties, and 808 State's *Pacific State* is next on the silver disc spinner. This isn't particularly well recorded, but is a good test for any loudspeaker. The A2 cuts through the dense mix rather better than expected, and throws out an awful lot of detail in the process. I'm particularly interested in the way that the drum machine track is carried, as it times really nicely and you can hear the gaps between the beats – showing that the speaker is quick on its heels. Treble is pretty sweet – if a little soft right at the top end, and lacking in atmosphere. Bass is full and bouncy, but only up to a point; this little box works really well in the upper bass, and although the Spendor has a go at lower frequencies, it just cannot reach deep down. There's only a certain amount of air that this compact cabinet can move, after all. There is also a slight 'thrum' in the upper bass and lower mid, but it's very subtle and if anything adds just a touch of pleasing warmth and weight.

Indeed, it often works in the music's favour. Isaac Hayes' *Cafe Regio's* is a really beautifully recorded slice of early seventies soul on Stax, and the Spendor really gets the joint jumping. It has a lovely natural rhythmic gait; things sashay along with ease in a satisfyingly fluid way. There's no sense that it gets this from being bright, artificially emphasising the midband, either. The result is a rich, warm

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sound that shuffles along with glee. Everything syncopates nicely with everything else, and music that can seem quite ambling and aimless on the wrong speaker, suddenly acquires a sense of joy. This track is also a fine test of its imaging ability – which proves good, if not spectacular. It gives a satisfyingly three-dimensional soundstage, although it isn't especially wide; again, it's limited by its own compact physical dimensions.

Conclusion

There are vast numbers of floorstanders around at this price. The A2 doesn't have a remarkable tweeter or breathtaking bass extension, and nor can it go hugely loud without any signs of stress. Yet for what one wants from a compact floorstander, it is a consummate all-rounder. In pretty much every aspect – tonal balance, detail, dynamics, rhythms, frequency extremes, etc. – it is very competent. Rather like a great football team with no star players, it gets the job done in a way that's a pleasure to regard. Factor in the fine build and the fact that it will be a really good fit in most listening rooms, and what's not to like? ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY



LIKE: Sweet, warm tonality; beguiling rhythms; build

VALUE FOR MONEY



DISLIKE: Mediocre sensitivity; limited frequency extremes

BUILD QUALITY



WE SAY: Highly compact floorstander with endearing character

EASE OF DRIVE



OVERALL

