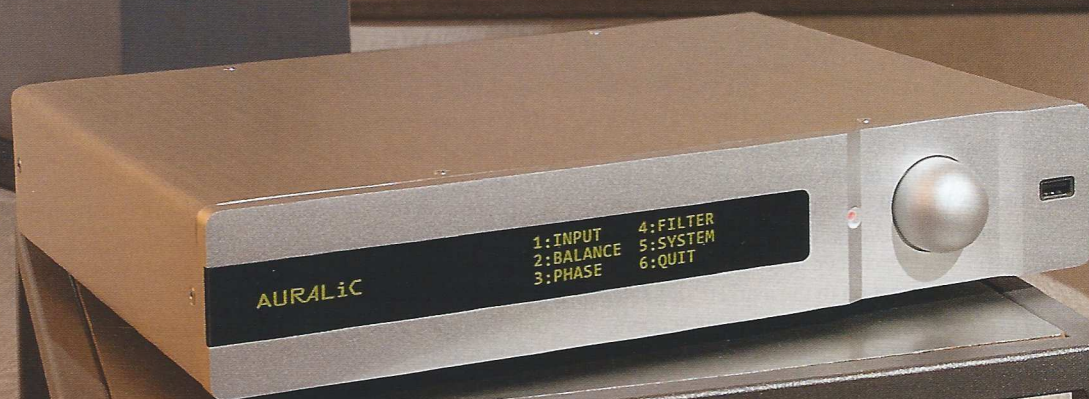


Future perfect

Big speakers need some equally chunky electronics to drive them, right? Not necessarily says **Ed Selley**



BEAUTIFUL SYSTEM AURALIC/SPENDOR

There is often something almost ritualistic about choosing and assembling the components for a hi-fi system. I make no secret of admitting that I love the whole business – the on-the-fly calculations of what is likely to work best with what and, through careful matching, achieving something that is greater than the sum of its parts. For many people, though, this is a process that sounds both needlessly complex and thoroughly undesirable. So how might you avoid it altogether?

A good way to start would be to consider a pair of speakers that are the result of careful engineering, rigorous attention to detail and that feature the sort of design aesthetic that is just as at home in the drawing room of a listed building as they are sat in a minimalist penthouse. Happily, the one-word answer to this particular set of demands is 'Spendor.' In the D9, the company has managed to condense its considerable experience into a speaker that can readily lay claim to being all things to all people.

As the largest member of the D Series, the slim D9 is also the flagship. Some of the technology from the D7 has been carried across like the distinctive 'LPZ' tweeter, which uses a thin and stiff stainless steel plate that helps the tweeter behind it to radiate energy in a more linear and effective manner. At the other end of the frequency spectrum, a unique tapered flow bass port that acts like the diffuser on a racing car allows the cabinet to move air in an extremely effective manner. The breeding is clear for all to see.

The D9, you see, is Spendor going all out. The inclusion of a dedicated midrange driver transforms it into a

COMPONENTS

AURALIC POLARIS £3,500

The Polaris is a self-contained music system with network and USB audio, onboard Tidal and Qobuz plus a selection of digital and analogue inputs, all powered by an amplifier rated at 2x 120W into 8ohm.

SPENDOR D9 £6,995

Flagship of Spendor's D line of speakers, the D9 (£8,495 as shown) is a three-way floorstander that uses Spendor's own drivers in a multi-chambered cabinet featuring an advanced bass porting system.



three-way design that stands well over a metre tall and has some serious presence to it. Some of this is down to the special high-gloss finish that this particular pair has been supplied in, but pretty much regardless of colour it is a handsome thing – for those of a more traditional outlook, it is worth pointing out that Spendor is also very good at wood finishes. There's an effortlessness to the proportions and an unadorned simplicity that makes many similarly priced rivals look like they're trying a bit hard too hard in comparison.

Hurly burly

The D9 has one last ace up its sleeve for those that desire simplicity from their system. It might be big and imposing, but it's also very well behaved. With a quoted 8ohm impedance and good sensitivity, it's not an especially demanding speaker, which means that the partnering electronics need not be a burly collection of heatsinks and toroids the size of a human head.

Even so, the disparity in size between the D9 and the Auralic Polaris that's driving it is still arresting at first glance. This compact 'wireless streaming amplifier' is built in the same casework as the Altair DAC that

proved so impressive in *HFC* 428 – no bad thing as it manages to feel beautifully solid and elegant – but also features amplification rated at 2x 120W into 8ohm. This means you get network streaming, Tidal and Qobuz Sublime support, a set of digital inputs and additional analogue connections along with the power required to drive the D9 to any volume that civilised society is likely to reasonably allow.

This system delivers on the promise of fuss-free choices and ease of use

This only tells half the story of the Auralic, though. The greatest joy of the Polaris and the rest of its family is just how good they are to use and live with. The Lightning app elegantly delivers on the promises of streamed audio, ensuring the listening experience gels nicely with the fit-and-forget theme of this system. Combined with the small footprint and unfussy placement of the D9, the result is a setup that, on paper at least, delivers on the ideal of a fuss-free selection process while

Above left: Clever engineering abounds in the D9's cabinet

Above centre: The Polaris might be small, but it is exceptionally well specified

Above right: Fit-and-forget audio never sounded so good

managing to effortlessly appear elegant and modern as it does so.

The first indication that this combination delivers rather more than just visual elegance comes from some low-level listening. The smooth electronica of Tosca's *Springer* has a wonderful, deep note in its bass line. Even at the sort of volumes you have to use when sleeping children and neighbours conspire against you, this system delivers perfect subterranean impact. The size of the D9 naturally helps in these circumstances, but even taking the considerable dimensions of this hefty cabinet into account, the effortless way in which it handles music at low volumes is outstanding.

Bring the noise

Of course, the Auralic has more than enough power in reserve to go impressively loud if you see fit. You can listen to Fink and the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra's *Berlin Sunrise* at the sort of volume that physically resonates your sternum, while throughout the Spendor is utterly imperious. The string section is a definable group of musicians with the nuance of each individual performer something that remains completely self-explanatory without ever being forced or unnatural. When



Fink's vocals begin, the weight and texture they have results in a moment of unambiguous realism. Throughout the entire performance, the impression that you've been transported to the venue in the Netherlands is palpable – an exercise in teleportation that really has to be experienced to be believed.

Ear for detail

Happily, this isn't just the preserve of high-quality live recordings. It's just as comfortable hammering its way through ZZ Top's *Heard It On The X* and discovering little details along the way that have remained previously buried. At the same time, the sheer ballistic joy of the mix is kept perfectly intact. The bass remains fabulously deep, but there's a speed and control that ensures that you're drawn into what is going on. The Polaris' decoding is a key part of this. It balances accuracy with sweetness in a way that can seem entirely straightforward right up until the point where you listen to other devices that don't appear to be capable of getting anywhere near achieving the same results.

Above all, it is fun – at times enormously so. The huge wall of guitar based noise that is *Warp Riders*



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by US metal band The Sword is an album that at times can be completely impenetrable, but here you are able to revel in this preposterously brilliant space-prog opera and appreciate that while tongue was definitely placed firmly in cheek as far as the lyrics are concerned, the quality of the musicianship and the unbridled joy

Even at low volume levels this pairing delivers perfect subterranean impact

that goes into the performance is utterly gratifying. What is perhaps more noteworthy, however, is just how unassuming the hardware is in this process. It seems ridiculous to claim that a pair of 35kg cabinets standing over a metre tall just disappear, but this is honestly what they appear to do. This is equipment that never loses sight of its role as a delivery system, offering up the message, not its own version of it.

After a few hours, I begin to realise that there is nothing I can choose to play on this setup that is going to wrongfoot it. Using the onboard Tidal implementation, I spend an

illuminating day picking through the various curated playlists and across a frenzy of tempos, genres and styles only to discover that it delivers an outstanding musical performance across the board. Somewhere in the vast expanse of recorded music, somebody has undoubtedly recorded something that might unstick this duo, but I suspect you'll have to devote an enormous amount of time to find it.

Easy rider

This is a system that whole heartedly delivers on the promise of fuss-free choices and ease of use, but it is so much more than that. The D9 is one of the most effortlessly accomplished speakers I have used, even at prices comfortably in excess of its own. Its genius is that it makes the business of accurately producing music look easy. Its technology and engineering never snag your attention, only their results. That the Polaris – a device that needs just a single shelf and mains socket to do what it does – can make the Spondor sing in the way that it does is no less impressive.

If the system matching ritual is one that leaves you cold, you should know that there is another way and much as I enjoy the process, it's hard not to be enamoured by this simpler route ●