

Hey, Big Spendor

Spendor's new D9 loudspeaker offers a big, refined sound that enthralled Jon Myles.

Spendor are one of the most renowned names in British hi-fi due to the company's heritage and range of loudspeakers respected for their sound. But they are not ones to introduce something on a whim, preferring to wait, work away and refine until they are sure a new product is truly better and class leading.

So, when MD Philip Swift telephoned and asked Hi-Fi World to take an exclusive listen to Spendor's new D9 floorstander we were more than interested. Even more so when the loudspeakers were delivered by Phil himself. Standing just over 3.7 feet tall they are imposing in height - but have a relatively slim profile, being just 8 inches wide.

Within this cabinet Spendor have engineered a three-way, four driver configuration with a special rear port configuration to boost low-frequency response.

The two bass drivers are Kevlar composite assemblies housed in their own enclosure. This is ported at the back via a down-firing aperture which uses an aerodynamically-shaped central baffle to smooth airflow. It sounds



complicated but it works (see Measured Performance for more details).

Above the bass units sit the tweeter and mid-range unit. The former is Spondor's latest LPZ tweeter which is built around a stainless front plate that forms a damped acoustic chamber in front of a lightweight woven polyamide diaphragm. The idea is to create a balanced pressure environment so the tweeter always operates in a linear mode.

The mid-range driver - that sits at the top of the cabinet - is Spondor's latest EP77 polymer cone and one I've always found smooth and warm yet not short of detail. On the rear are a single pair of binding posts (no bi-wiring here) above that aforementioned port - which Spondor say eliminates noise and enables the D9 to produce fast, clean, articulate bass.

As ever, Spondor use substantial internal bracing as well as polymer damping that converts acoustic energy into heat to eliminate internal standing waves in the cabinet, controlling resonances.

Put together it makes the new D9 a tall loudspeaker but rather slim; it looks elegant and would easily fit into any medium-sized room or above. A variety of finishes are available, with prices starting at £6995 and rising to £7995 depending on which one you choose.

There's no doubting that at the price you are getting a lot of loudspeaker for the money and it certainly looks imposing and purposeful with the grilles off to show those four drive units. But, as ever, it's the sound that matters.

SOUND QUALITY

The D9s have good sensitivity so don't need masses of power to go loud. That said I still pressed a Devialet Expert Pro 220 into service (more of which later) but also used an Icon Audio Stereo 30 SE valve amplifier. Connection was courtesy of Tellurium Q's Black 2 'speaker cables.

Philip Swift had suggested positioning the loudspeakers with a slight toe-in - which was how I started the listening.

However, playing Oasis's classic 'Definitely Maybe' debut on CD it was quickly clear the treble was just a little too prominent for my liking. Admittedly, this isn't the smoothest of albums with a raucous bite to the top end but the Spondors seemed to



The D9s have a proprietary rear reflex port with a central baffle to direct airflow.

accentuate this.

Adjusting positioning so the D9s pointed straight down the room solved the problem, taming their top end. Now I could really hear what these loudspeakers can do and the results became even more impressive as time went on.

First off they are extremely clean-sounding, especially in the lower registers. And they do go very low indeed - going below 20Hz so capable of producing club-like subsonics with the right material. With The Chemical Brothers' 'Block Rockin' Beats' bass hit me in the chest with its power nearly knocking me off my seat when I turned the volume up on our Icon

Audio amplifier. The D9s made the amplifier's 30 Watts of power sound much, much more.

But allied with acoustic power they are also very well controlled. They don't sound flabby or boomy but are possessed of a fulsome, tuneful bass that if anything errs on the dry side. There was no artificial warmth to it, instead just a refreshing tonal accuracy.

It's a trait evidenced with my favourite test track - James Blake's 'Limit To Your Love'. This piece really tests a loudspeaker's frequency response with rumbling sub-sonics, delicate piano and Blake's keening vocals above. It's a combination not all 'speakers can handle and knit together into a coherent whole, many making elements of the music divorced from one another.

But the D9s made it sound better than on any other loudspeaker I've heard at this price. Piano was sparkling, Blake's voice plaintive and anchored firmly between and just above the cabinets - and when the bass kicked in it was truly room-shaking. Yet those low octaves didn't mask what was going on above. They came in like a sledgehammer but started and stopped with no overhang or interference from the cabinets.

There's no doubt the D9's rear port makes a big difference here. It helps these 'speakers go deeper but without the inherent problems of more basic reflex designs where an artificial bass boost can be evident. Here there is no such artificiality.



The mid-range unit uses Spondor's latest EP77 polymer construction that gives a damped natural sound, free of metallic cone hardness.

The D9s exhibit good timing and tempo. They are remarkably agile – especially for a large loudspeaker. With Michael Gandolfi's 'The Garden Of Cosmic Speculation' (Atlanta Symphony Orchestra SACD) the farrago of tonal styles - baroque, minimalism, jazz and even elements of hip-hop, wove together beautifully.

Soundstage was also wide with a glorious spread across the room. With Pink Floyd's 'Dark Side Of The Moon' (24/96) the sound was immersive and enveloping - effects sweeping from left to right and extending close to the walls of the listening room. The ringing clocks at

correct.

The Spendor D9 is one very well-engineered loudspeaker indeed. It offers prodigious but controlled bass, detailed treble and a nice clean midband. All these combine seamlessly so you wouldn't know you were listening to four drivers. Add in superb construction (Spendor have their own cabinet-building facility in Sheffield) and you have an exceptionally impressive floorstanding loudspeaker. I've heard much more expensive loudspeakers that do less.

CONCLUSION

Spendor traditionally make good loudspeakers and the D9 is one of



A closer look at the reflex port with its aerodynamically-shaped baffle that helps smooth output, providing clean deep bass.

their best yet. It is big-sounding with great bass but supremely natural and free-flowing. This is one for those who like to hear music as it should be.



The LPZ tweeter employs a stainless steel front plate with a lightweight diaphragm behind.

the start of 'Time' were striking - the D9's tweeter giving them startling reality.

Taking out the Icon Audio and connecting the 'speakers to the Devialet Expert Pro 220 proved interesting. Especially when tuning the amplifier's SAM (Speaker Active Matching) technology. Essentially this is a DSP feature that corrects phase and time domain errors induced by the design of the loudspeakers to produce a cleaner sound. Spendor believes the system works and a number of their 'speakers have been mapped by Devialet.

With Massive Attack's 'Angel' bass output - good without SAM on - went that bit lower with it on. Voices and acoustic instruments also had an extra lifelike quality to them. It wasn't a vast difference and I have heard SAM have more effect on other, less expensive 'speakers. Which leads me to think that the better engineered a loudspeaker is the less SAM has to

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Spendor's D9 has a big cabinet with a large, rectangular floor level port at rear, fitted with profiled flow control vents – unusual. Port output was also unusual in being broad and untuned (no peaking). The twin bass units, large cabinet volume and unusual port venting scheme extend bass smoothly down to a low 35Hz, whilst the port provides support lower down, to below 20Hz our red port output trace shows. The impedance analysis correspondingly shows broad bass damping, centring around a low

FREQUENCY RESPONSE

Green - driver output
Red - port output



IMPEDANCE



25Hz. All of which tells of a big cabinet that goes very low and will provide very deep yet also well controlled bass. This is a loudspeaker that will produce subsonics of some force.

A roll-down in output below 300Hz will remove any sense of fulsome-ness, a dry lower midband being likely and perhaps some divorce from lower frequencies apparent in smaller boomy rooms.

Measured on-axis tweeter output was raised by +2dB or so – enough to give obviously strong treble and a bright sound balance. Off-axis our response analysis shows a more even tonal balance so the D9 is best pointed straight down a room and not directly at listeners. Strong output in a band from 2kHz to 3kHz will make detail very obvious.

Sensitivity was good at 87dB from one nominal Watt (2.8V) of input, if not quite up with others of the cabinet size that manage close to 90dB. However, the big D9 still needs no more than 60 Watts to go extremely loud; more power is unnecessary.

The D9 will have powerful low bass that is controlled and tuneful. It will not have a warm sound balance overall however, likely sounding dry and forcefully detailed. **NK**

SPENDOR D9 £6995



OUTSTANDING - amongst the best.

VERDICT

Spendor has excelled itself with the new D9. Deep, controlled bass allied to a detailed treble bring the best out of whatever you play. Highly recommended.

FOR

- bass output
- detailed treble
- smooth midband
- quality construction

AGAINST

- not overly warm

Spendor Audio Systems
+44 (0)1323 843474
www.spendoraudio.com