

Bigger is better?

Richard Stevenson auditions REL's S/5 SHO 12in subwoofer, wondering if it can out-perform the company's smaller, more affordable S/3 model



The design is identical to the S/3 SHO, only bigger

HAVING ONLY RECENTLY waved goodbye to the mighty REL No.25, the company's middleweight prize-fighter in Super High Output (SHO) trim looks veritably svelte by comparison. The S/5 SHO is still a serious-sized sub though, adding an inch or two to every dimension of its smaller S/3 SHO sibling that we reviewed in *HCC* #264.

While the baby brother packed in a 10in main driver, the S/5 SHO ups that to 12in and marries it to a more potent 550W amp. The result is an extension a couple of Hz lower (20Hz at -6dB) and more grunt for bigger effects. Both models feature the same down-firing 12in passive radiator, cubic good looks and luxurious gloss black or white finish. The 12in cone uses a lightweight alloy and

one-piece design to reduce moving mass while increasing driver rigidity. The result is a light, stiff and fast driver capable of punching the air with well over 100 square inches of surface area. The passive unit on the underbelly is flat, with an all-carbon construction. It doesn't move a great deal at lower volumes, giving the S/5 much of the sheer speed of a sealed-box design. Yet as you wind up the wick it gets more involved, allowing the sub to plumb the depths of bass like a 15in single-driver model.

Dialling it in

While I would have liked a balanced XLR input and maybe a remote control on a £2,000 sub, REL deems them unnecessary; get the S/5 dialled into your room correctly and you should never need to fiddle again. I've set up a lot of REL subs in the last 20 years. Get basic phase correct, play a tune with a consistent bass tone and adjust level and sub position until it all merges into one holistic soundfield. Yet the S/5 SHO proved a challenge in my room compared to its baby brother, sounding powerful but rather portly irrespective of where I placed it.

SPECIFICATIONS

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 12in continuous profile aluminium cone woofer; 1 x 12in flat, carbon-weave, passive radiator
ENCLOSURE: Sealed with passive radiator
FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED): Down to 20Hz (-6dB) **ONBOARD POWER (CLAIMED):** 550W Class D amplifier **REMOTE CONTROL:** No **DIMENSIONS:** 444(w) x 455(h) x 507(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 31.6kg

CONNECTIONS: Phono LFE input; stereo phono line-level input; Neutrik Speakon high-level input; SMA antenna connector for use with REL LongBow wireless unit

REL HQ suggested some serious running in was required. So I locked it in playing a Bob Marley megamix and told it to *Lively Up Yourself*. A week later and after some more position tweaking, all was *Jamming...*

The S/5 SHO is a bigger sub than the S/3 in every respect, sounding heftier, bolder and more fulsome. I'm not sure I could detect any real difference in its lowest frequency response, but the S/5 certainly made its LF presence felt more in your chest.

Gary Oldman's opening scene in the *Leon SE* Blu-ray (part of the revamped Luc Besson collection) is a dynamic tapestry of silences and spectacular impacts that demands the very best sub performance. From Oldman's 'I like these calm little moments before the storm' line to the opening shotgun blasts, the S/5 delivers plenty of its SHO promise.

The scale of the larger explosions is epic, with the dual drivers comprehensively engaging the air and driving the entire room. The size and impact would not disappoint an even larger design. You'll be impressed by the potency of this relatively compact box.

The S/3 SHO review was a while back, but I seem to recall it sounding leaner but slightly tauter with more leading-edge attack in my listening room. This model shows it a thing or two in terms of muscle, weight and visceral slam though, and for movie watching that ticks all the boxes. The final chase scene in *Last of the Mohicans*, with Daniel Day-Lewis in hot pursuit up a mountain backed by Clannad's haunting tune, brings a heart-beat-like bass rhythm that the REL all but maps onto your own pulse. It's a real hoot.

In my cinema I'd prefer the S/3 SHO, as it was a little gentler and more even-handed with music, but that's not to detract from this larger model's prowess ■

HCC VERDICT



REL S/5 SHO

→ £2,000 → www.rel.net

WE SAY: REL's bigger S/5 SHO delivers huge bass and real slam, capable of driving much larger rooms than its dimensions might suggest.