

REL Serie T/7x subwoofer

by Alan Sircom

First, let me begin with an apology. I got into publishing at a time when 'hot metal' was still just about a thing and REM and the KLF were in the charts. And in that time, I have never once broken an embargo. Until I flagged up the REL Serie T/7x in one of our Next Issue contents pages! My apologies to all concerned.

In my defence, I was left unattended with a really good subwoofer I wanted to discuss and my excitement got the better of me. The new three-strong Serie Tx range represents a new starting place for subwoofer experts REL and the Serie T/7x (in between the T/9x and T/5x) is something of the sweet spot; a good balance between price and performance that makes it the perfect choice for audio enthusiasts in the jumping off spot for subwoofery.

A subwoofer in an audio setting has to balance bass depth, speed and integration with the rest of the loudspeaker sound. This is subtly different to the requirements in home cinema, where the subwoofer is considered a channel in its own right, rather than a reinforcement to the sound of a pair of good speakers. Get it right in audio, and it's like you've given the main speakers the freedom to be themselves, opening out the soundstage, making the midrange more clear and open, and focusing the sound more tightly and accurately. Get it wrong and you have a speaker that slows the music and booms along with the song, undermining what makes a good system. REL has always batted above average in making a good sub that integrates well into a domestic audio system, so any changes to the REL genome is met with some trepidation.

The T/7x uses the well-trodden path of front-firing active driver with down-firing passive radiator; in this case a 200mm 'FibreAlloy' long-throw unit with an inverted alloy dustcap housed in a steel chassis, and a 250mm long-throw unit with its own inverted dustcap. This is driven by a 200W Class AB amplifier and includes the usual Neutrik speaker-level connector alongside the regular line level inputs. REL also has an optional 'Arrow' wireless connection that can be used with the T/7x. The cabinet is no longer a equal-sided cube; its stubbier look isn't just decorative, though; although it looks smaller, cabinet volume has been improved slightly over previous models in the same ball-park. ▶



► Set-up remains the same for audio purposes; use the Speakon cable and high-level input, with the cables connected to the left and right positive and a single negative terminal of your power amplifier. Now use a vocal recording and dial the subwoofer down until it is just past audibility. Then confirm with a record with good bass; you can combine the two if you use 'Ballad of the Runaway Horse' by Rob Wasserman and Jennifer Warnes [*Duets*, Universal]. Now come back a week later and turn it down a notch, then make a cup of tea or coffee, sit back down to your system, and be a bit amazed!

So far, so REL. What the T/7x does is introduce some extra speed and weight to the bass, the sort of performance normally expected from more upmarket models in the line. Weight here is a difficult subject, because the Serie T/7x does not make a small speaker seem 'weightier', just 'bigger' and more importantly 'better' across the midrange. I used this in particular with the Rogers LS3/5A SE tested in this issue and this proved to be both an ideal test subject and an ideal candidate for the Serie T/7x. The REL added depth to the sound, but not in the way that it changed the tonality of this well-known speaker system; more that it filled in the bottom end in the same way the SE version fills in the midrange over the original; thoroughly, but paradoxically almost imperceptibly. The REL was fast enough to pass the Trentemøller test [*'Chameleon'*, *The Last Resort*, *Poker Flat*] and provided enough reinforcement to make out a few more left-hand piano notes on the Liszt B-minor Piano Sonata played by Martha Argerich's during her Début Recital {DG}, but more importantly on this recording it also gave that recording the sense of space and gravitas needed to make it something truly outstanding. Switch the sub off and seemingly not a lot happens to the sound, but the sound also collapses and becomes insubstantial. Put it back in and the bass is not overt or oppressive, in fact it's almost not there, but the way the T/7x delivers that 'almost not there' bass makes all the difference. And, if you compare that bass delivery to previous REL designs under about £1,500, the new T/7x has both more substance and form, and less intrusion into the sound of the speakers.

The speed of the Serie T/7x is its outstanding feature. Few do bass depth and bass speed like this subwoofer at anything like the same price, and for that alone it deserves very high praise because that means the REL sub can keep up with fast musical transients played through equally fast and reactive loudspeakers. Couple that with the sort of depth to fill out floorstanders in this category and it's an exciting addition to the audio canon.

While we aren't geared up for home cinema here, it must be noted that the REL Serie T/7x is not just for us music lovers. When used as bass channel instead of bass reinforcement, it has the sharp transient response and directness that makes it so good for two-channel, but with more of an oomph needed to resolve what home cinema does so well. In fact, I'd argue that where previous REL subs at this price point were hi-fi subs that could be used in cinema, the Serie T/7x straddles the divide almost perfectly; home cinema enthusiasts will view this as a powerful sub that can also do two-channel music, where two-channel enthusiasts see this as the audiophile's friend that can also speak cinema.

In audio settings, a good subwoofer should be seen and not heard like a Victorian schoolchild. REL has consistently been one of the few subwoofer

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Type: Front-firing active woofer, down-firing passive radiator

Inputs: Hi Level Neutrik Speakon, Lo Level single phono, LFE phono

Active drive unit: FibreAlloy™, 200mm long-throw, inverted alloy dust cap, steel chassis

Passive radiator unit: 254mm long throw, inverted dust cap

Power output: 200w (RMS)

Lower frequency response: 31Hz at -6dB

Gain control range: 80dB

Dimensions (WxHxD): 36 x 32 x 36cm

Weight: 17.5kg

Price: £999

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brands to achieve that goal, and the REL Serie T/7x does it better than before. No, it's not going to out-do a No. 25 or the big 212/SX from the brand, but it does draw heavily from the S/510. While in absolute terms, the S/510 is a better sub all round, the gap has closed significantly. The Serie T/7x at £999 throws down a gauntlet to other subwoofers. It's the one to beat right now. +