

PRODUCT
Focus
SPEAKERS

Few high-end audio companies can match REL's adherence to the time-honored saying that if you're going to do only one thing, you'd better do it really well. Fact is, REL knows its way around a subwoofer. It builds them the old-fashioned way—heavy and impregnable and permanent—like the British Empire was once thought to be. But empires can overreach. With such a high-flying reputation at stake, it might seem a risky proposition for a prestigious company like REL to release its new T Series—a three-model collection that competes in the bare-knuckle sub-\$1k category. But that is exactly what REL has done, leaving only one important question to address: Is the new T2 a real REL?

The T2 is actually the middleweight entry of the T Series. Physically, it's a near-perfect cube. Retro-accented, it sports a piano-black lacquered-steel frame along its sides that raises the subwoofer high enough to permit the downward-firing ULT (ultra-long-throw) 8" driver to effectively launch wave after low-frequency wave. The cabinet is ported; for the sake of efficiency and tuning, it uses a forward-firing passive radiator tuned lower than the active woofer, a configuration said to improve speed and coherence. The back panel is superbly finished and sparkles with details like crosshatched heat-sinking for the built-in 200W amplifier and polished stainless-steel Allen-head screws.

The T Series continues the REL tradition of low-pass-only filtering, a choice that eliminates high-pass circuitry from the main speaker signal path and presupposes that the main speakers already produce a substantial share of the low-frequency spectrum. To keep within its price range, REL has substituted a simplified variable crossover selector for the unique dual coarse/fine settings of its elite offerings. The T retains a REL staple: The Neutrik Speakon high-level connector (from the main amplifier speaker terminals) means that the subwoofer “sees” the identical amplifier

REL T2 SUBWOOFER

Downsized in Everything but Performance

Neil Gader



signal that the main speakers are seeing—a setup that REL believes more fully integrates the sub with the main speakers. A feature unique to REL subs is the option of using the LFE input and the high-level connections simultaneously, with levels set independently.

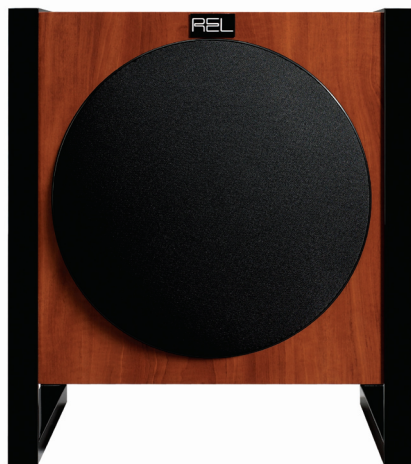
Great subwoofers are creatures of subtlety, an opinion that might shock those who've only banged heads with the boom boxes of home theater. This means the kind of uncolored bass response that seems to originate from some unfathomably dark place beneath the soundstage—barely a rumble at first, just a slightly disorienting feeling, like the unexpected weight you felt when you first

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Specs & Pricing

Drivers: 8" woofer with 10" passive radiator
Crossover: Variable, 30Hz–120Hz
Power: 200W Class AB
Dimensions: 13.2" x 14.75" x 15.5"
Weight: 33 lbs.
Price: \$798

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held a small lump of lead in your hand. Appreciating the timbral nuances of a fine subwoofer like the T2 is only as far away as the recently released Jennifer Warnes 20th Anniversary edition of *Famous Blue Raincoat*. Concentrating on the tom-tom's timbral shifts and rhythms during "Bird on a Wire," I compared the remastered disc (superior) to the earlier CD release (yuck) and the original LP (sweet) from 1987. Each imparted a completely different low-frequency personality with

differing ingredients of pitch, extension, and dynamics. Although the T2 won't throw the heavy wave of low frequency into the room that the big RELs do, it passed my own personal "goose bump" test with flying colors. It's Rutter's "Praise Ye the Lord" [*Requiem*, Reference Recordings] that gets my nod for my favorite subwoofer moment. It's virtually the last series of organ notes on the track, blowing full-tilt through every rank and then stopping dead, as if the yawning bass had been swallowed up by a sinkhole, the sound diminishing into fragments of reverberation. It's a track that can embarrass a poorly implemented design. The T2 (even at my overcooked levels) sailed through cleanly. Dynamically, it pulled back slightly and couldn't summon up the deeper, more ominous voice of the larger REL subs, but its performance could otherwise hardly be faulted.

The acid test for subwoofers, however, is integration. That is, can a single box offset from the main L/R pair become indistinguishable from them and vanish into the soundstage? The subwoofers that best accomplished this trick in

my room were an acoustic-suspension monster from ATC and more recently the REL Britannia B3. In each case, the lack of coloration and box resonances made

The T2 is, indeed, a real REL

them unidentifiable as sound sources, and the lowest frequencies seemed to couple with the main speakers like Romeo with Juliet. Even with the T2 firing out of the room's corner, electric bass lines and kick drums were reproduced with the timing to maintain a focused central image. Although the T2 rolls off a little quicker below 30Hz, it could rarely be localized as a source—a critical achievement.

Whatever you call it, don't call the T2 a REL-Lite. Built like it was conceived by a family of miniature body-builders, it handily maintains the tradition of REL subs. There's not one element aboard the tight little T that spells budget. So, in answer to our original question, the T2 is, indeed, a real REL. And that should be all you need to know. **TAS**



Subwoofer of the Year

REL T2 \$798

Beyond the fact that the T2 is compact and rock-solid to 30Hz, what NG likes most about this REL is that when he puts it in a system he's not going to hear from it again. That is, it's got the speed to keep up with almost any L/R satellite system, and an adjustability that won't give away its location in the room. Thanks in part to REL's renowned speaker-level Neutrik Speakon connectivity, the T2 gets timbre right, particularly in those transitional octaves—the sub-to-sat intersections where a range of orchestral instruments crisscross. Since main speakers are run full-range with a REL, a gut-check is required of your system before putting them into the ring with the T2. For those transducers that qualify, the addition of the T2 will deliver one helluva rewarding one-two punch.

Reviewed by NG, Issue 176

