

REL HT/1205 MKII Subwoofer Review

The REL HT/1205 MKII is another beautifully built subwoofer from REL's Serie HT line of home theatre-aimed subwoofers. It delivered an authoritative low-end performance, with a highlight being its ability to reproduce punchy, tactile bass impact. It will not plumb subterranean ultra-low frequency depths, but that doesn't reveal itself at normal listening levels. It is a fantastic sounding subwoofer that has plenty to offer for its £849 asking price. The HT-Air wireless subwoofer sender/receiver that I tested it with was a revelation in use and made a compelling case for doing away with a wired approach. The REL HT/1205 MKII and HT-Air make a fantastic, living-room-friendly combination, that is capable at times of startling bass transients.



Pros

- Punchy, articulate bass
- Attractive design
- Unobtrusive form factor
- Gorgeous CarbonGlas driver

- The HT-Air worked flawlessly

Cons

- Output limited at very low frequencies

What is the REL HT/1205 MKII?

The REL HT/1205 MKII - dubbed 'The Cannon' by REL - is a 12-inch sealed subwoofer equipped with a 500W amplifier, priced attractively at £849. It sits in the middle of REL's Serie HT range of home theatre-aimed subwoofers. Above it is the 15-inch, 1,000W HT/1510 Predator II priced at £1,799, which I reviewed in October and found to be deeply impressive. Below it, sits the HT/1003 MKII ('The Hammer'), priced at £699 and equipped with a 10-inch driver and 300W amplifier.

The REL HT/1205 MKII replaces the HT/1205 v.1, which was similarly specified although featured a different 12-inch driver. REL claims that the MKII version can play up to 6dB louder than its predecessor, although it doesn't specify at which frequencies.

Design

The HT/1205 MKII felt positively diminutive in my room. At (H*W*D) 387mm x 413mm x 438mm, the REL's form factor would suit most people seeking to enjoy serious home cinema in their living room whilst keeping their sound system reasonably discreet. Weighing in at 19.6kg, it has some heft but was relatively easy to manoeuvre into place.

The 12-inch CarbonGlas driver (a mix of carbon fibre centre cap and glass fibre cone) employs the same inverted centre cone construction as found on the rest of the Serie HT line up and is similarly gorgeous to look at. As a result, the grille is best left in the box.

On the surface, that appears a little lacking for hardened enthusiasts

The driver's meaty surround suggests considerable excursion capabilities. Indeed, REL refers to it as a "long travel" driver, although does not specify how long. The specified -6dB point is 22Hz, which is measured in-room rather than anechoically. On the surface, that appears a little lacking for hardened enthusiasts.

As with the rest of REL's new Serie HT subs, the HT/1205 MKII is wrapped in textured line-grained vinyl, with a high gloss lacquer top plate. In my review of the HT/1510 Predator II I said any proper home cinema subwoofer should be devoid of mirror-like reflective top plates, so as not to become a visual distraction while watching a movie. That opinion still stands. However, on the HT/1205 MKII, a concession to aesthetics feels appropriate, seeing as it's more obviously aimed at living room bass duties.



... a concession to aesthetics feels appropriate

The grille frame is chunky and basic, appearing to be constructed from 16mm black MDF, featuring grille guides instead of magnetic attachments.

The 'NextGen5' Class D amplifier on the rear is rated at 500W, which will be enough for most living rooms. In typical REL fashion, the amplifier lacks any form of user programmable DSP, featuring only a 0/180 degree phase switch, together with level and crossover dials. Indeed, it lacks any form of digital signal processing to shape the response of the driver, but it does have an analogue subsonic filter that rolls the driver off from 8Hz, to protect it from over-excursion.

RCA connections are provided although there are no XLRs. There is also a standby switch, which puts the REL into auto mode, that will turn the subwoofer on when it senses bass content and turn it off when none has been sensed for 30 minutes.

On the bottom of the sub, the HT/1205 MKII features four large silver feet, with soft rubber undersides. Unlike the HT/1510 Predator II and higher end REL subs, the HT/1205 MKII can't connect to other 1205s in a tower array, and therefore it doesn't ship with any brackets to achieve this. This is a little disappointing; the 1205's pricing means a tower array would be far more affordable than an array of pricier subs. I'm not sure why REL has decided to omit this functionality, but it seems like a missed opportunity.



HT-Air

The HT/1205 MKII shipped to me together with the HT-Air wireless transmitter. The HT-Air is intended to replace unsightly wires trailing across the floor between a receiver and subwoofer. It relies instead on a 5.8GHz connection, which REL claims allows for uncompressed dynamics, a latency of between 16 to 20 milliseconds, and a useable range of approximately 18 metres.

The HT-Air comprises two square black boxes; one sender and one receiver. Both units require mains connection. The sender connects via RCA to the output from an AVR, and transmits the signal to the receiver, which outputs via RCA to the input of one's subwoofer; in this case, the LFE input of the HT/1205 MKII. Both sender and receiver feature a pairing button, but in testing I didn't need to use these, as the units paired automatically, without any manual intervention on my part.



Setup and Operation

I positioned the HT/1205 MKII in the rear right corner of my room and connected it via RCA to the receiver unit of the HT-Air, with the sender in another room, connected to a Denon AVC-X3800H that I had on test at the time. I used the Denon for bass management and therefore set the crossover on the REL's amp plate to its maximum value of 200Hz.

The HT-Air was effortless to set up. Once powered on, the sender and receiver immediately found each other, indicating their connection with a solid white LED on the rear of each unit. Throughout my testing the connection was rock solid and in no way perceptibly different to using a wired connection.

Performance

Subwoofers are often described as 'fast', which is generally a nonsense, as the perception of 'fast' bass is dominated by how a subwoofer couples with one's room. However, the performance of the HT/1205 MKII in my room certainly tempts me to describe it as fast. Throughout my testing it exhibited the same punchy articulacy that I loved during my testing of the HT/1510 Predator II.

The HT/1205 MKII's performance with music was outstanding. I revisited many of the same electronic music tracks I had listened to on the Predator II and, in truth, I could scarcely discern any difference between the HT/1205 MKII and its senior counterpart (bearing in mind the fallibility of audio memory).

... there was little audible difference between the subwoofers, even at uncomfortably loud listening levels

For example, *Evil Dub*, the third track on Trentemøller's 2006 debut album *The Last Resort*, was delivered with plenty of tactile bass. The same was true of the REL's performance with my other test tracks, including a subwoofer-testing favourite, *Hip-Hop* on Dead Prez's 2000 album *Let's Get Free*. The track features a constant bass tone with modulating pitch, accompanied by a thumping drumbeat, all of which was reproduced effortlessly by the REL, with real low-end authority. The HT/1205 MKII's performance here was a salutary reminder that genuinely great bass can be achieved without having to fork out north of £1,000, or to accept a washing-machine sized eyesore in one's living room.

Onto movie testing and the REL continued to shine, turning in a superb performance during one of the most demanding bass scenes I could think of, the D-Day flight in *Overlord*. Transient dynamics and tactile impact were here again in spades, underpinned by a competent ability to deliver some truly low bass. One of the things I look for in this scene is a subwoofer's ability to resolve distinctly the various explosions

alongside the plane, without this being drowned out by the pounding musical score. In this respect, the HT/1205 MKII performed most admirably.

... don't expect reference levels at ultra-low frequencies

However, whilst the HT/1205 MKII and HT/1510 Predator II were neck and neck for musical reproduction, this was clearly not the case for movies. The HT/1205 MKII simply could not plumb the same depths as its 15-inch sibling. That is in no way a fair comparison of course; the HT/1510 Predator II is more than twice the price. The mere fact I'm making it is a testament to how impressed I was by the HT/1205 MKII, and how, for the most part, there was little audible difference between the subwoofers, even at uncomfortably loud listening levels.

For example, during the slow-motion gunshots in *John Wick's* Red Circle bathhouse scene, each gunshot was rendered with explosive, chest-pounding force, as they should be. Similarly, the explosions after the drill pipes burst in *Deepwater Horizon* shook the room. Whilst explosions such as these might lack the last ounce of depth, during the majority of programme material that is not a problem, although I do suspect the HT/1205 MKII would not satisfy die-hard bass junkies. However, what the REL delivered, abundantly, was clean, impactful, detailed bass that was a joy to listen to.



Conclusion

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Should I buy one?

The HT/1205 MKII is yet another fantastic sounding subwoofer from REL's Serie HT. It's attractively designed with a gorgeous CarbonGlas driver that should see the grille left firmly in its box. Its relatively unobtrusive dimensions mean the REL could grace an owner's living room without drawing too much attention to itself. What's more, the HT-Air was a revelation in ease of use. It took seconds to set up and did away with the need to hide unsightly wiring.

... what the REL delivered, abundantly, was clean, impactful, detailed bass that was a joy to listen to

With a 12-inch driver and 500W amplifier, the HT/1205 MKII should produce enough bass for most users, although don't expect reference levels at ultra-low frequencies. For those who are looking for output at sub-30Hz, there are other, more capable options on the market. However, the REL excelled in its performance above 30Hz, which accounts for the majority of programme material, and delivered a punchy, articulate performance.