

Spendor D7

by Jason Kennedy

If you solely looked at the tweeters on a cross section of loudspeakers, very few would be easy to identify. The vast majority are built by a small number of companies, and as a result there is a good deal of homogeneity in this fundamental part of a loudspeaker, even though the end results sound quite obviously different from one another. This is not the case with Spendor's latest model, the D7. It features a perforated metal plate over the tweeter and looks very different indeed. There have been plenty of tweeters with wire mesh protectors on and some (like the PMC fact.8) use a perforated metal plate, but none have ever looked so dense. How, you have to wonder does enough treble energy get through it?

The microfoil acoustic lens (as Spendor describes it) does a number of jobs some of which are familiar. The central solid spot is a diffraction plate that equalises phase and frequency response; similar things can be seen on a number of tweeters, but they're usually held in place by bars. What is unusual here is that the foil also balances the pressure on either side of the tweeter diaphragm or dome. Tweeters are usually quite restricted in terms of space behind the dome and completely open in front, so what the foil does is help to equalise the mechanical impedance seen by the driver on either side. Bowers & Wilkins addresses this issue with a damped tube behind the drive unit, but Spendor's approach is the most radical I've seen so far. Apparently it took ages to get right, which is hardly surprising given that they were breaking new ground, going where no hi-fi manufacturer had gone before. As well as the pressure equalisation the foil also acts as a lens to focus the treble and as a diffraction element to enhance dispersion, all from a piece of metal that's less than a ▶



▶ millimetre thick. The dome behind it is a textile type with a wide surround that Spendor says is flat to 20kHz in this loudspeaker.

While the tweeter is the most obvious thing about the D7, it also has a number of important features that should also be noted. The midrange driver for instance benefits from Spendor's latest polymer, dubbed EP77, this has appeared on the new A6R but these are the only two models to use it thus far. The bass driver has a Kevlar composite cone and both units use 120mm cones in 170mm chassis. The MDF cabinet uses constrained layer damping at specific points to enhance rigidity, and asymmetrically placed bracing to break up standing waves. It sits on a thick MDF plinth with machined steel anchor points for the spikes. This might seem like overkill, but will provide considerably greater rigidity of support than a threaded insert screwed into MDF, which is usually the case. I don't generally like spikes but gave them a go on this occasion in order to see if they could be a genuine benefit when done this well. One obvious advantage is that you can tighten them without fear of damage, something Paul Messenger would undoubtedly appreciate, what with his massive torque and all.

At first glance the D7 appears to be sans port, but it also lacks obvious cable terminals, so a closer look is required and this reveals an opening at the bottom rear of the box that conceals both these elements. The terminals are a single pair and the port is Spendor's twin-venturi design; its fifth generation linear flow port that was inspired by the diffusers on F1 cars. Spendor is of the opinion that port turbulence is a source of midrange distortion, so it designed the twin-venturi to minimise this with a low Q acoustic output and very low phase shift. My sample was finished in Spendor Dark; this is a real wood veneer with a dark stain and a rich piano gloss surface. In the evening it looks almost black but in daylight you can see the figuring – it's pretty slick.

Installing the D7 in place of the PMC fact.8 – which works extremely well in my system/room – was always going to make life tough for the Spendor. But it's high sensitivity gave it a leg up and, while it couldn't deliver the same sense of space as the PMC, it made a good argument for its case. The bass has a solidity that is very appealing, thanks to excellent extension and a cabinet that is unusually inert. Its midrange is more polished than the fact.8; it doesn't have that speaker's enthusiasm but it is extremely revealing and equally importantly, it's rhythmically secure. Putting on the well recorded vibes of the Kairos4tet revealed the visceral side of their performance rather effectively and reminded me that I had heard the D7 in a rather different situation a few months earlier.

That was during a visit to the Chord Company where they demonstrated the remarkable Tuned ARAY cables using the D7s on the end of some unusual German amplifiers, a Naim DAC and a Sony CD player as a transport. It was a convincing demo for Tuned ARAY and made me realise just how coherent and timely the D7 is. It seems to like playing at higher levels and its high degree



of transparency allied to very low colouration mean that you can hear things like cable differences with no effort whatsoever. It also proved just how much power they can take, way more than I would usually throw at a speaker and certainly more than my Valvet A3.5 monoblocks can muster. They are only 50 watt class A devices after all. The result that my amps induced with the Spendors was more in the tuneful, fine detailed and tonally deep vein. This speaker is very clean and precise but isn't stark or analytical. Some speakers manage to sound remarkably detailed and clean by virtue of a rather clinical top end but this neatly sidesteps that possibility with the tweeter design. It fills in the leading edges in such an effortless fashion that all you hear are the intonations and nuances of the music, this means that lyrics are very easy to understand and tiny bells have a solidity to them that few tweeters can manage. Making treble notes into rounded, multi-faceted things is not ▶

► easy without forcing them on the listener, but that's what the D7 achieves.

In practice, it brings out filigree detail and marks the difference between recordings very clearly. A D7 owner is more likely than most to become a high-res recording hoarder for this reason.

Keith Jarrett's recent release, *Somewhere*, finds him and his band in fine fettle, their ability to improvise together seemingly enhanced by the passing years. The Spendors reveal the supremacy of this trio when it comes to interplay in the live environment, they let you hear the pianist's irritating mutterings as well, but the music is far more powerful and it's easy to forgive any peccadillos. The speaker also reveals a

lot about partnering equipment, it is unerring in this respect, which is a good thing if you have the right source and amp for the desired result. Based on what I heard in the Chord dem room I could have done with a more energetic amp because the finesse of the class A Valvettes could occasionally leave the sound a little lacking in va va voom. This speaker has sufficient sensitivity but a slightly restrained sense of pace and dynamics that needs coaxing out with a more upbeat amplifier.

Having said that, if you are after a rich tonality, fine detail and precise but natural acoustics then a class A amplifier is the tool for the job. What is obvious is that this is a seriously revealing and low distortion loudspeaker, one that shifts the Spendor name several rungs up the ladder in terms of its ability to compete on the world stage. Combine this with the phenomenal build and finish quality on offer and you have an extremely attractive speaker, one which should turn on audio enthusiasts outside of the traditionalist school that the brand has long attracted.

Most of my listening was done without spikes in place as is generally the case but it occurred to me that they might push a little more energy out of the D7. In practice this tightened up the bass so that timing was enhanced overall, the difference was marked but not transforming and on balance I preferred not having them 'nailed to the floor'. That said this was clearly what Chord Co were doing and rarely have I heard such convincing music making from an almost affordable system. The Spendor D7 is something of a chameleon; it is extremely capable and very neutral indeed, but most importantly it puts the music first. +

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Description: 2.5-way floor standing loudspeaker

Enclosure type: linear flow reflex with dynamic damping

HF drive unit: 22mm LPZ with fluid cooling

MF/LF drive unit: 180mm ep77 cone

LF drive unit: 180mm Kevlar composite cone

Sensitivity: 90dB for 1 watt at 1 metre

Crossover point: 900 Hz, 3.2 kHz

Impedance: 8 ohms nominal

Terminals: Single pair of recessed precision binding posts

Cabinet (HxWxD): 950 x 192 x 320mm (excluding spikes)

Standard finishes: black ash, cherry, light oak, dark walnut

Premium finishes: dark, white

Weight: 21 kg each

Price:

Standard finish £3,495 per pair

Premium finish £3,995 per pair

Manufacturer: Spendor Audio Systems Ltd

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