

Wilson Audio Alexx V floorstanding loudspeakers

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Damn those Romans! Whenever you see the capital letter 'V' after a name, you think it's a suffix, denoting 'the fifth'. It summons up the 'band of brothers' speech from Shakespeare's *Henry V*, the Saturn V rocket that put men on the moon in 1969, the Supermarine Spitfire Mk V, and so on. So, naturally, seeing the name 'Alexx V', you expect the Wilson Audio floorstanding titan to be the fifth version of the loudspeaker design. And you expect wrong; the 'V' stands for 'V-Material', so it's pronounced 'Alexx Vee' not 'Alexx Five'. I'm not admonishing anyone here but writing it down like this might be the only way I can push thinking of it as 'Alexx Five' out of my brain.

As you can probably guess by the name pointing to V-Material, a new proprietary formulation joins the already secret vibration-isolating 'X-Material' used throughout Wilson Audio enclosures and the more naturally vibration-transmissive – but equally proprietary – 'S-Material' used almost exclusively in the company's front baffles. The new V-Material is used in the interfaces between enclosures to better absorb vibration. Most notably, the new material is used in the top panel of the bass cabinet, to limit the vibration from that large, air-moving box from activating vibration or resonance in the gantry-mounted upper enclosures for midrange and treble. It's also used in the new footers, that are supplied as standard on the Alexx V and are available for other loudspeakers in the range as the optional 'Acoustic Diode'. V-Material is also core to the new range of Pedestal footers designed for electronics.

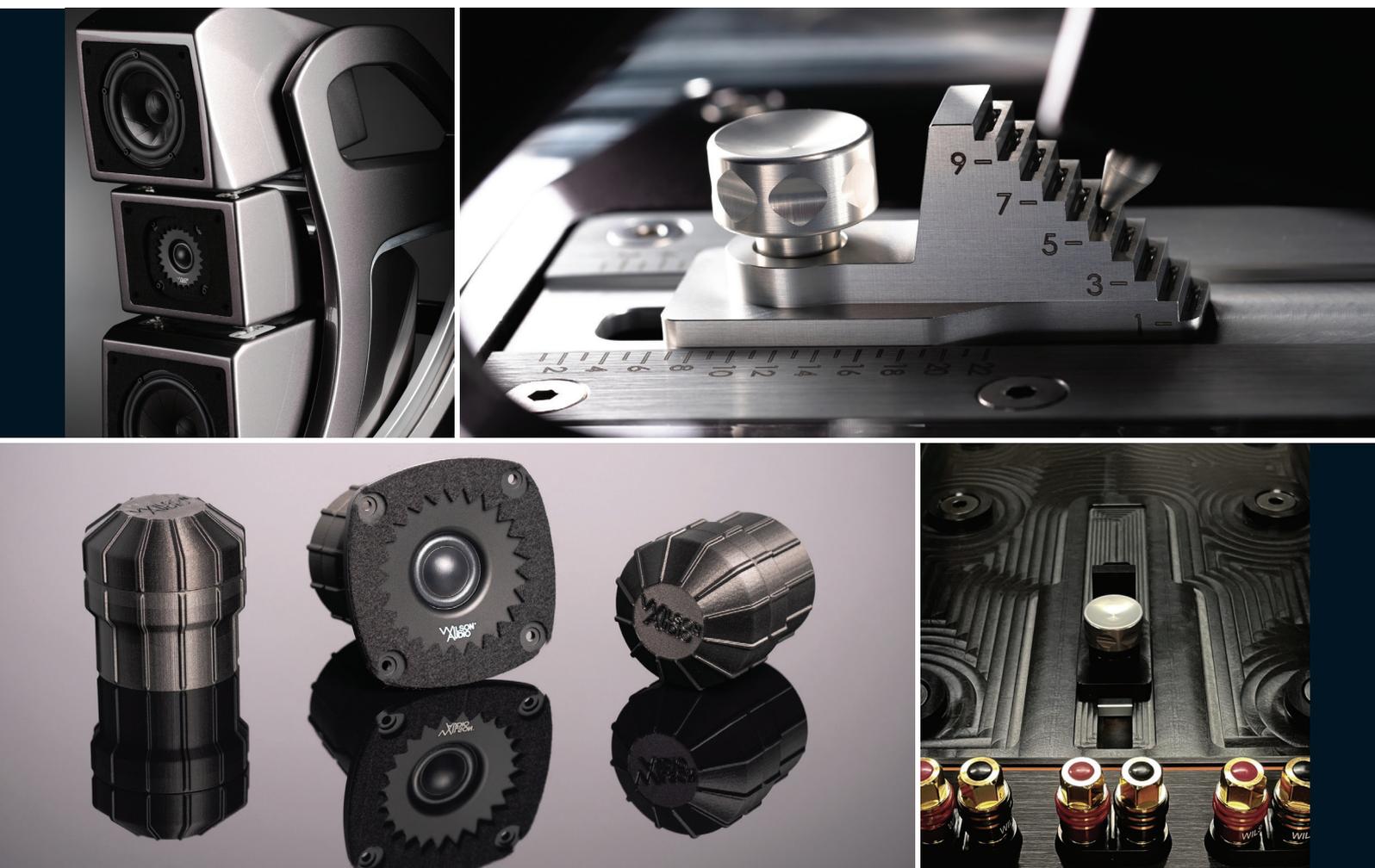
It's not just good, it's Austenitic!

Incidentally, both the Acoustic Diodes and the Pedestal footers use V-Material with Austenitic Stainless Steel. This is a 'face-centred cubic' steel alloy that is used in medical, automotive, and aerospace because it's exceptionally resistant to corrosion, very strong and yet formable, and – because it can't be hardened by heat treatment – extremely heat resistant. And the reason I mention all this is nothing whatsoever to do with 'Austenitic' being named after an English metallurgist with the delightfully Victorian name of 'Sir William Chandler Roberts-Austin' who was Assayer to the Royal Mint, and who rocked some exceptionally good





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» 'mutton chops' facial hair. Nope... it's all about the steel for me, honest.

When it comes to the meaty bits of the Alexx V, everything changes. Except for the wholly new tweeter, all the drive units have been seen before in other Wilson Audio loudspeakers, although none have been used in previous Alexx models. There's nothing wrong with this; it represents a coming together of disparate threads in Wilson Audio designs.

The tweeter, however, is new for the Alexx V. The Convergent Synergy Carbon (CSC) tweeter builds on the previous Convergent Synergy motor while featuring a unique rear-wave housing (above). This tweeter also benefits from the company's expansion into 3D printing as the carbon-fibre design is manufactured in-house. This new tweeter design is claimed to produce even more linear high-frequencies than its predecessors.

I am reluctant to gloss over the changes to the other loudspeaker drivers just because they appeared in other designs. Take the 7" midrange driver, for example. Yes, if you follow Wilson Audio designs closely, you'll notice that this is the same 'QuadraMag' design first used in the Chronosonic XVX. But, that's worth restating. This driver uses an Alnico magnet (aluminium, nickel and cobalt) in place of rare-earth metals. Alnico was the magnetic material of choice for some of the finest loudspeaker drivers ever made from the 1930s until the mid 1970s. It has seen something of a comeback of late as people discovered that it wasn't just that they are less brittle than rare-earth magnets; they sound damn good too!

Similarly, the in-house designed and manufactured AudioCapX-WA capacitors (also first seen in the Chronosonic XVX and more recently the SabrinaX) are used in the crossover of the Alexx V. »



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» Perhaps the most visible change between the original Alexx and this new second iteration is the use of an open-architecture gantry, as used in the WAMM Master Chronosonic and Chronosonic XVX. Perhaps surprisingly, the new open side panels of the Alexx V are more rigid than the solid gantry of the previous Alexx. They also minimise pressure build-up behind the upper mid and treble enclosures, and – of course – make installation and adjustment considerably easier.

I see the light!

A useful tool for installers that will likely stay in place long after the process is finished is the new Coolfall Sono 1 lighting solution. A cross-brace at the rear of the gantry is illuminated, which makes module set-up and time-alignment fine-tuning a little easier. It also looks the part; it's like rim-lighting your loudspeakers! And just as other aspects of Wilson Audio design filter up and down the line, I expect this to be seen in later iterations of Wilson's higher-end models.

Light show notwithstanding, installation shouldn't be a problem, because you shouldn't be involved in the installation process! This isn't because it's some sort of dark art, but instead it's a precise application of positioning and micrometer adjustment of midrange and treble cabinets within the upper gantry that is best done by trained experts. Installation is more predictable and repeatable as a result. In fact, the only real downside for installers that I can see is because those gantries are now open, it's the installer equivalent of 'show your working'. If you do a sloppy job of dressing cables, it's now on show for all to see.

It also means that the Alexx V can fit into some surprisingly small spaces, as the time-alignment of the drivers allows for relatively near-field listening. OK, let's be honest, a pair of loudspeakers that stand as tall as Scarlett Johansson are not going to disappear in a tiny room. Also, in any such room, a full-range loudspeaker is an exercise in bass management. But, unlike many similarly specified loudspeakers, the Alexx V's ability to be adjusted to the listener's position makes them more likely than most to be sonically acceptable in far smaller spaces than you might first imagine.

The WASP (Wilson Audio Set-up Procedure) finds the ideal position for loudspeakers in a room, and that spot does not change as the loudspeakers increase in size. The footprint of the Alexx V is some eight centimetres deeper than the new Alexia V, but notionally if an Alexia V fits comfortably in room, an Alexx V might also be possible.

Sense and sensitivity

A loudspeaker like the Wilson Audio Alexx V is notionally easy to drive. A rated sensitivity of 92dB and nominal impedance of four ohms means – from a surface reading of the specs at least – the loudspeaker seems as if it could be driven with almost any amplifier on the market today. However, the loudspeaker's impedance plot drops to two ohms at 250Hz, and that means it needs some power behind the throne. It doesn't automatically mean a beefy solid-state amplifier. Even if many Wilson loudspeakers today are demonstrated in the company of D'Agostino solid-state amps, dCS digital electronics, Transparent Audio cables and Artesania equipment supports, that doesn't make such systems mandatory for the Alexx V; I used them with the larger Karan Acoustics Master Collection amplifiers, but I've also heard them (and heard of them) working well with VTL, Robert Koda, Audio Research, Vitus and more.

Part of the reason I mention so many amp names is that one of the big changes to have happened to Wilson Audio loudspeakers is they have become far more amplifier-supportive than previous iterations. You get the feeling of more of a collaboration between amplifier and loudspeaker, rather than the loudspeaker exposing the limitations of the amplifier or imposing its signature on the system. That's not to say the Alexx V is somehow colourless or that previous editions exhibited some form of coloration.

In all cases, the Alexx V has common elements of a sublime image size and expansiveness coupled with a seemingly endless ability to be driven as hard as your ears or your amps can take. This might read like I'm embracing my inner caveman, but that unburstability is not just there for playing loud, it's for playing with full-thickness dynamic range at any listening level. That's an exceptionally rare achievement in 'cone-and-dome' loudspeakers and something more akin to electrostatic loudspeakers, but without their inherent dynamic limitations imposed on the sound. I've heard this a couple of times before and it was in the humbling experience felt from the WAMM Master Chronosonic and Chronosonic XVX.

Play something powerfully dynamic – the 'Ode to Joy' from Beethoven's Ninth symphony for example – and it can fall apart when played too loud or too quiet. But not here; the scale doesn't change, the tonality remains constant. Played quiet, it doesn't sound like two-thirds of an orchestra, a smaller orchestra, an orchestra playing *pianissimo* or one that's far away; it's the full orchestra, just quieter. And that's remarkable. »

EQUIPMENT REVIEW

Wilson Audio Alexx V



» That's just the jumping off point for this loudspeaker. The staging is impressive too. Impressive not simply in size, scale and transparency; it's the sort of sound that's impressive in tone and that elusive sense of realism that so few loudspeakers achieve in the real world.

And once more, the loudspeaker has that 'left me speechless' property that the Chronosonic XVX and WAMM Master Chronosonic have. Play something that is both superbly-recorded and that you know really, really well. For me, that's Joyce DiDonato [*Stella Di Napoli*, Erato], Duke Ellington/Ray Brown's [*This One's For Blanton!*, Pablo], Lana Del Rey [*Norman F***ing Rockwell*, Polydor] and –guilty pleasure time – Joe Sample, Ray Brown (again) and Shelly Manne [*The Three*, Inner City]. Each album has been played hundreds or even thousands of times by me to assess equipment, and each album sounded shiny and new like the first time I heard them.

It's all about balance

There is a sense of balance to the sound of the Alexx V that makes that renewal possible. Everything is in good order and equally so. The tonal balance is intrinsically 'right', expressive and articulate from the deepest bass to the highest treble. The dynamic range is nothing short of thrilling, even to the point of pressure-loading the room with every bass drum beat and the combination of macro and micro-dynamics (as in the big scale loud-to-soft movements of the music and its ability to resolve tiny details in the mix while doing so) are little short of astounding. Stereo staging is also an elegant balance of being extremely big

and impressive and yet unobtrusive; this sounds like an oxymoron until you hear it. It's clean, fast, expressive and supremely detailed. It also keeps good time; while perhaps a secondary concern when compared to some of the more rhythm-obsessed 'Brit-Fi' boxes, the Alexx V has a more ordered sense of rhythm and greater temporal drive than its predecessor!

V for Victory!

Perhaps the lone concession in the Alexx V sound is the change in tonal balance from the previous Alexx from that new tweeter, but it brings the design more in line with current Wilson designs. The tweeter, however, is also the most noticeable difference between the Alexx V and the really big guns in the Wilson Audio arsenal; the tweeter is effortless and resolving by normal standards, but no match for the extraordinary levels of detail retrieval from the Chronosonic XVX. I don't see that as a downside; if anything it's a victory given the price differential.

The Alexx V is an important loudspeaker for Wilson Audio as it the 'realistic' step up for owners of Alexias and even owners of Sashas. Beyond the Alexx V, the sheer physical size of the loudspeaker means it demands a larger, ideally dedicated, listening room. The footprint of the Alexx V means it can be almost a straight swap for the Sasha and Alexia. But to be a worthy contender for that upgrade market, it needs to deliver the goods and represent a substantial improvement over both of these loudspeakers... and the Alexx it replaces. Fortunately for Wilson Audio, it does that brilliantly. In fact, it's a baby Chronosonic XVX! +

Technical specifications

Type Four-way, five-driver dynamic loudspeaker

Driver complement One 320mm woofer, one 270mm woofer, one 180mm lower midrange, one 150mm upper midrange, one 25mm tweeter

Loading XLF port, front- or rear-firing (woofer); rear vented (lower-midrange module); rear vented (upper-midrange module)

Frequency response 20Hz–32kHz ±3dB

Sensitivity 92dB/1W/1m at 1kHz

Nominal impedance 4 ohms, 2.0 ohms minimum at 250Hz

Minimum amplifier power 50Wpc

Dimensions (W×H×D) 40 × 161 × 71cm

Weight 227kg per speaker

Price £149,998 per pair (standard colours; upgrade, custom, and premium colours at additional charge)

Manufacturer Wilson Audio Specialties

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