

Going its own way

The T-7 uses a Class A/B amp and offers some unusual hookup options. Oh, and it sounds good



REL ACOUSTICS HAS been at the business of subwoofers for a very long time and has a slightly different set of design priorities to many other brands. RELs were originally all about giving a bit of low-end shove to your stereo system before 'home cinema' was a gleam in Dolby's eye. To this end, the T-7 is

'The REL T-7 has a superb balance of speed, agility and depth – this a very complete woofer'

a somewhat different proposition to the other three subs in our roundup.

Firstly, the REL T-7 is the only woofer here to make use of a Class A/B amplifier, which means a good portion of the rear panel is given over to a heatsink. Secondly, although the REL is fitted with an LFE and separate low-level input, the company chucks in a distinctive high-level Neutrik Speakon socket. Both are

fitted with a volume control to allow them to be used simultaneously, which is the brand's suggestion for optimum performance, although you can just employ the traditional LFE output from your AVR. The T-7 is also fitted with crossover and phase controls.

Like the GoldenEar ForceField 3, the REL makes use of a downward-firing 8in driver. And, like the GoldenEar, the REL uses a passive radiator instead of a bass port for cabinet tuning. However, here this takes the form of a conventional 10in driver, which is ironically the one that's visible.

The T-7 is small but feels extremely solid and the finish is good. The four feet and top-plate logo are milled aluminium; the exterior makes use of nine coats of hand-sanded lacquer. Like the Quadral, the REL feels like a piece of furniture as much as it does audio equipment.

Similarly sumptuous

In fact, the T-7's performance is similar to the Quadral Qube 10 in a number of ways. This is a subwoofer with excellent integration at the handover to the speakers, and the overall

performance is never anything less than composed, and free of any harshness or lack of control. At the same time, the T-7 manages to conjure more aggression and excitement when it's required. This means that the pivotal sequence in *The Impossible* has both detail and control, and some of the savagery that you might expect a giant tidal wave to deliver. And, while it has to give ground to the GoldenEar and, to a lesser extent, the SVS SB12-NSD in terms of absolute extension, the T-7 feels more assured than either.

With television material, the REL produces an equally composed performance with just the right amount of clout. The pacemaker sequence in *Elementary* is beautifully handled, with the T-7 really tracking the bass tone and helping build the tension.

Part of the reason why REL's £650 woofer is so effective in these instances is the agility that it possesses. There is almost no sense of overhang or bloat to its performance, which greatly aids the sense of realism. This also means that the T-7 is the best of the pack for music use: even when the high-level input isn't used in the interests of a fair test, the REL has a speed, agility and depth that the other group's contenders simply don't combine with the same balance.

Very complete

The end result is that the T-7 is a very complete subwoofer. It does trade the last few per cent of depth and slam for greater all-round ability, and if you happen to live on a diet of braindead blockbusters you might find that you want a bit more oomph. Yet to live with every day, and use across a wide variety of material, the REL takes a good deal of beating and has a great deal to offer. Even the manual is excellent...

SPECIFICATIONS

REL T-7
DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 8in downward-firing long-stroke woofer; 1 x 10in passive radiator
ENCLOSURE: Sealed
FREQUENCY RESPONSE: From 30Hz (-6dB)
ON BOARD POWER: 200W Class A/B
REMOTE CONTROL: No
DIMENSIONS: 305(w) x 349(h) x 349(d)mm
WEIGHT: 15.4kg
CONNECTIONS: LFE input; low-level input; Neutrik Speakon high-level input

Final standings

RUNNING A HOME cinema system without a subwoofer is tantamount to AV treason. One bass box is essential and adding a few more doesn't hurt, either, which is why affordable models like our grouptest quartet are so appealing – find a £600 woofer that you like and it won't break the bank to bring another into your speaker array. However, a truly great sub doesn't just add vicious slam to cinematic explosions, it needs to be fast, agile and musical, too. And it helps if it manages to do all that with a touch of design style...

ALL FOUR OF these woofers have attributes that may make them the ideal design for you depending on how much or little you want them to do. If you are looking for a sub solely to rearrange your internal organs during action films, the GoldenEar ForceField 3 takes some beating. It isn't subtle and cannot be considered a true all-rounder, but it's a lot of fun nevertheless.

Quadral's Qube 10, on the other hand, is often a little too self-effacing for its own good. Yet there is little arguing with the refinement and detail that it possesses, and the fact that it is engineered like a Swiss watch. There's also no arguing with the keen pricing – it's affordability can't be discounted.

Separating the SVS SB12-NSD and the REL Acoustics T-7 is a hard task. In some ways, the

SB12 is the most complete performer here. It nearly matches the GoldenEar for impact and the REL for musicality, and the speed and agility that it goes about producing bass is extremely impressive. Yet the relatively prosaic looks and its large size means that some people might be turned off.

Shining example

This is where the REL T-7 shines. It cannot quite match the SB12-NSD for bass depth but it comes closer than you might expect, while offering top-notch musical prowess. And it does this while taking up a commendably small amount of space, offering a build and finish that is unlikely to offend, and giving tweakers some interesting connection possibilities. That's why it's our winner ■

MAKE IT A LARGE ONE



Bigger brothers: Each of the brands here offer larger, more potent subwoofers for those with higher budgets, in particular SVS and REL. The former has a 10-strong product stable that includes a trio of 'tower models' – including the flagship 13.5in-driver PC13 Ultra, pictured – and an assortment of more traditional sealed and ported

designs. REL, meanwhile, offers subs from the entry-level 6.5in T-Zero, through its step-up R series, to the range-topping G series 'Gibraltar' subs (but you'll need over £3,300 to bag the astonishing 12in G1).

GoldenEar is a relative newcomer and currently only offers subwoofers under the ForceField banner (in fact, it only makes three lineups of loudspeaker). The ForceField 3 reviewed here is outgunned by, you've guessed it, the ForceField 4 and 5, which house 10in and 12in drivers respectively, and offer even more onboard power. No sign yet of the ForceField 5 on sale in the UK, though. Quadral, meanwhile, sells a wide range of loudspeakers, but mainly partners them with iterations of the Qube lineup to create 5.1 arrays. Here, the Qube 12 (which uses a 12in driver) is the flagship product – although its sub-brand, Aurum, packs the more expensive (but also 12in) Orkus woofer.

HCC VERDICT



GoldenEar ForceField 3
→ £550 Approx
→ www.karma-av.co.uk
→ Tel: 01423 358846

HIGHS: Immense low-end extension and power; usefully compact and solidly built
LOWS: Can move around; some lack of fine detail and agility with music; quirky shape...



HCC VERDICT



Quadral Qube 10
→ £525 Approx
→ www.quadralgb-ie.co.uk
→ Tel: 01785 748 446

HIGHS: Controlled, detailed and civilised performance; excellent build quality; handsome design; affordable
LOWS: Slight lack of low-end extension and sense of excitement; fairly large enclosure



HCC VERDICT



REL Acoustics T-7
→ £650 Approx
→ <http://rel.net>
→ Tel: 01656 768 777

HIGHS: Cohesive, detailed and lively performance; small footprint; excellent build and aesthetics; simultaneous high-/low-level hookup
LOWS: Some limits to its absolute depth; quite expensive



HCC VERDICT



SVS SB12-NSD
→ £650 Approx
→ www.karma-av.co.uk
→ Tel: 01423 358846

HIGHS: Impressive low end with plenty of detail; works well with music material; well-specified; solid construction
LOWS: Slightly 'on/off' performance; prosaic appearance; fairly expensive

