

Hi-Fi Choice

P R E S E N T S

THE COLLECTION - 2010 -

A CELEBRATION OF THE WORLD'S FINEST HI-FI

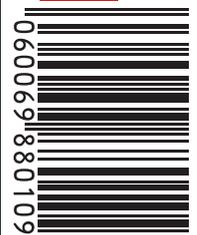


Hi-Fi Choice

THE COLLECTION 2010

techradar.com

THE COLLECTION 2010
Future
MEDIA WITH PASSION £4.99



09

www.hifichoice.co.uk

[AUTUMN/WINTER 2010 £4.99]



Wilson Audio

SASHA

Wilson replaces the iconic WATT/Puppy with a thoroughly rethought replacement

Price £28,046 **Contact** Absolute Sounds ☉ 020 8971 3909 ☉ www.wilsonaudio.com

The Sasha is Wilson's successor to the WATT/Puppy, surely the biggest selling sub-\$10,000 loudspeaker in history. To the untutored eye, the Sasha looks like the next version of the Puppy. The reason for the new name is that Wilson wanted to show that this new model is a new speaker, one that shares its brief with its predecessor, but not its means. No major components are shared across both platforms.

The basic architecture of the Sasha is carried across from its predecessor. The main part of the system is the compact two-way speaker whose shape is reminiscent of a truncated pyramid, that in its original pre-Sasha days was known as the Wilson Audio Tiny Tot (WATT). Its remit was the upper bass, midrange and treble. It was originally designed as a compact loudspeaker for use in recording studio control rooms. Out of the studio it was normally coupled with the dedicated Puppy woofer – a moderately large dedicated bass enclosure, conceptually similar to a passive subwoofer, whose motive power came from two 200mm drivers. One difference is that the top section of the Sasha is no longer intended for use on its own. Indeed, the crossover is now relegated to a sealed-off space within the bass enclosure. The top section can be adjusted to allow the phase integration of the two sections to be fine-tuned, however.

The two Sasha enclosures are completely new. The top section is built from a new cellulose/phenolic composite, and comparable (not identical) changes have been made to the head unit. Wilson has completely redesigned the fine details of both enclosures: they have roughly the same shape as before, but the internal volume of both sections has grown a little and the new system has a slightly more extended LF bandwidth (by 2Hz). The drivers have also evolved, and the Sasha incorporates both the 178mm paper/carbon-fibre composite cone midrange driver and the Focal-built 25.4mm inverted titanium dome similar to those specified for the MAXX Series 3. The two bass drivers have new motor and magnet assemblies, improving their power/weight ratio and bass dynamics. Crossover networks have also been reworked.

The listening for this test was carried out at Absolute Sounds, the importer, using Krell 202 and 302 amplification – the latter the predecessor of the 302e. Krell is one of the few amplifiers guaranteed not to balk at the kind of ball-crushing loading imposed by the Wilson. The source for the occasion was the Metronome Technologie Kalista Reference CD player.

SOUND QUALITY

Some features of the Sasha on audition are blindingly obvious, even to a humble hi-fi reviewer. First, it is truly a high-performance loudspeaker, one that does less to reduce the scale and structure of recorded music than almost any other.

Second, it is completely seamless. There is no sense of listening to a collection of disparate drivers, and no audible discontinuity between the bands covered by the three drive units when set up carefully for the listening room used, and the seating position, which was about three meters forward of the speaker plane. This ability to integrate may underpin

the decision to use a Focal tweeter, but to avoid beryllium or other high-tech dome materials.

We also walked around the listening room while the music was playing, which meant listening from a much higher plane, and the only obvious effect sonically is that the sound became more distant-sounding when we were further away from the speaker end of the room. The sound held up well when not listening on the central axis between the speakers, but there was some loss of impact and compression of the lateral spread of the stereo image when listening from well off to one side. Not to have behaved as described would have meant rewriting the laws of physics, so no surprises here.

"Stereo imagery and musical dynamics are particularly well-expressed"

Many other facets of the sound impressed us. Stereo imagery and musical dynamics are particularly well expressed, for example. But, most of all, we were captivated by the way the sound scaled to suit the music in use at the time, and by the way it coped flawlessly, no matter how difficult the discs had previously proved to be to reproduce successfully. It worked beautifully, with superb imagery and the unmistakable sense of a living, breathing acoustic with some accompanied songs (for mezzo soprano and piano) the Brahms *Alto Rhapsody*, and it made a devastatingly authoritative and compellingly 'grippy' sound with Schoenberg (*Gurrelieder*) and Messiaen (*Turangalila*).

We have seen a rather fatuous executive summary of a review published elsewhere in Europe which suggested that the Sasha is an example of a trend for Americans to hear what Europeans already knew. If this was true, other manufacturers got there first, most obviously (in its own different way), Magico.

We will concede there is nothing about the Sasha to suggest it was designed to deliver a typically overcooked US-style bass, or to suit the thin-wall listening rooms common on the West Coast of the USA. So, to this extent, and because it is an unusually refined loudspeaker, maybe it has a touch of Europe about it. But we are hard-pushed to think of any European loudspeaker that could survive a well-informed head-to-head with this American. #



Alvin Gold