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# Sonus Faber Stradivari Homage

*This gorgeous statement product from Sonus Faber simply oozes style as well as radical thinking*

PRICE: £22,000 per pair CONTACT: Absolute Sounds, 58 Durham Road, London SW20 0DE ☎ 020 8971 3909 🌐 www.sonusfaber.com

Long regarded as Italy's finest, Sonus Faber is a company with all the style, performance and flair one associates with that country's famous sports car marques, applying them instead to the world of hi-fi loudspeakers.

This top-end model has been keenly awaited for a number of years, its release held up by a painstaking development and refinement process. Unusual width is its most striking feature, which certainly makes for a very room dominating appearance, rather in the manner of a large panel-type electrostatic dipole. Despite appearances however, this is a regular monopole design, the reason for the width being to provide an 'artificial wall' to load and control the midrange and treble radiation.

Viewed from above, the shape forms a wide ellipse, 65x25cm at the top, and it stands 138cm tall. It's beautifully presented and finished, made up of several contrasting sections and finishes. The core is constructed from a succession of horizontal strips of a lustrous grain-oriented 'crimson' real wood veneer, beautifully laid and deep-gloss lacquered. (A graphite finish option is available at extra cost.) The black central portion of the front, 29cm wide, accommodates the four drive units, and is covered by the clever transparent 'elastic band' grille. The outside edges are completed by shaped, rounded and tapered sections, wider at top and bottom than in the middle, finished in deep piano black lacquer.

The enclosure is mounted on a large, thick and heavy black steel plate, adding plenty of mass and creating a large and totally stable footprint. Chunky 8mm spikes floor-couple each speaker's very considerable 75kg weight, and can be adjusted for best image focus at the listening zone.

This a three-way design, using two bass drivers with 260mm frames and 190mm alloy cones, plus a 150mm midrange unit with 100mm loaded plastic cone, and a 33mm annular 'ring radiator' tweeter. The internal wiring and network use suitably exotic components, the crossover itself operating at 300Hz and 4kHz, and fed from a single terminal pair. Both bass and midrange drivers are separately enclosed and ported at the rear, while the mid/treble section of the front baffle is mechanically isolated from the main bass enclosure.

Our far-field averaged measurement gave a generous sensitivity of 91-92dB, although this is partly a consequence of an impedance that falls to a low 2.5 ohms around 750Hz. An

amp with good current reserves is therefore to be preferred, and valve amps might not make a good match. The in-room measurements look rather impressive, especially across the broad midband, where the whole zone from 70Hz up to 2.5kHz is remarkably flat and smooth. A modest presence notch at 3-4kHz (close to the crossover) should ensure the speaker avoids sounding aggressive, while the treble proper is again smooth and well judged. The bass end also looks well aligned, if a little strong below 60Hz in our 4.3x2.6x5.5m room. A bigger room might produce better results.

## SOUND QUALITY

Happily, that mild low-bass excess by no means spoiled the delicious music making of this superb speaker. Indeed, if anything it's a positive, adding impressive weight and scale without any extra thickening, largely because the bass is qualitatively taut and free from overhang, with fine tonal discrimination.

Apart from being installed by a couple from Pinewood Music (a dealer experienced in products from UK distributor Absolute Sounds), who knew how to do so with optimum sonic performance and zero enclosure damage, the Stradivari didn't

**“The Stradivari shows superb refinement and delicacy right across the audio band.”**

receive any special treatment. All too often, makers or distributors of exotic components insist on supplying complete systems, with the avowed intention of showing a component at its best. The consequence tends to create more confusion than enlightenment.

On this occasion no special amps, sources or cables were brought along, so the speakers were merely connected to our reference Naim NAC552/NAP500 amps, Naim CDS3 and Burmester 001 CD players, a Linn/Rega hybrid record player, Magnum Dynalab tuner and VertexAQ and Naim cabling. The results were very special indeed – all the more so because the rest of the system was entirely familiar.

The first impression one gets is of a mild degree of understatement in the way this speaker goes about its business. That underlying character remains, but is quickly followed by the realisation that what one is hearing is an almost complete lack of 'nasties', with a balance and room drive that must be very close to the ideal.

A sense of rightness and order permeates the entire listening experience, as everything sounding properly in place – tonality, dynamic structures and stereo perspectives. And if the overall sound is a little laid back and restrained, that is almost certainly the sort of presentation that the overwhelming majority prefer. And it means you can wind up the volume as high as you like, and the speaker just gets louder, without tending to become aggressive. It's maybe not the obvious choice for hard driving rock and dance material, but classical and acoustic music shows its delicacy, sweetness and fine tonality to best advantage.

Cabinet coloration is clearly very low indeed, probably because the irregular shape and curved front panel successfully suppress standing waves, and in consequence there's virtually no 'boxiness'. Remarkably perhaps in view of the shape, the sound has great transparency, and stereo depth perspectives are very convincing, though the focus of specific instruments could perhaps be sharper. The sound distribution or dispersion of a loudspeaker has a major impact on the listening experience, and the Stradivari's shape creates a distribution pattern that's not only probably unique, but also one that steers a happy course between the opposite extremes.

Narrow speakers with very wide radiation include more of the listening room and help create an illusion of bringing the musicians into the room; while more directional designs like horns and dipole panels give a precise view onto the recording itself. Neither one nor the other, the Stradivari is perhaps the ideal compromise between the two.

Compromise is at the heart of loudspeaker design, and the specific choices made by the individual designer are even more crucial in a money-no-object design such as this. No design illustrates this better than the Stradivari Homage, which shows superb refinement and delicacy right across the audio band and through a very wide dynamic range. No one design will appeal equally to every listener, and this speaker may well be a little too gentle and laid back for some tastes. But that is also perhaps its greatest strength, as it delivers music with great subtlety and delicacy, without ever seeming to try too hard. **HFC**

*Paul Messenger*