

REL bass gets better by the minute

Richard Stevenson was so excited to audition REL's new Predator subwoofer that he forgot to dig out his own *Predator* UHD Blu-ray...



AV INFO

PRODUCT:
15in home cinema subwoofer

POSITION:
Top of REL's Serie HT (Home Theatre)

PEERS:
SVS SB-4000;
REL S/3 SHO;
Bowers & Wilkins DB3D

HOME CINEMA
Choice
RECOMMENDED

PREDATOR? EVEN IF the word is a noun, naming a subwoofer after one of the most iconic action thrillers of all time is brave. Yet REL's new HT/1508 Predator might just have all the right ingredients to pull it off.

This dedicated LFE beast packs a bespoke 15in driver and 850W amp into a (relatively) compact, sealed cabinet. The plain black finish, lack of frills and phono-only inputs keep the cost down to £1,600, allowing the HT/1508 to stealth into the mid-market jungle and hope to invisibly pick off similar-price but lower-spec subs.

An introduction to REL's new model comes from company head John Hunter, who explains the Serie HT ethos: 'Whereas traditional RELs are asked to be fantastic all-rounders, the HT (Home Theatre) range is designed to focus on one task, LFE, and do it perfectly. We designed an all-new 15in driver with 3in of stroke fore-and-aft but, as with all REL driver designs, our focus remains on speed and articulation, not just boom.'

That 15in CarbonGlas driver is pretty special. Around 60 per cent of the surface is carbon fibre backed by a lightweight glass fibre mix. The result is a stiff and light cone, terminated with a butyl rubber roll surround, that should deliver super-fast transients with no overhang if given enough power – which is where the 850W NextGen5 Class D amp comes in, an upgrade on the 500W version found in REL's 12in HT/1205 model [see HCC #290].

Next to the usual bespoke furniture REL cabinets, the HT series is... homely. I wouldn't go as far as wheeling out Arnie's comment on the comeliness of the Predator (Google it, with safe search off) but let's agree the HT/1508 looks purposeful rather than pretty. The textured matte black cabinet is a slightly flattened cube with profiled side edges and fronted with a hefty MDF-framed grille. It's not particularly large for a 15in woofer and camouflages well in the shadows of a darkened cinema room.

The cabinet is not as plain as you might think though. It's extensively braced internally, feeling very inert to a tap on the side, and the glossy top is a 12mm-thick plate of glass that aids with damping the cabinet, says REL. The feet double as stacking rails – if you want even more LFE impact, you can sit HT/1508s on top of each other.

'The HT/1508 is as brutal as its billing – the sound is fast, fluid and blessed with trouser-flapping punch'

The amp panel board takes up much of the sub's rear, although the connection and control count is frugal. You get stereo phono inputs and one balanced XLR input (not a feature of the smaller Serie HT models), plus balanced and unbalanced outputs for daisy-chaining. Controls are as basic as they get; auto power on, phase switch, gain and crossover knobs.

There are no speaker-level inputs, no 12V or IR triggers, no networking connections, no user EQ system and no remote control. While there are plenty of subs around £1,500 that will give you some of those features, none do it with a 15in custom driver and 850W digital amp tuned for purely home cinema use.

And this unfrivolous spec does at least make setup fairly simplistic, compared to subs with baffling EQ where if you lose it you are in a world of hurt. There was some

SPECIFICATIONS

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 15in front-firing CarbonGlas woofer **ENCLOSURE:** Sealed **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 22Hz (-6dB) **ONBOARD POWER (CLAIMED):** 850W NextGen5 Class D amplifier **REMOTE CONTROL:** No **DIMENSIONS:** 500(w) x 450(h) x 480(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 36kg

FEATURES: Balanced XLR input; balanced XLR output; stereo phono input; stereo phono output; LFE input; variable crossover; level; 0/180-degrees phase switch; auto standby feature; claimed 3in driver excursion

PARTNER WITH



PREDATOR 3-MOVIE COLLECTION: *Predator*, *Predator 2* and *Predators* are bundled together in this 4K boxset, with the 1987 original particularly benefitting from a more authentic transfer than the previous DNR'd Blu-ray.

moving the unit around, flipping of phase switch and setting the gain level by ear before letting my AV receiver sort out the crossover.

Payback time

The opening scenes of *Ready Player One* (Ultra HD Blu-ray) were enough to reveal that the HT/1508 was as brutal as its billing.

Spielberg's thrashing street-car race is delivered with a maelstrom of LFE across engine roars, crashes and leaping giant apes hitting the track. The sound is fast, fluid and blessed with trouser-flapping punch.

Switching to more subtle content is interesting. The HT/1508 is quiet, eerily so. I'm used to having a high-level input to a REL sub, hooked up to the main left/right channel outputs to bolster scale at the front of the room. With just LFE going to the woofer (front speakers set to 'large'), the REL loiters silently in the cinema, ready to strike at any hint of sub-bass action.

Deep rumbling effects are like being washed over by a wave of LF that seems to bypass the ears and go straight for your wobbly, fleshy bits. Soundtracks have thunderous basslines, encouraging me to dig out the subterranean nightclub scene in *Blade* (DVD). The thumping track is engagingly solid and, while other RELs definitely have a little more grace with music, there's no denying the HT/1508 delivers what the director intended from the scene; visceral and engaging bass.

For a REL, a brand born in sub-bass systems for music, a dedicated LFE sub is something of single-minded departure. Yet, just like the smaller HT Series we've looked at, the HT/1508 offers unrivalled value in setting out its fast, high-impact and incredibly powerful cinema sound without frills or features. A REL S/3 SHO costs exactly the same and arguably offers much more all-round appeal – but don't expect it to move your gizzards and blow out the windows like this big-game hunter ■

HCC VERDICT

★★★★★

REL HT/1508 Predator
→ £1,600 → www.rel.net

WE SAY: REL's HT flagship is a powerful, purposeful, dedicated home cinema sub, eschewing features and fancy finishes in favour of outstanding LFE performance.

1. 15in is the largest driver REL uses across its subwoofer ranges