

Compact and cavernous

Subwoofer fanatic Adam Rayner gets to grips with REL's slinky, dinky 10in bass-box, and finds it's still got enough power to wobble his windows



Like cars, subwoofers come in a variety of flavours, from cheap and utilitarian all the way up to huge and very expensive.

This sub-bass system (you don't simply call RELs 'woofers') is definitely in the posh-yet-compact Porsche bracket. The middle-sized product in the range (its siblings are the R-205 and the R-505), the R-305 is a good-looking boom-box indeed. Even the non-cognoscenti will take one look and know that this is no budget product, but rather one made to a standard, instead of solely to hit a low price-point.

Don't get me wrong, I love a cheap-as-chips massive enclosure, with a darn great 15in driver in it and the ability to push the windows out – but after a while, like getting tired of a 1.8-litre screaming turbo-nutter hatchback, one does tend to hanker

for a bit of refinement, class and sheer sexy engineering. Not to mention melodic rather than monotonous sonic performance. This is where this REL comes in...

Design and build

The R-305 is a sealed cube box with a deep piano black finish. Deep grooves in the case add to its classy look. A bulky and purposeful-looking grille sits on the front and a brushed gunmetal colour plate occupies the back.

The box has just a power switch and four sockets on it. One is the mains, one is the famous REL high-level input and the other two are phonos. As with all REL products – and it has to be said, emulated by others – the subwoofer can accept both speaker level and LFE or low-level phono inputs simultaneously. This means that you get an input for simple stereo use as well as the .1/LFE feed found on all proper home cinema systems, so that even the basso moments overlooked by soundtrack engineers will get to your sub bass system, and, moreover, it helps blend

the bass and subsonics to your main speaker's output.

In my view the best method is to use the .1/LFE phono, rather than the simple low-level phono, as that way you get independent control via the gorgeous control module mounted underneath the box. Held off the floor by four solid-metal triangular feet, the control module is connected via a computer-style connector that fixes into the brushed-metal casing by retaining bolts. The simple controls are behind a thick slab of clear glass, intended to keep fiddling to a minimum and to protect said controls, which comprise a 0-180° phase toggle switch and knobs for gain of the high-/low-level input and the .1/LFE input, as well as a crossover point selection knob.

Features

The REL looks delicious and has some really clever features hidden away in its innards that bear learning about. For one, rather than giving the 300W amp a hard time by playing the output via a

SPECIFICATIONS

ITEM	DETAILS
Rel R305 Subwoofer	
Drive units	10in long-throw design with paper pulp cone and cast chassis
Enclosure type	Sealed box with external control electronics
Frequency response	25Hz-100Hz (but plays much deeper than specification)
Onboard Power	300W RMS
Dimensions	318(w) x 368(h) x 343(d)mm
Weight	18.6kg

Connections Two gold-plated phono sockets for .1/LFE or single-channel low-level unfiltered feed, plus female gastight Neutrik 12V trigger input. Speakon' connector socket. 10m male Neutrik 'Speakon' cable supplied



Use the .1/LFE feed for independent control



The R-305's control module is kept safe by a clear glass panel

Tried&Tested... Subwoofer



HOME CINEMA
Choice
Best Buy
★
GUARANTEE

'Despite its small size it was able to pressurise the room with a massive wobble'

savage lifting EQ curve, that strains the amp in order to get it to play way below the natural resonance of the small sealed box system, it uses a 12dB-per-octave cut to the bass above the lowest frequency it'll play to, so that it sounds unstressed and melodic when playing down at 25Hz.

It also has an instantaneous power-saving feature that means no so-called Auto-on/off circuit will cut the system off during quiet bits then arrive with the front part of the explosion missing when it comes back on again. One or two professional-heritage items I have tested have had this fault.

Performance

So, it's gorgeous to look at, costs £800 and reeks of class. But how well does the REL R-305 work?

To kickstart my audition, I connected it up via the Speakon and the .1/LFE phonos as recommended by the above-average instruction manual.

My first test for any subwoofer is always to put a savage 15Hz music-content 5.1-channel CD through it to see how it copes with ultimate low-frequency extension. The Telarc recording of Holt's *Planet Suite* (*Mars* in particular) is a real pull-through to test a sub's ability to be melodic and agile at deep frequencies rather than just go 'Burr Burr!' and shake yo ass (as our colonial chums would say).

The huge notes within this track were delivered perfectly. It may be quieter at the absurd 15Hz depth but it has way more level than the B&W PV1 can do and that is rated to 16Hz. It remained in control and was very impressive indeed.

Moving on to movies, I spun up a copy of *Robots*, specifically for the bass-rich cross-town express sequence after our lead character arrives in Robot City. The REL buoyed-up my main reference Energy Veritas speakers perfectly, offering a really rich, fat underpinning that changed with the soundtrack and never seemed to place its own tonic flavour upon the material, as so many active subs tend to.

Despite its small size, it was able to pressurise the entire viewing room with a massive wobble when asked – not quite as vast as the £2,500 resident reference sub, but incredibly similar in flavour and depth. Even when playing loud already, it had some headroom left for crescendoic weighty moments, which it delivers with enormous ability. And all that's before the excellent manual's referred-to running period of some 24 hours of play time

before the suspension of that weapons-grade 10in driver loosens up a bit.

Conclusion

This mid-range REL is another welcome addition to the British brand's sub-bass stable. I would heartily recommend it for those with small space but a decent budget. Quite simply, it's killer! ■

RATINGS

Highs: Extremely compact; amazing LF extension; potent for the size
Lows: Tacky plastic badge on the grille makes it look a bit cheap

Slam	★★★★★
Depth	★★★★½
Precision	★★★★½
OVERALL	★★★★½