



Towering subwoofer with SX appeal

REL's second-generation 212 bassmaker proves to **Richard Stevenson** that the sequel can sometimes be even better than the original

AV INFO

PRODUCT: 2 x 12in, 1,000W subwoofer with dual passive radiators

POSITION: Below only REL's reference-grade No.25

PEERS: Bowers & Wilkins DB1D; Velodyne DD15+; KEF Reference 8B

REL'S ORIGINAL 212/SE was a radical design, effectively stacking a pair of subs on top of each other in a single unit. Two 12in drivers, two passive radiators tuned to achieve different sonic goodness, one very large amp and a cabinet that was likened, by my wife, to a glossy black Minion. I immediately wanted several to undertake my evil bidding, but it transpired one was pretty darn fab on its own.

The sequel is always a challenge. Building on the success of a box-office hit without destroying the magic of the original is something the cinema industry is historically bad at (I'm are looking at you, *Weekend at Bernie's II*). Yet REL has set about making the 212/SX faster, more controlled, more dynamic and with improved resolution of fine detail. And while dishing out sky-high briefs to the design team, it wanted it made slimmer and more attractive too. Less of the Minion thing, it said. Probably.

The cosmetic result is a rather more svelte on the eye yet taller offering. A little deeper, a little weightier but seemingly 'smaller' in visual impact, at least with its clothes

on. Pop off the mighty front grille and the aluminium drivers have gained REL branding and crown logos big enough to see from space.

Both drivers and the rear 12in passive radiator use a cast alloy, smooth-profile cone that feels solid enough to stop a bullet. A simple knuckle rap emits the sort of solid thunk associated with vault doors, yet the cones themselves are fairly light. Their structural integrity is enhanced by a layer of carbon fibre bonded to the rear, in the form of a sheet with seven radial ribs stretching across the back of the cone. The cone itself is terminated in a rubber roll surround that could double as the side tubes of a rigid inflatable boat, and the whole ensemble is set in a cast aluminium chassis with eight fixing bolts. The downfiring passive, meanwhile, is a flat-panel, carbon weave affair designed to propagate the deepest bass into the room effectively.

The cabinet is suitably robust MDF, with a 32mm-deep front baffle. By sheer fluke, REL happened upon an MDF sheet sourced from Australia as the supply of materials

from China dried up as that country went into COVID-19 lockdown. The Australian-crafted MDF, says REL, transpired to be denser and smoother, resulting in a better sound and giving a slicker paint finish from the outset.

Internal changes over the original include the use of REL's latest NextGen5 1,000W amp, and adjustments to an analogue filter network 30 years in the refining. Controls include independent gain for both high-level and LFE inputs, plus crossover frequency dial and phase switch.

While the material value of the enormous cabinet and four drivers look exceptional against the likes of B&W's DB1D, there is no DSP trickery here, no display, no remote control and no app.

Clear and present danger

This REL's performance is surprisingly nuanced – yet there is no lack of clout. Massive explosions: check. Stomach-churning LFE: check. Nosebleed-inducing deep notes so far above 100dB volume they will rip the mic out of your iPhone trying to measure it: check. All the stuff I have come to expect from £4,000 subs are present and correct.

Yet arguably, that bit isn't tricky. Where the 212/SX scores heavily over my own venerable Velodyne DD18+ is in its ability to seemingly fill a room with bass without overwhelming the soundstage. There is a remarkable lack of room bloom or residual LF swell to swamp your main speakers, and even cataclysmic-scale special effects are handled with a tautness and control that allows you to distinguish individual components from the LF noise.

Original Dolby Digital movies could be rumbustious in the LF department as Dolby fought to outgun DTS in those early days of DVD. The nightclub scene in *Blade* (DVD) is a prime example. Its thunderous music is designed to drown you in the scene but it can encourage room resonances that will just as easily drown you in falling plaster.

Not so (much) with the 212/SX. The bass is taut and infectious, and while super-deep, it simply didn't trigger my room into singing along. Was this simply a case of lucky positioning (mid-wall to one side of the room)? I swapped it out with one of my Velodynes and re-dialled it into the

'You can almost sense REL's amp sucking power from your wall as those 12in drivers leap back and forth'

system. This corner positioning yielded a little extra richness and warmth, but the double-height REL still managed to do its thing in a polished and sophisticated manner.

Of course, some days you just want to really let fly. With *Aquaman* in the Blu-ray player and the volume set to stun, the REL gets into its high SPL stride. You can almost sense the amplifier sucking power from your wall as those drivers leap back and forth with each LFE burst. Slamming tridents, laser fire and giant aquatic fights quite literally moved me, such was the avalanche of bass power.

Yet I'll stress again: it never lost control of the room or let the LFE output get bigger than the sum of the parts of the whole mix. Whether this is down to half of the driver complement being a lot further from the floor than usual, the down-firing passive radiator or the design of the drivers, I have no idea, but I can vouch for the system working as a whole, and working well.

SPECIFICATIONS

DRIVE UNITS: 2 x 12in front-facing CastAlloy cone drivers; 1 x 12in rear-facing CastAlloy radiator, 1 x 12in down-firing carbon weave flat-panel radiator
ENCLOSURE: Sealed with passive radiators **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 18Hz-180Hz **ONBOARD POWER (CLAIMED):** 1,000W NextGen5 amplifier
REMOTE CONTROL: No **DIMENSIONS:** 362(w) x 838(h) x 515(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 58kg

FEATURES: Phono line-level stereo input; phono LFE input, XLR LFE input/output; Neutrik high-level input/output; high/low level gain; LFE gain; crossover frequency control; phase switch; optional Acoustic Airship wireless transmission system

PARTNER WITH



MONITOR AUDIO GOLD 300: Add REL's high-end woofer to Monitor Audio's high-end – and gorgeous – Gold Series floorstanders. Priced £4,000 per pair, each features dual 8in woofers, a 2.5in midrange and pleated diaphragm HF unit, and sounds sublime.

2



1. Joining these twin front drivers are down-firing and rear-firing passive radiators

2. New aluminium plinth feet run from front to rear

Which led me to digging out Faithless' *Outrospective* and skipping to *We Come 1*; an eight-minute trance anthem with some of the cleanest ultra-deep bass anywhere in my CD collection. Using the speaker-level output from my amp into REL's Acoustic Airship lossless wireless transmitter (a £300 optional extra) made adding stereo bass a piece of cake, and the results were sublime.

There was a renewed splendour permeating the lower registers of each track, and this REL pulls off the company's long-standing trick of adding body and dimension to vocals seemingly far above its operating frequency range. A cut-to-silence in the Faithless track involves an LF roll down from several hundred Hz to as low as your system will go – 20Hz easily here. It was smooth and deep, and segued straight into a thumping bassline that had me dancing around like my living room like a loon.

Visceral and refined

At £4,200, REL's 212/SX is not a budget solution to LFE and/or deep bass with stereo music. Yet once again, the company has leveraged its specialisation in the category to produce something that's both visceral and refined. It's very special indeed. And the same can't be said about *Weekend at Bernie's II*. ■

HCC VERDICT



REL 212/SX
 → £4,200 → www.rel.net

WE SAY: The 212/SX's outrageously lairy looks are a contrast to its gloriously refined performance. This delivers precise, ultra-deep bass without bloat.