

Spendor S5e £1095

↑ FOR
Even-handed presentation; clarity and bass control; sturdy build

↓ AGAINST
Low-key presentation might not impress on a short listen

★ VERDICT
These compact floorstanders don't score an instant hit, but in time their all-round excellence shines through



RECORDINGS DON'T GET much more demanding than Chemical Brothers' *Setting Sun*, an explosive dance track with an atomic bassline and the kind of treble that, in the wrong set-up, breaks glass at 50 paces. So how did these compact Spendors handle it? They refused to buckle, delivering a refined yet dramatic sound of a quality beyond what's expected at this price. There was no sign of hardening or compression, even at high volumes.

However, give the S5es a short listen and their talents aren't immediate, mostly due to an unexaggerated tonal balance that doesn't emphasise the extremes in a bid to excite. Their presentation isn't as bold as that of some rivals, either – but the payback is their appeal will last over the years.

These two-and-a-half-way designs use two 14cm drivers. The mid/bass is the same unit from the impressive SR5 wallmounters and C9e centre, while the bass driver is a new homopolymer-coned affair.

At 79cm high, the S5es are no giants, so don't expect the weighty bass that larger rivals such as B&W's 704s (see opposite page) generate. Even so, low frequencies are taut and tuneful. Timing and dynamics impress, too, plus you also get an insightful midrange that has plenty of bite without sacrificing refinement. The result is a fine delivery of vocal material such as Radiohead's classic *Fake Plastic Trees*.

Positioning is easy for a product of this type: the rear-firing linear-flow port ensures bass stays controlled even when the speakers are close to a rear wall. The best compromise between bass weight and stereo imaging is with them 30cm from the wall, slightly toed-in to the listener. This way the


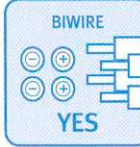




The S5es aren't huge, so don't expect the weighty bass larger rivals generate

stereo imaging is expansive without sacrificing outright precision. System matching isn't much of a problem, either. The speakers' even-handed attitude combined with an easy electrical load means that they will slot into most price-compatible systems without throwing a sulk. That's more than can be said of many rivals.

The S5es are smallish, cost a chunk and don't stand out much on a shop floor – give them a long listen, though, and their class really shows.

AT A GLANCE...

 FLOOR	 BIWIRE YES
 SPEAKER SIZE 79x17x26cm	 POWER HANDLING WATTS 200