

# Bass is back with REL reborn

Adam Rayner checks out the first product to come out of the REL factory since it changed hands, and comes away reassured. Time to rumble...



**W**e have a fine tradition in the UK of the genius/nutter inventor. UK inventive genius is special.

Yet sometimes a tragic rot sets in when a charismatic company, headed by such a creative genius, gets bought out by a bigger firm that wants the brand name but ultimately doesn't understand the product. Soon it is common knowledge that the only versions of certain products worth having were from the previous era of manufacturer. This is rampant amongst electric guitars in particular.

So it was with mixed feelings that I learned that Richard Lord, REL's fabulously entertaining and gentle genius, was no longer to have direct design input into REL subwoofers, and that, indeed, the outfit had been sold to a big far-flung company. Part of me wishes one of my heroes the single most comfortable and spoiled-rotten retirement that any man ever deserved... and the selfish part of me

was gutted – the most profound and deep-dropping subwoofer brand in my world was plainly screwed.

I have never been more grateful to be wrong. For one, new owners Sumiko seem aware of what they have bought, and in no way are the flagship Stadium, Studio and Stentor 'ST' subs going to do anything other than continue to be made to the same manufacturing standards. Secondly, this new R-Series of subwoofers is the result of a project that was being worked out from long before Richard Lord was presented with a set of slippers.

## Design

The only trick that REL never cracked was how to make a good subwoofer cheaply. It tried with Tsunami and the smaller Q series. However, despite not being cheap, (my test sub bass system is a grand's worth) it is a lot less expensive than the resident £2.5k Stentor and yet comes close to its performance. It also brings a whole new design look to play.

A sealed box with powerful internal 500W class D amplifier and sexy control box fixed underneath, this new REL stands upon solid aluminium feet. You get a phono connection for the LFE channel, a separate phono socket for using with a non-crossed-over signal to go via the internal crossover and a Neutrik Speakon. This last takes speaker level signals from the front pair of speaker's terminals and collects all the bass the surround sound

## SPECIFICATIONS

ITEM	DETAILS
<b>REL R-505</b>	
Drive units	12in heavy-duty long-throw
Enclosure type	Sealed MDF cubic
Frequency response	<20Hz to upper roll-off
Onboard Power	500 watts RMS from onboard amp
Dimensions	382(w) x 425(h) x 419(d)mm
Weight	26.3kg

**Connections** Single Neutrik gastight Speakon connector for high level, plus one phono for 0.1 input and another phono for use with internal crossover at signal level

## RATINGS

**Highs:** Tight, controlled bass of great musicality  
**Lows:** There's a distinct risk that ornaments may fall off shelves

Slam	★★★★★
Depth	★★★★½
Precision	★★★★★
<b>OVERALL</b>	★★★★½

engineer neglects to put in the 'point one' channel. As both speaker and signal level operate simultaneously, you theoretically get the best of both worlds. REL was the first to do this and the technique is now emulated by at least one other bass-making brand.

The control box is mounted underneath, connected by a screw-in multipin, and the knobs sit behind frosted glass. You get a gain level knob for each of the levels of input, so that one's for the Speakon and one for the phono. The crossover point selection, between 25 and 100Hz, is offered on the only other knob. Other than that, there's the phase 0-180° switch.

The grille is huge – as it needs to cover a thick paper-coned driver that can leap a decent distance right out of its box – yet the 500W class D amplifier manages not to need external finnage to cool it.

Interestingly enough, according to the manual, the way the speaker driver is able to play way down past the box and the driver's own natural resonant frequency is simply ugly amounts of power. Not by adding boomy EQ boost, but by having enough juice to play the snake's belly fatness tones and then, where the tone is less profound could

# Tried&Tested... Subwoofer

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**'Like a demolition ball moving slowly, yet covered in velvet, it is inexorable'**

be overblown to use an EQ cut instead, at 12dB per octave. A sawn off shotgun follows similar reasoning.

## Performance

As well as all my favourite sequences that allow me to check out just how far down the subwoofer reaches, I like to use a wonderful chunk of simple stereo from the movie *Sneakers*. It carries this absurdly taut yet large and profound

*thrum-thump*, which really stretches the subwoofer output channel and allows you to feel to what degree the unit is pressurising your room.

As well as keeping a melodic grip on bass line material in big-assed 5.1 music recordings from Linkin Park to Sting, and holding delicious grip of atmosphere and feeling of normal bass material, this woofer can reach heavily down into the fear register. Those frequencies, that

when pressing upon your body firmly enough, literally cause disquiet in sane people. The effect is subtle but effective. Mainstream movie fans may not even be too sure why they find the film so exciting. It's in the thrum of a big ship in deep space, it's certainly in the growl of a dinosaur and from this big old beast, it comes in quantities to pull gently at your chest, if not quite as mad as the £2.5k REL Stentor.

Like a demolition ball moving slowly, yet covered in velvet, it is inexorable. The petrol tanker sequence in the original *Toy Story* was a fave of the chap who brought the R-505 round, so I opened up the old Laserdisc vault and pulled out the heavy, shiny 12in disc. It still looks pretty on my Denon LD player and

demodulated to provide a Dolby Digital soundtrack. The rears of my system didn't like it much, as when the truck arrives at the empty gas station to nearly squish the toys, it has to be one of the largest scale fly-overs in all cinema. This woofer just loved it, though - you too could have been pinned to the tarmac on your back in terror.

## Conclusion

As the first sub from the new REL organisation, the R-505 is something of a relief. Not only because it delivers a superior sub-sonic listening experience, but because it also honours the brand's lineage. It's small, cute and maybe even brilliant. My recommendation, as ever, is to buy two ■



These stumpy feet are made from solid aluminium



Use the Neutrik connector for a high level speaker connection



REL opts for a 12in driver where rivals lean towards a 10in one



REL has ramped up the styling for its 2006 range