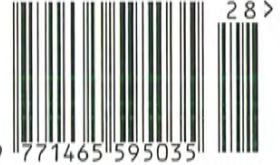




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ISSN 1465-5950



REPRODUCING THE RECORDED ARTS OCTOBER 2015 • 128  
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## PLAY THE SYSTEM

### YG'S NEW CARMEL 2 MEETS ITS PERFECT PARTNERS!



BURMESTER BA31 LOUDSPEAKER  
GRAHAM AUDIO LS5/8 MONITOR  
MARTINLOGAN MOTION 35XT  
**EXCLUSIVE:** CANJAM LONDON  
SHOW REPORT



NORDOST ODIN 2  
CABLES: THE BEST  
JUST GOT BETTER!



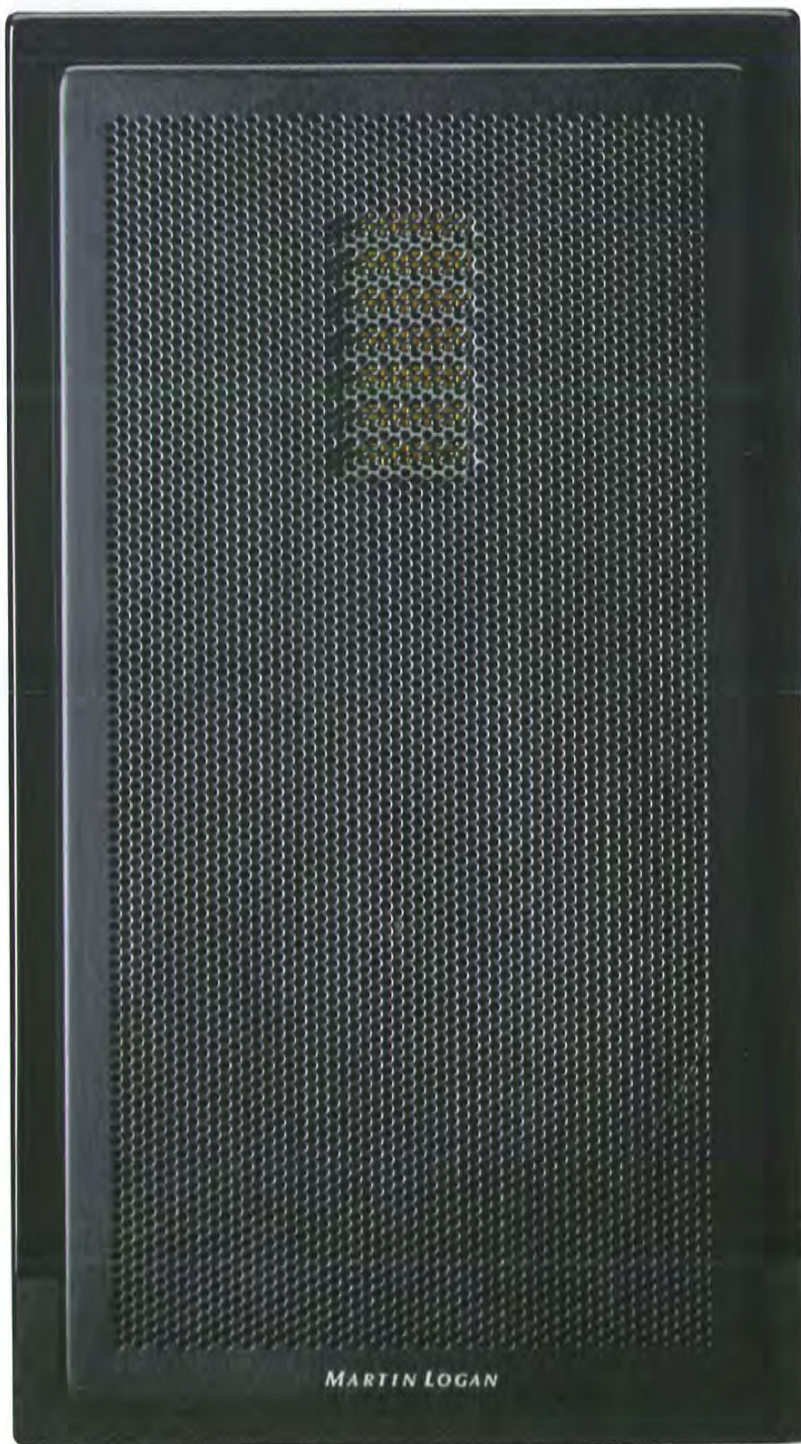


## MartinLogan Motion 35XT loudspeaker

by Roy Gregory

I reviewed MartinLogan's miniature two-way Motion 15 loudspeaker back in Issue 98 and it was quite the surprise package. Small but perfectly formed, it was the musical performance that really impressed: here was a hybrid AMT/dynamic speaker that really worked, a miniature that really delivered – a rare beast indeed. With the benefit of hindsight, perhaps its astonishingly capable performance shouldn't have come as a surprise. After all, MartinLogan have been building hybrid designs for over 30 years and are also one of the few companies to crack the puzzle of actually delivering the potential cost/performance benefits of Chinese manufacturing (for the Motion series) with consistent quality. The Motion 15 stands as an impressive monument to the careful blending of Western expertise with the realities of global economics, a signpost to the future that can be enjoyed (and I do mean enjoyed) now. But the real question is, did MartinLogan – and the rest of us – simply get lucky with the Motion 15, or can they make lightning strike twice?

Outwardly, the 15's larger sibling, the Motion 35XT looks all but identical: same flawless lacquer finish, same beautifully contoured and machined baffle, same distinctive, sloping topped cabinet and same combination of pleated AMT treble unit and neat, aluminium-coned mid-bass driver. In fact, short of sitting them side-by-side you'd be hard pressed to tell them apart. The 35XT might be a couple of inches taller and deeper as well as an inch wider, but its growth is proportional, meaning that the pleasingly balanced appearance remains almost unchanged. But appearances can be deceptive. As well as the increased cabinet dimensions (and internal volume) the 35XT sports a 165mm driver in place of the 15's 133mm unit, as well as the larger XT tweeter. ▶

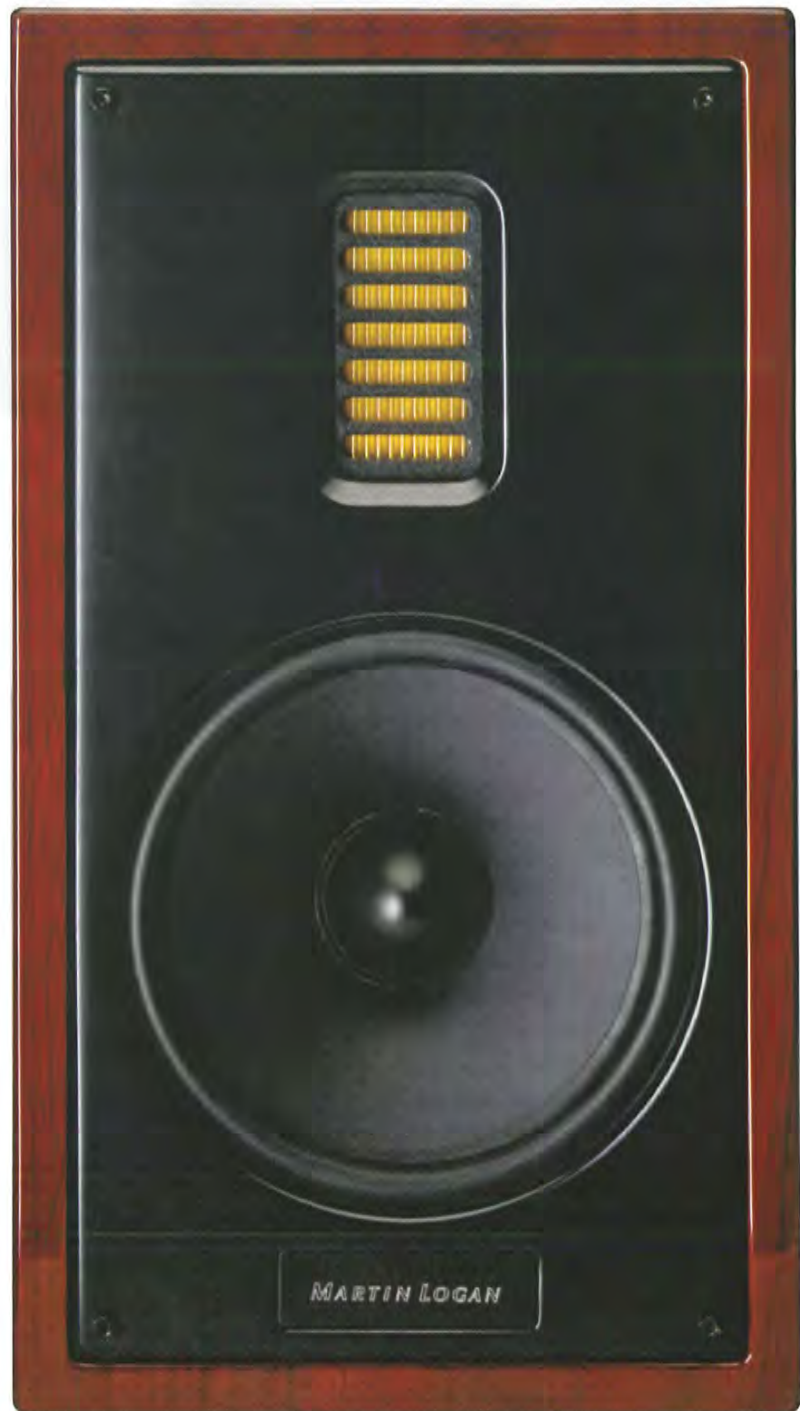




*“Of course, there’s no such thing as a free lunch, but when it comes to designing loudspeakers you don’t even get a half-empty dish of peanuts. Every design choice involves its own associated compromises.”*

▶ 32mm on the diameter of a bass-mid unit might not seem like much, but do the maths and you’ll realize that it all but doubles the swept area available. Combine that with the larger cabinet and you are looking at a handy increase in bass weight and extension – an area in which the 15 already excelled.

Of course, there’s no such thing as a free lunch, but when it comes to designing loudspeakers you don’t even get a half-empty dish of peanuts. Every design choice involves its own associated compromises. In the case of hybrid speakers that attempt to meld the virtues of two differing driver technologies, those compromises can be potentially fatal. The Motion 15’s performance is built around the successful integration of its two disparate drive units. But increase the diameter of the bass driver and you impair both its ability to reach up into the mid-band and its dispersion characteristics, key considerations when it comes to seamless integration. Simply stick the Motion 15’s tweeter into a bigger box with a bigger bass unit and the results would be predictably awful and disjointed. Which is exactly where the larger XT tweeter comes in, a unit with just over twice the radiating area of the one used in the Motion 15. That extra area allows it to reach lower down the range, in turn allowing the designer to roll it in at a low 2200Hz, rather than the 2700Hz used in the Motion 15. The end result is a loudspeaker that has almost identical sensitivity and electrical characteristics to the Motion 15, the same seamless integration and musical coherence but extends the -3dB point from 60Hz down to the magic 50Hz point. Why magic? Because that’s the point at which a speaker generates enough bottom end that it no longer sounds small or curtailed. Of course, extension and weight, ▶





► body and presence aren't givens, but at least the system has some meat to work with. The 35XT's large, rear-facing port tells you that its bass is going to roll off pretty sharply, but it also hints at the substance it will deliver within its operating range and that's exactly what you hear. The 15's bass was quick, articulate, pitch secure, and rhythmically informative. The 35XT's bottom end is all that, plus weighty, solid, and outrageously BIG – well, given the compact cabinet. Where the 15's were a perfectly executed miniature, physically and musically, its bigger brother is a real room filler.

Select anything with a deep, fast, and mobile bass line ('Tears Inside' from Art Pepper's *Smack Up* [Contemporary] will do nicely) and you'll hear exactly what I mean. There's a wonderfully tactile attack and decay to the beautifully pitched, paced, and spaced notes of the bass line, with an absolute security of their weight and tone. And this holds in the way they work with the piano, the way you can follow them as a constant presence under the other instruments, the way they maintain the direction and momentum of the track is all perfectly configured. These are genuine corn-fed, free-range bass notes, not the texture-less, processed nuggets served up by most small standmounts.

That sense of purpose and energy extends across the 35XTs' whole musical range, from the stabbing brass of small ensemble jazz, to the breathy intimacy of well-recorded vocals, the sudden attack of crisply hit snare drum to the prolonged harmonic decay of an acoustic guitar. These speakers have an uncanny ability to fasten on the sense of life and presence in a recording and project it into a room. It's a quality that serves them well when fed by modest electronics (Arcam's A19 for example), but it also allows them to grow and thrive in more exalted company. After hearing what the Motion 15's could do on the end of the VTL 450 mono amps, the presence of Audio Research's Ref 10 line-stage and Ref 150SE power amp was too tempting to pass up...

On paper, the price disparity makes this an unlikely combination, but sonically and more importantly musically, it's perfectly valid. Play Don Henley's inspired cover of 'These Days' from the Jackson Browne tribute album, *Looking Into You* [Music Road] and the opening guitar that usually lodges firmly in the right-hand speaker with most stand mounts, steps away from the cabinet, its reverberation revealing the extent of the whole soundstage. Henley's vocal has a natural expressive presence and body, and is beautifully dimensioned and stable. The subtle bass line works the track, the cascading drum patterns have real impact and dynamics. This is one speaker that just gets bigger and better the more you give it, that will play quietly but loves to play loud, and that will surprise you with the musical coherence and insights it brings even to familiar tracks. I'd never really rated Bob Schneider's cover of 'Running On Empty' until I heard it on the ARC/35XT system. Suddenly the measured tempo and melodic extrapolations make sense, the bottom-end locks in and ties it together, while the elongated rhythmic evolutions and that deep, deep, almost flappy bass drum all start to make sense. ►



## TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

**Type:** Two-way, reflex loaded hybrid loudspeaker

**Driver Complement:** 1x XT Air Motion Transducer, 1x 165mm aluminium cone mid-bass

**Bandwidth:** 50Hz–25kHz,  $\pm 3$ dB

**Crossover:** 2,200Hz

**Efficiency:** 92dB

**Impedance:** 4 Ohms

**Dimensions (WxHxD):** 192 x 343 x 300mm

**Weight:** 8.4kg ea.

**Finishes:** High gloss black, white or red cherry

**Price:** £1,298 per pair

**Manufacturer:** MartinLogan Ltd

**URL:** [www.martinlogan.com](http://www.martinlogan.com)

**UK Distributor:** Absolute Sounds Ltd

**Tel:** +44 (0)208 971 3909

**URL:** [www.absolutesounds.com](http://www.absolutesounds.com)



► One downside of the larger tweeter diaphragm is a more restricted listening window – meaning that you need to pay attention to the speaker's rake angle and I found myself inverting the speaker and running it with the tweeter below the mid-bass driver. The good news is that the extra bass also adds up to a slightly fuller and more forgiving balance without sacrificing the lucid clarity and natural sense of musical organisation that characterised the Motion 15, making the 35XT an easier speaker to partner, especially with solid-state amps. Experimentation is the name of the game here, but put the effort in and this unassuming little speaker has the capacity to startle and excite in equal measure. The 15s were capable of remarkable performance, especially in smaller rooms, but give the

35XTs a little extra space (and especially if you can give them a lot of extra drive – in quality terms that is) and they simply blow their little brothers away.

The MartinLogan Motion 35XT succeeds in ticking pretty much every box on the small-speaker wish list: easy to drive and easy to live with, but can really grow with your system, a sound that is detailed and open but also genuinely solid and musically convincing, and a speaker that is entertaining and informative at the same time. The perfect alternative for the high-end music lover looking for a second system or stand-in, it's also the hair-shirt audiophile's starter speaker *par excellence* – except that it might just embarrass the speakers in more than a few big, high-end systems and lacks the basic appearance so important for budget-esoteric credibility. Let's face it, speakers this pretty (and this affordable) really shouldn't sound this good, be this engaging, or this much fun. Like lightning striking twice in the same place, it upsets the natural scheme of things! +