

# hi-finews

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## PREMIER PRO-JECT

Exclusive review of the Xtension turntable

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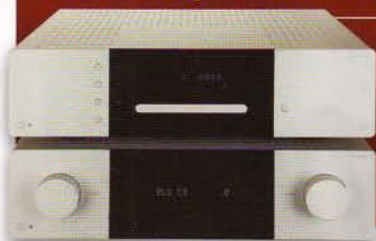
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Sophia 2 loudspeakers

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# Sophia, so good

**WILSON AUDIO SOPHIA 2** (£14,995)

It may lack some of the user-flexibility of the WATT/Puppy but the Sophia 2 could well be Wilson's trump card

hi-finews  
EDITOR'S  
CHOICE



Let's talk about synergy. And not mere system synergy: honestly, when did you last get it so wrong that the amp wouldn't drive the speakers? No, I mean speaker-to-room synergy. In the nine years I've had my dedicated listening room, no speaker has matched it so perfectly and immediately as the Wilson Audio Sophia System 2.

Delicious is this irony, for no speaker manufacturer I can think of goes to such lengths to ensure that users have positioned their speakers to the millimetre as does Wilson. Admittedly, the Sophias filled a space that once contained a WATT/Puppy of almost identical dimensions, but the Sophias didn't merely feel right at home: they set up camp like the world's most guilt-free squatters.

### ALL OF A PIECE

In Series 2 form, Sophia remains true to its role: that of a less complicated, less expensive alternative to the iconic WATT/Puppy. It's only fractionally smaller, so its 1100x306x483mm (hwd) form provides no notable space savings. Rather, its main aesthetic appeal is that it's a single cabinet: smooth-sided and all of a piece. For many, then, it's prettier than the WATT/Puppy. What is lost is the means to tilt the section housing the mid and treble drivers independently of the bass.

On the other hand, you'll save £10k, enough for one luscious pre/power amp combo. It's roughly the price of the McIntosh C2200/MC2102 used for the listening sessions, but less (!) than the Transparent speaker cables. Also used were the Musical Fidelity kW DM25 CD player/DAC, the SME 30/2 with Series V arm and Koetsu Urushi cartridge, Audio Research PH5 phono stage, and Yter and Kimber interconnects.

A true three-way system, the Sophia uses a single 10in long-throw aluminium woofer. It is ported at the back, through a machined metal aperture almost wide enough to take one's fist. The only other details at the back are the large binding posts, and a smaller damping port on the upper part of the speaker's back.

For the midrange, Wilson has fitted a 7in driver, while treble is handled by a 1in inverted titanium dome

### ANY COLOUR SO LONG AS IT EXISTS

Wilson is bound by 'form-follows-function' dictum, but still has to deal with the 'wife factor', like all makers of free-standing speakers. Instead of compromising on the shape, Wilson deals with this through superb construction and finish, made palatable by what may be the best paintwork in the business. And the customer can choose any colour for which a paint can be mixed.

True story: when Dave Wilson's car sustained some damage, the local dealer's paint job proved unsatisfactory. So Dave painted the panel at Wilson Audio, to better than factory standards. Which tells you that WilsonGloss' proprietary paint and its 12-stage process from primer to clear coat, is as good as anything on wheels, the in-house facility filtering out particles '1/2 the size of an amoeba.'

For the review, Wilson supplied the Sophias in a vinous hue in-between Guado Al Tasso and Masetto. My choices exactly!



ABOVE: The Sophia 2 does not have a split crossover for bi-wiring, sporting just a single pair of 4mm terminals

## AUDIO FILE

Rear-ported floorstanding three-way loudspeaker

Made by: Wilson Audio

Supplied by: Absolute Sounds

Price: £14,995

Telephone: 0208 971 3909

Web: [www.absolutesounds.com](http://www.absolutesounds.com)

tweeter. The baffle to which they're fitted is sloped, to align their performance in the time domain. Because the Sophia 2 is a single-box speaker, the slope of the mid/treble baffle is at best a carefully-executed average; if you want greater control over the relative angle of the tweeter to the mid, or of the entire section relative to the listener, you are limited to the positioning of the speaker in terms of distance, toe-in (more of which anon) or tilting the entire enclosure a few degrees by raising the rear spikes relative to the front.

A tip I was given years ago when setting up a WATT/Puppy system applies equally to the Sophias: from the hot seat, you should just be able to see the slightest part of the inner panel on the slope-sided top section. Genius advice: the initial positioning required only one tiny adjustment, a mere centimetre of toe-out.

Whatever horror stories you may hear about driving Wilsons, these latest Sophias worked sublimely with

**'The Sophias didn't merely feel right at home: they set up camp like guilt-free squatters'**

2x100W of McIntosh valve power. A nominal 4ohm impedance specification led to the MC2102's 4ohm taps; Wilson's Peter McGrath insisted that there is a marked change when used with 8ohm taps. Thus, impedance settings and listening with or without grilles increase the fine-tuning options. This no-cost experimentation is recommended: try both.

### SOMETHING WONDERFUL

'Love at first burst' is the only way I can describe the sound of the Sophias when fed with the one song guaranteed to bring me to tears: Rodgers and Hammerstein's 'Something Wonderful'. Peggy Lee, followed by Doris Day, then Carly Simon entered the room. As the Lee and Day recordings were 'golden era' American standards, the sound shimmered. Indeed, something wonderful must have been dialled into

## LOUDSPEAKER TEST



ABOVE: The Sophia 2 uses a single 10in long-throw woofer instead of a pair of 8in drivers à la WATT/Puppy

the Sophia 2 to make it more listener- rather than critic-friendly because it managed to convey every microscopic detail, in signature Wilson fashion, while conveying a warmth that can, on occasions, elude the more expensive WATT/Puppy.

Spatially, the experience is purely Wilsonian, but only those who have partaken of a demo of Wilson speakers – whether WATT or Alexandria – can know what their breadth, depth, height and precise location of instruments can do for conveying that frisson of reality. The Sophias disappear with the grace and completeness of their dearer siblings, lacking only in the sense of scale. They truly sound like the Alexandrias', MAXXes' and WATT/Puppy's kid sister, and in that descending order, too. But I did say that they suited my room to a 'T', which I like to think of as a quarter-scale replica of the SME Music Room, so the relative scale and bass delivery applies to a space measuring 12x18ft.

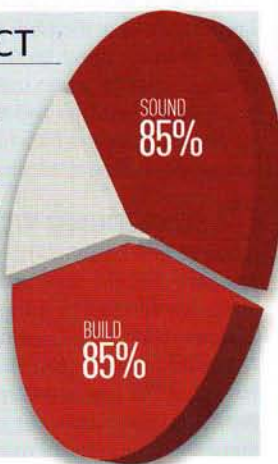
### HOT TO TROT

Sweet and warm vocals, hot and fast transients, natural harmonics (especially on Taj Mahal's acoustic guitar) – the Sophias do everything I want, but with an added bonus. While my room has never had bass issues, neither have I imagined it capable of mimicking a larger area when lower octaves are concerned.

How wrong I was: the Sophia plumbed the deepest octaves, with the best control and most natural decay I have ever experienced in that room. Weight, body, palpability – Kodo drums have never sounded so in-the-room. Sometimes, 'horses for courses' is the only rule worth believing. ☺

### HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

Preferring dearer models to those that are less-expensive is natural: we're ordained to believe that price hierarchies are sacrosanct. The Sophia 2, though, played a trump card by addressing the synergy issue – and I repeat, in my room – with faultless, natural sympathy. It is, for my needs, the finest 1m-tall-or-less/compact high-end speaker currently on the market.



## WILSON AUDIO SOPHIA 2 LOUDSPEAKER / £14,995

hi-finews  
**LAB**  
RESULTS



New tweeter retains the familiar inverted titanium dome but now incorporates design enhancements to dissipate rear-directed radiation from the diaphragm. Improved resolution and reduced treble 'grain' are claimed.

Use of a revised grille retaining pin, pioneered on the Alexandria, improves the coupling of the grille frame to the cabinet, so that there is minimum impact on sound quality if the speaker is used with its grilles in place.

Wilson's 'jitter-reducing' crossover technology is inherited from the Alexandria and MAXX 2. Wilson Audio hasn't explained this in detail but claims that it 'reduces interaction among the drivers and reduces the noise floor. The music emerges from a blacker background'.

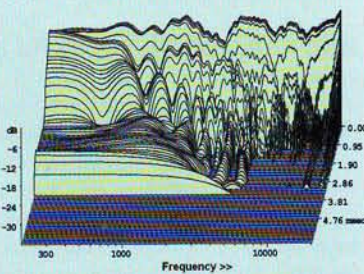
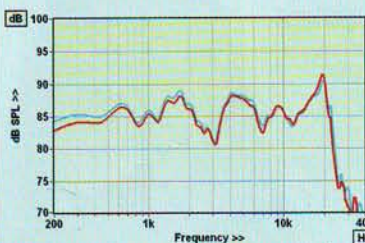
### HI-FI NEWS LAB REPORT

Wilson Audio claims an 89dB sensitivity for the Sophia 2 but our measurements indicate a pink noise figure significantly lower at 86.0dB. This is over the frequency range 300Hz-20kHz rather than our usual 200Hz-20kHz because the Sophias, at 73kg apiece, could not be raised off the floor to achieve the usual 5ms-plus time window before the arrival of the first (floor) reflection.

Wilson also claims that the Sophia is not a difficult speaker to drive and this is affirmed both by its minimum impedance modulus of 3.3ohm and its minimum EPDR (equivalent peak dissipation resistance) of 2.2ohm, which benefits from modest impedance phase angles. On-axis frequency response was measured at tweeter height and, 300Hz to 20kHz, recorded errors of  $\pm 5.5$ dB and  $\pm 4.6$ dB for the pair. These are a little on the high

side for an expensive speaker but, as the response graph [below left] shows, the overall trend is essentially flat and the errors would have been lower but for a peak just below 20kHz which appears to be due to the gravest breakup resonance of the inverted titanium tweeter dome.

Pair matching, at  $\pm 1.4$ dB across the same frequency range, could also be a little tighter, although it betters the figure we measured from the Duette. A diffraction-corrected -6dB bass frequency of 39Hz is a fine result but at the other end of the spectrum the response falls away rapidly above 20kHz. Bass distortion is well controlled at 0.1% for 90dB SPL at 100Hz and the cumulative spectral decay waterfall [see graph, below right] suggests that the stiff, weighty cabinet does a very good job of suppressing structural resonances. KH



ABOVE LEFT: The response is a little irregular for a high-end speaker but bass extension is impressive; ABOVE RIGHT: The waterfall plot reveals the benefits of Wilson's proprietary cabinet reinforcement

### HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Sensitivity (SPL at 1m for 2.83Vrms – Mean/IEC/Music)	86.8dB / 86.0dB / 86.0dB
Impedance modulus min/max (20Hz–20kHz)	3.3ohm @ 228Hz 14.1ohm @ 42Hz
Impedance phase min/max (20Hz–20kHz)	-40° @ 50Hz 30° @ 392Hz
Pair matching (300Hz–20kHz)	$\pm 1.4$ dB
LF/HF extension (-6dB ref 200Hz/10kHz)	39Hz / 24.3kHz/25.1kHz
THD 100Hz/1kHz/10kHz (for 90dB SPL at 1m)	0.1% / 0.3% / 0.3%