

# The Specialist



**Adherence  
to the com-  
pany's credo  
ensures  
credibility**

REL's business model is as simple as it is unusual: they only build subwoofers. These are, however, also of the highest quality.

**T**he specialist from the USA, who has its subwoofers built by an appropriate supplier in China and subjected to an additional final inspection in England, has so far resisted all temptations to build something other than subwoofers. This chutzpah of stubbornly sticking to a concept that has been recognized as the right one is rare. Especially as in economically turbulent times this can lead to considerable fluctuations in revenues and profit. But John Hunter, head and heart of the company,

kept focused. He lost his heart to subwoofers many years ago during a demonstration, when he realized that, if they are properly matched and reproduced with proper timing, deep frequencies mean so much more than additional pressure hitting the stomach area. Several decades have passed since then in which Hunter could not be dissuaded from his course: the drivers are built of as high a quality and as reliably as possible and they can only be found at REL; use of extremely stable cabinets; renunciation of an automatic calibration by means of extensive equalizer and DSP functions, as they have become so en vogue in recent years. Also no traditional bass reflex port is employed but instead a large passive membrane with a diameter of 30 centimeter that radiates to the floor and supports the 25 centimeter long-stroke bass. The fixed feet guarantee the desired



**Lots of options for connectivity including Speakon and Bluetooth but rather limited settings**

distance to the floor. On top of all that, REL also goes its own way for the setting up and connecting its subwoofers – the unambiguous recommendation is: place your subwoofer in the corner of your room and take advantage of the resulting nine decibels of volume increase. The manual also provides some well-founded information on how to adjust the volume. First determine the correct phase setting: the one that makes the bass sound louder at the listening position is correct. The next step is to adjust the working range of the sub and satellites, using the crossover control so that the two overlap audibly when the program is bass intensive. Then use the level control on the sub to adjust the volume to the same level as the satellites. Then check the phase again – louder wins. Now pull the sub slowly and evenly out of the corner of your room until it sounds louder, deeper and more powerful. The fine tuning is done by turning the sub, again until the highest possible level is reached. These are all the most important points. However, also the fine tuning of the crossover frequency and the volume of the S3 is explained in detail in the manual: the higher the subwoofer runs, the lower the level should be, is the rule of thumb – absolutely exemplary and unfortunately not a matter of fact. Another indisputable recommendation from REL is: whenever possible, tap the signal at the speaker terminals of the amplifier to let its sound character flow into that of the subwoofer. For the cases where this is not desired or possible

for whatever reason, the very detailed manual offers illustrated information on alternative connections. A ten meter long cable is included, which is connected to the subwoofer by means of a Speakon connector. An option for connection via Cinch is also on board, as well as even a wireless variant, which is, however, dependent on an in-house wireless module. „This was the only way to meet our quality standards,“ REL says. The standby function can be completely bridged. In terms of sound, none of the other participants can top the American. Once the instructions in the manual have been put into practice, the bass reaches very low, sounds crisp and precise with good punch, while blending in well with the overall sound. The REL can also play quite loud, so that home cinema applications should be no problem. Their tips for setup and positioning are by the way worthwhile trying out with other subs – the more care you take in advance, the less you’ll have to try “saving” with DSP equalizing later. The REL initially requires a bit more work, but then rewards you with really convincing sound. ■



**OPTICS**

The cover is removable, the handles on each side are suitable for carrying if necessary.

**REL S3**

**Price:** around 2000 € (in white or black)  
**Dimensions:** 37 x43 x43 cm (WxHxD)  
**Warranty:** 3 years  
**Contact:** REL Acoustics  
**Phone:** +44 (0) 1656 768777  
 www.rel.net

A subwoofer for people who have less confidence in automatic calibration systems than in their own ears and who don't mind experimenting a little with the positioning. Perfect sound and very good workmanship.

**Measurement results**

Lower cut-off frequency (-3dB SPL)	23 Hz
Power consumption Sby./idle (at)	/17,2 W

**Lab Comment**

Low distortion, sensible adjustment options and a clean step response – the REL also made a good impression in the laboratory.

STEREO - TEST	
SOUND QUALITY	85%
PRICE/PERFORMANCE	
★ ★ ★ ★ ★	
<b>OUTSTANDING</b>	