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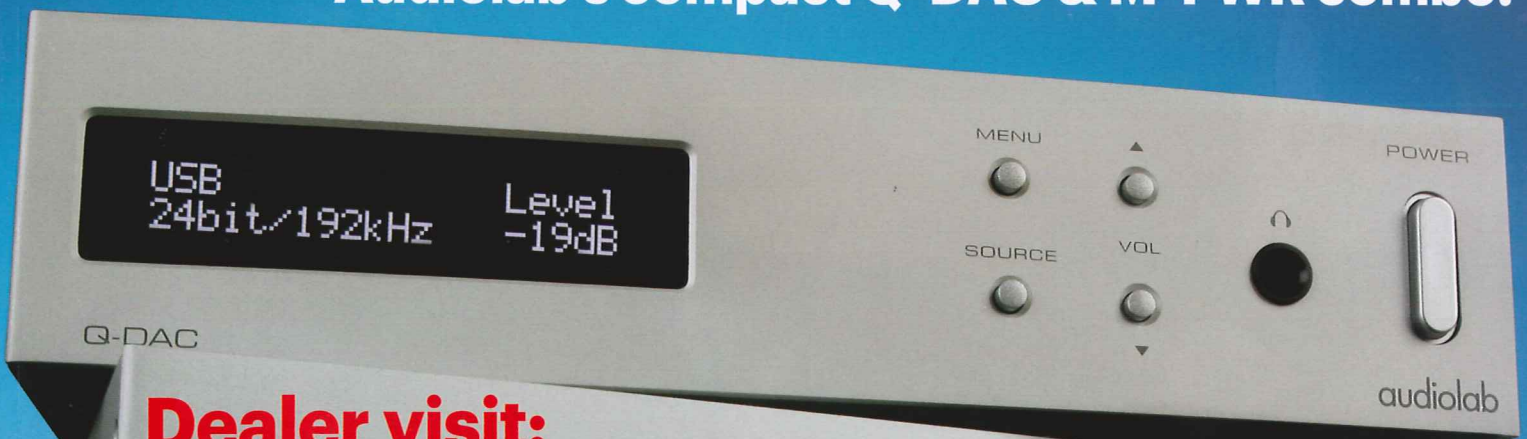
PASSION FOR SOUND

Issue No. 374

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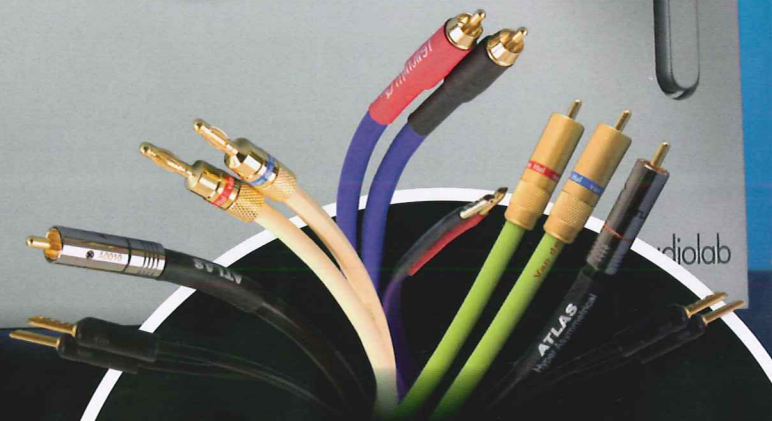
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VS SONUS FABER VENERE 1.5
STANDMOUNT LOUDSPEAKER £950

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RECOMMENDED



The sound of little Italy

A Sonus faber for less than a grand? The Venere 1.5 is offering just that and **Ed Selley** finds out if it delivers the goods

Sonus faber is unashamedly high-end. The name alone brings to mind exotic symphonies of wood, leather and chrome that bisect science and art and frequently come with price tags to suit. When supercar manufacturer Pagani announced a tie in with Sonus faber for the sound system of the new Huayra, the combination was as logical as a dab of sour cream to a portion of caviar.

What happens though when a company that's so associated with the use of exquisite materials makes an affordable speaker? Does the result still feel like a Sonus faber or does

The Sonus faber is possessed of an exceptional balance of detail and clarity

something have to give? The Venere 1.5 is yours for £950 and while I won't pretend this is an amount you'd find stuffed behind the sofa, it is still a fairly terrestrial figure in the big scheme of things. So does it work?

The Venere 1.5 is the smaller of two standmounts in the Venere range and the least expensive. The 1.5 is a two way design with the same 29mm soft dome tweeter seen in the rest of the range mated with a 150mm mid bass driver that makes use of the same 'Curv' technology as the other Venere's. Like the rest of the range, the 1.5 has a sloped top panel that means that the Venere is smaller than the bald specifications might suggest as only the narrow section at the rear is actually 40cm tall. A single small slot port at the front of the cabinet augments bass performance while around the back, impressively sturdy terminals should allow for the connection of pretty much any cable that takes your fancy.

Finished in white lacquer (black is also available and a wood finish is an option for £250), the Venere 1.5 provokes many of the same thoughts that the 2.5 did when it passed through as part of the recent *Beautiful Systems* piece. The Venere could be delivered in blank boxes with no visible branding (in fact from a seated position, no logos are visible anyway) and it would still feel like a fairly special piece of design. The shape is elegant and the contrast between white and black makes for distinctive, but cohesive-looking speakers. The Venere looks slightly more modern than some of its pricier brethren, but this is a speaker that will comfortably sit in most domestic environments. Build quality is excellent and the 1.5 feels impressively solid, although the main driver doesn't have quite the same immaculate finish as the rest of the speaker.

The review pair is supplied with the matching Venere stand, which adds £350 to the total price. I'm in two minds about the stand as a value proposition. There are a number of designs for the same price that are rather more massy, but the dedicated stand looks and feels a good match for the speaker and adds a degree of lean to the stance in keeping with other Sonus faber designs. The top plate comes with the wherewithal to attach the 1.5 to it via screws, but your x-ray vision will need to be in top form to do this easily.

Sound quality

Initially I connect the 1.5s to a Naim SuperNait integrated amp and ND5 XS streamer with XP5 XS power supply. While probably not the first choice of most Venere customers, the results are impressive. Some aspects of the performance are recognisable from the larger 2.5, mainly the treble performance. The Sonus faber is possessed of an exceptional balance

of detail and clarity, but even with less than stellar recordings it never tips over to harshness or aggression. This allows the Veneres to snarl their way through Kasabian's *Velociraptor* and capture the fury of the music without giving in to the less than stellar recording quality.

Give them something well recorded, though, like the 24/96 FLAC of Mark Knopfler's *Privateering* and the Venere rewards with a performance that is exceptionally open, involving and utterly believable. There are speakers at the price that can manage more superficial excitement, but the balance the Veneres have means you can listen to them for hours at a time without fatigue, which is the hallmark of a speaker you want to live with long term. As a relatively small speaker, there are limits to the scale that the Venere can achieve, but the performance never seems curtailed. The massed instruments of the Cinematic Orchestra in *Manhatta* are given the space they need and sensing their placement relative to one another is a breeze.

The other instantly noticeable and very likeable aspect of the Venere's performance is the agility that it possesses. The work that has gone into the midbass driver has resulted in a speaker that is able to stay on top ▶

DETAILS

PRODUCT

Sonus faber Venere 1.5

ORIGIN

Italy

TYPE

Standmount loudspeaker

WEIGHT

6kg (each)

DIMENSIONS

(WxHxD)
206 x 394 x 300mm

FEATURES

- HF drive unit: 29mm high-definition precoated fabric dome with no ferrofluid
- Bass/mid-drive unit: 1x 150mm driver – mid woofer free compression basket design and Curv cone
- Quoted nominal impedance: 6ohms
- Choice of black and white lacquers and optional wood finish

DISTRIBUTOR

Absolute Sounds

TELEPHONE

020 89713909

WEBSITE

sonusfaber.com



Q&A

Paolo Tezzon
R&D manager



ES: The styling of the Venere range is much more contemporary than some other Sonus faber models – is this deliberate?

PT: It is a deliberate choice. Venere was designed to catch the interest of new customers, so we knew we had to create a more universal and easy to understand object that can fit well in contemporary environments. We started with Sonus faber's recognised design language and simplified it without losing our identity.

Sonus faber designs have tended towards being rear ported, what was the thinking behind changing to front porting on the Veneres?

It was our intention to make the Venere line a little more 'user friendly' than other Sonus faber speakers, and front-mounted reflex ports allow the end user to place the speakers closer to the back wall than is possible with rear-facing ports. It is also a choice linked to the sonic character we wanted to deliver with the Venere speakers: we wanted them to sound vibrant and entertaining, with superbly engaging bass, and a front-reflex design better allows us to achieve this kind of sound.

With a choice of black and white lacquers available, are other colours or limited edition finishes also under consideration?

There is also a more traditional walnut wood veneer finish available across the entire Venere line.

During the development of the range, did Sonus faber find any electronics that you felt were a specifically good match for the Venere's characteristics?

During the development of Venere, we used almost every amp available from the Fine Sounds Group (of which Sonus faber is a part), from relatively low-power, affordable models to more expensive, high-power designs. Like all good speakers, the Veneres require partners of a suitably high quality to sound their best, but equally, these are not difficult speakers to drive and relatively modest amps can deliver excellent results.

IN SIGHT



- 1 29mm silk dome tweeter
- 2 Biwireable three way speaker terminals
- 3 150mm 'Curv' mid bass driver

of material pretty much regardless of speed and ferocity. The Venere keeps the same clean and ordered presentation even as the tempo rises and never loses the sense of control and cohesion that it displays with more relaxed material.

Some of this more rapid and bass-driven material does show up a slight weakness in the Venere shared with some other speakers of this size. The absolute bass extension of the Sonus faber is pretty good for a relatively compact speaker, but there is a genuine sense that it has been achieved at the expense of some of the lower midrange energy, which can seem slightly recessed by comparison. This is never pronounced enough to really detract from the enjoyment of the performance, but it is something with material that is dependent on this part of the frequency response.

Substituting an Audio Analogue Verdi Cento integrated amplifier for the SuperNait yields a bigger surprise than I was expecting in that although the presentation of the two amplifiers is very different, the overall presentation of the Venere is not affected to anything like the degree that I originally anticipated. The slightly fuller presentation of the Audio Analogue is reflected in the performance to an extent, but the way that the Venere goes about making music is not seriously altered. Connecting a studiously neutral Cambridge Audio 851A yields similar results.

This is an interesting ability and means that the Venere really needs to be auditioned with reasonable thoroughness to ensure that you like what you hear. It would not be right to say that this is a source-agnostic

speaker – it is certainly revealing enough to show up limitations in partnering equipment – but it has a very definite presentation that is not easily 'tuned' further up the signal path. If you like what it does, it will go about doing it without being unduly affected by the rest of the system around it.

Conclusion

After some time in the company of the baby Sonus faber, I have to say that I like what it does. This is a speaker that manages to look and feel special in a way that we expect a Sonus faber should, but more importantly delivers a performance that has long-term listening pleasure down to a fine art. It isn't perfect – the matching stand is expensive and there are speakers at the same price point with slightly more even low-end response, but neither of these issues are the end of the world. The Venere 1.5 delivers on the basic promise. This is a speaker with a real-world price tag that delivers a little slice of the magic the Sonus faber marque is capable of ●

HOW IT COMPARES

The Venere 1.5 would've made an interesting addition to the recent standmount group test (May 2013) of speakers at this price point. The smooth, detailed and distinctive presentation would have stood it in good stead against the competition and few of those six speakers can match the Venere's controlled, but detailed top end and forgiving manner with poorer recordings. Perhaps, the closest match is fellow Italian, Opera's Mezze which has some of the same engaging control and impressive soundstaging. The Opera is not as handsome as the Venere and neither does it feel as solidly built, but it is £100 cheaper and less choosy about stands.

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY



LIKE: Detailed, refined sound, elegant looks and solid build

VALUE FOR MONEY



DISLIKE: Stand is pricey, slight lack of lower midrange

BUILD QUALITY



WE SAY: An affordable way into Sonus faber ownership that delivers much of what it is so well regarded for

EASE OF USE



OVERALL

