

REL reborn

Under new transatlantic ownership, REL reinvents its entry-level range – in style!

PRODUCT REL R-305

TYPE Active subwoofer

PRICE £795

CONTACT ☎ 01656 768777 @ www.rel.net

REL's previous leader, Richard Lord, has handed over the reins to the company that was previously REL's US distributor, Sumiko. Many models remain as before, but Sumiko's main contribution to date has been to introduce new, less expensive compact subwoofers, most notably the R-range, which replaces the well-liked, but aging Q-series.

The R-305, replacing the Q-201 but capable of 12dB extra acoustic output, is the second of three R-series models. The 19kg R-305 is a true compact, with a near cubic form factor and a footprint of a little over one square foot. The cosmetics are altogether more sophisticated, featuring black gloss panels (only made possible by outsourcing enclosure construction to China) and some subtle design work that replaces the old, utilitarian

textured black Grittex with slashes of slate grey, plus some intriguing fine detailing and a natty glass cover that conceals the controls. But unlike the Q-201, there's no remote handset.

The technical design has also changed. The sealed construction of the Q-series has been retained, so no ports and no 'chuffing', and the enclosure's build is extremely solid. In contrast to the Q models, the R-series uses a stiff but lightweight 250mm carbon fibre/pulp cone that features a powerful magnet assembly to overcome the spring resistance of the trapped internal air. Motive power comes from a 300-watt ICEpower Class D amp module, housed externally below the main enclosure, with some proprietary fine tuning and limiting.

SOUND QUALITY

REL is promoting a new method of setting up systems with subwoofers, specifically for the R-series. REL's view is that, where possible, subs should be rolled into circuit where the main

speaker output dies away. With floorstanding speakers this means crossing over at around 30-35Hz, so the subwoofer is probably only in circuit for a half octave or so. Of course, smaller speakers can still use higher crossover points, and there is no reason not to switch as high as 100Hz if required (the full scope of the low pass filter on the R-305 spans from 25-100Hz). With simultaneous use of the LFE and the Neutrik input, the host system can be configured to make use of stereo (2.1) and home cinema (5.1 or greater) arrays simultaneously.

Compared to its darker-sounding predecessor in the Q range, the R-305 is faster, with less overhang; it's a more touchie-feelie result, and one that is more naturally voiced. The subwoofer barely contributes even to the bass and is limited to the sub-bass, where its character is less audible – but the extra depth and weight it delivers is not only audible, but very alluring. The other benefit is that the deep bass is more tuneful and larger in scale, with less 'pulling' of pitch at the lowest frequencies.

A major benefit is that 2.1 channel operation, using a subwoofer with a pair of main speakers, is much more transparent and sure footed than you might expect – augmented stereo is viable without significant loss of sound quality. Using two subs is still the preferred strategy, but a secondary benefit of a low crossover frequency is that there is less monoing of bass over much of the audio band.

Either way, this is a faster, more agile, deeper and louder subwoofer than the Q-201, and much better turned out – with there's no price penalty. A no-brainer, in fact. **HFC**

Alvin Gold

VERDICT

SOUND >> 88%



FEATURES >> 82%



BUILD >> 91%



VALUE >> 87%



PRO

Louder, faster and more full on, as well as being more tuneful than Q-201; simplified control system and more domestically acceptable styling and finish.

CON

No obvious problems, unless you miss the remote control (we didn't) or you prefer the more industrial appearance of the old model (some do).

CONCLUSION

This is that rarity – a subwoofer that doesn't cost a fortune, but whose design forces a reevaluation of how a sub should be designed and used. The R-305 is excellent for multichannel, but is one of the few subs transparent enough for stereo, too.

HI-FI CHOICE >> **88%**
OVERALL SCORE