

A design aimed at big bass... lots of use of the word 'pressurisation' in the blurb... **Adam Rayner** is excited by REL's new sub



HOME CINEMA
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AV INFO

PRODUCT:
High-end cinema subwoofer

POSITIONING:
Sits alongside the Gibraltar series

PEERS:
Paradigm Sub 15;
Velodyne DD15+;
Monitor Audio
Platinum PL15

Four's plenty

THE 212SE, THE newest venture from sub-bass specialist REL, is a mighty quad-driver woofer capable of making profound, structure-borne seismic lows that will flow through walls and foundations. It probably isn't fit for semi-detached suburbia, unless – like me – you have *The Best Neighbours Ever*.

Its vertically-aligned cabinet stands around 80cm high, and comes only in a shiny black finish. There are metal protector/ornament/handles on each flank, beneath a scooped-out dimple that somehow adds to the premium look of this £2,750 bass-maker. The front grille is a massive affair, held a good distance from the front baffle on shiny chromed metal pegs that fit into rubbery sockets.

The space provided is because the active 12in drivers (of which there are two) are a bit bonkers. A seriously mobile 2in cone travel is married to a metal diaphragm that has massive rigidity and a truly pistonic motion. The two drivers share 1,000W of onboard amplification. Although, as the 212SE is rated at 1,700W peak output, each needs to be able to digest 850W of grunt at full-pelt, so requires a substantial motor assembly.

The rear of the sealed sub features what looks like another of these 12in transducers, but is, in fact, a passive bass radiator (PBR). This allows the system to resonate as low as the compliance of the drivers' suspensions, rather than a ported woofer's tuned frequency. It makes for a best-of-both-worlds between ported and sealed designs. And underneath is another 12in PBR pressure-loaded to your movie-room floor by the stumpy branded feet.

Simultaneous excitement

The amp panel is typical of REL. You get low- and high-level connections (the latter uses a Neutrik Speakon socket and a supplied 10m cable), as well as an input for 'L'. The idea is to connect both high-level (to your AVR's speaker terminals) and LFE simultaneously. REL says its approach is unique, but there are other brands that agree with the logic of this. It means the 212SE is fed not only the bass material steered to the LFE channel, but also that of the front L/R stage. It will bolster two-channel music, too.

The 212SE is also compatible with REL's LongBow wireless transmission system, which is an optional extra here. It works well.

On the rear panel is a crossover control, which can be set between 30Hz and 120Hz, as well as a zero/180-degree phase switch and an always on/standby toggle. Set up is

comprehensively described in the manual although you may boggle at the implication that a full system would cost you £13,750 and feature 8,500W peak amplification.

Believe me, unless you have a huge room, one of these woofers is plenty.

Jack of all bass trades

I spun up *Gravity* (Blu-ray) with Gorgeous George and Sandra Bullock. As a qualified diver who once had a scary-air moment, this film, with its Oscar-winning sound editing, sound mixing and score, terrifies me. It majors on sound and the physics of it, but happily ignores that when it suits the filmmakers. So you get some explosions you cannot hear and yet Doppler-Effect vocals as space-suited astronauts zoom about.

The REL 212SE does deep and it does loud. Oddly, it also does subtle and it does brash, too. And sometimes it manages to do both at once. In *Gravity*, you feel Sandra Bullock's heartbeat speed up and then slow down as she fights panic while drifting off into space.

A monstrous cello note and a deep, dropping throb is used when an oxygen alarm becomes critical. The huge, vast wobble at that moment went all the way down to infrasonics and made me truly understand her fear. It was breathtaking. Later, the poor love bangs her head inside the ISS. The thud imparted by the REL was sickeningly visceral.

After a while, I tried the system playing at a more everyday level and still found it deliciously linear. The 212SE works beautifully at lower volumes, every bit as rich and effortless. Like a three-litre petrol turbo, it has a lot of vava-voom in store. A 5.1 DTS music track (Sting's *Heavy Clouds, No Rain*) showcased huge scale and a tremendous grip of the basslines. This big brute is very musical indeed.

If you truly 'get' deep bass, if you like your kit to be on show rather than hidden away and – above all – if you feel that urge for truly energetic audio, then the REL 212SE is actually good value. For this level of output you can pay a lot more. It is sumptuous to look at, beautifully made and will both frighten and impress your guests. Audition one ■

SPECIFICATIONS

DRIVE UNITS: 2 x front-firing 12in long-throw die-cast aluminium chassis drivers with 2in linear stroke of travel; 1 x rear-facing 12in passive radiator; 1 x down-facing 12in passive radiator

ENCLOSURE: Sealed

FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 21Hz at -6dB

ON-BOARD POWER: 1,000W RMS

REMOTE CONTROL: No.

DIMENSIONS (WHD): 436(w) x 816(h) x 507(d)mm

WEIGHT: 55.3kg

CONNECTIONS: Low-level stereo phono inputs; LFE input; high-level Neutrik Speakon input

FEATURES: Compatible with proprietary LongBow™ wireless signal transmission system (optional); supplied speaker-level cable with Neutrik Speakon connector

HCC VERDICT

REL 212SE

→ £2,750 → www.rel.net

→ Tel: 01656 768 777

HIGHS: Glorious looks; sumptuously deep, tight output; wireless transmission compatibility; flexible setup options

LOWS: Only available in shiny black; slightly favours slam over subtlety

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★