

SPENDOR SA-1

Classic British speaker style, with a sound to match

Andrew Everard finds these small speakers understated and very enjoyable

More than a few British audio companies have been taken over, only to have their brands devalued by over-exploitation. A travelling friend saw an LCD TV with the Rogers name on it not so long back, and admits to thinking "it's all a long way from the LS3/5As".

Fortunately, other famous names have found owners who refuse to dilute their brand values, and indeed build on the successes of the past. Spendor is a fine example of this: the company, founded back in the 1960s by Spencer and Dorothy Hughes – hence the name – was bought in 2001 by Philip Swift, who started Audiolab, and since that time Swift has developed the brand, and the speakers.

He's done so by sticking with some of the established design thinking, while bringing to the party his own input. Nowhere is that more clear than in the little SA-1s we have here. They're in the classic British mini-monitor mould, at just over 30cm tall, and are of a two-way, sealed-box design.

They're also really rather luxurious, being available in a range of zebrano high gloss lacquered veneer, black piano lacquer or satin-finished wenge, with matching stands available. In fact the stands are more than available – they're strongly suggested, coming in black satin lacquer with inlays to match the speakers, and add £400 to the speakers' price. So that's £1500 a pair with stands, or £1100 without.

It's claimed that this is "the most musical and revealing small loudspeaker ever created by Spendor", and there's certainly been a lot of work put into backing up that claim. The SA-1s use the usual Spendor thin-wall damped panel construction, but here it's backed up with rigid bracing and the use of three different thicknesses of material in the enclosure. This means each panel has its own resonant frequency, these working together to damp out any vibration.

The tweeter is a new 22mm "wide surround" unit, said to combine the extended frequency



response of small diaphragm with the low-frequency working of a larger design. The midrange and bass, meanwhile, are handled by a 15cm Spendor driver using a magnesium alloy chassis, advanced polymer cone and surround material, and a long-excursion motor.

Spendor says that perfectly balanced phase response, optimum bass alignment and a high level of electrical damping give these speakers impressive bass for enclosures so small, and the sealed design makes them much less fussy about positioning than would be a ported speaker. In other words, if you have to use them against a wall, you can – but that said, the speakers do sound their best when used on the dedicated stands, which have the effect of tightening the bass and giving better low-end definition.

PERFORMANCE

The SA-1s are a little less sensitive than many less expensive speakers of this size, at 85dB/W/m, but have an easy-going 8 ohm nominal impedance, meaning that massive amplifier power really isn't needed. They also have single-wire terminals,

taking another variable out of the equation, and as mentioned sound best on the dedicated stands.

What really impresses about these little speakers, however, is the way they give a sound that's very much full-scale. What they lack in ultimate bass extension they more than disguise with a low end that's fast, tuneful and entirely convincing, even when tackling a full orchestra, and there's beautiful character down there so they really bring basses and cellos alive.

The rest of the frequency band is just as accomplished, the speakers having a lovely open sound through the midband and up into their sweet but clean treble, which is entirely free of spit or glare, yet capable of revealing the space and atmosphere of a recording. They're also very fine indeed when it comes to the delivery of voices, having a vibrant, open-mouthed tonality that comes up trumps on character and intelligibility.

In fact, these are just about the perfect speakers for those wanting top sound quality in smaller rooms, or indeed those who simply favour a small, unobtrusive, but superb system. They respond well to high-quality amplification but don't demand massive power to be heard at their best, and they back up the quality of their presentation with excellent fit and finish. Ⓢ

SPENDOR SA-1

Type Two-way standmount loudspeakers

Price £1500/pr with stands, £1100/pr speakers only

Drive units 22mm tweeter, 15cm ep38-cone mid/bass

Sensitivity 85dB/W/m

Impedance 8 ohms nominal, 6.3 ohms minimum

Power handling 125W

Accessories supplied Remote handset

Dimensions (HxWxD) 30.5x16.5x19cm

Finishes Zebrano high gloss, black piano lacquer, wenge satin

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