

You can't see the eyes of the demon, until him come callin'

By Doug Pyper Oct 17, 2022



REL HT/1510 Predator II Subwoofer Review

The REL HT/1510 Predator II is a well-designed, powerhouse of a subwoofer. It rejects conventional approaches to subwoofer design and the quest for outright extension, preferring a more straightforward philosophy that favours time domain performance and slam. It's a refreshing approach that results in one of the most impressive subwoofers I've had the pleasure of listening to.

Pros

Tight, hard-hitting bass

High SPL capability

Attractive finish

Gorgeous 15-inch driver

Unobtrusive form-factor

Robust build-quality

Powerful amplifier

Cons

More output is available elsewhere at this price

Basic controls.

What Is the REL HT/1510 Predator II?

The REL HT/1510 Predator II is, as the name suggests, a sequel to the foregoing HT/1508 Predator released around five years ago. The 'HT' in the title signifies 'home theatre', differentiating the Serie HT line from REL's more music-oriented offerings. And, before you ask, no, I don't know why a company from Bridgend uses the Italian 'Serie' instead of Series.

Alongside the Predator II, the refreshed Serie HT range comprises the 12-inch HT/1205 MKII at £849 (which REL calls 'The Cannon'), featuring a 500W Class D amplifier; and the 10-inch HT/1003 MKII at £699 (which REL calls 'The Hammer'), equipped with a 300W amplifier.

Design

The Predator II cuts a rather fine figure, clad in a tasteful textured silver vinyl wrap. Dimensions are (WxHxD) 540mm x 457mm x 494mm, which feels surprisingly unobtrusive in one's room, perhaps because the REL sits quite low to the ground.



The vinyl finish is both resistant to fingerprints and sufficiently tough that I suspect it would remain relatively undamaged by minor knocks, where a more delicate paint finish might chip. My appreciation for the REL's aesthetics doesn't extend to its top plate, however. Whilst its black gloss finish is perfectly pleasant to look at, that mirror-like sheen has no place on a sub intended for serious home theatre duties. It will reflect light from the screen and become distracting.



On the front, the REL's grille attaches by way of rubber grille guides. The grille frame is improbably sturdy and constructed from what appears to be 16mm black MDF. The presence of grille guides is a tad disappointing, given other manufacturers at this price point employ magnetic fixings. That disappointment is largely because, without the grille, the sub is an absolute stunner, and the grille guides get slightly in the way of this. The 15-inch CarbonGlas driver is truly a thing of beauty, constructed, unsurprisingly, from a mix of carbon fibre and glass fibre, with an inverted centre cap.

On the underside, in place of four feet, the REL has a wide rail on the left and the right sides, covered in soft rubber. The rails are integral to the Predator II's party trick: through using the supplied brackets, one can connect and stack up to three Predator IIs to create a tower array. An array of three Predator IIs would be a sight to behold. Of course, to fully benefit from a multi-sub approach, one should position subwoofers at various points in a room rather than simply stack them vertically, and deploying multiple triple-stacked Predator IIs around the room would cost a pretty penny.

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In terms of power, the Predator II is well catered for by a substantial 1,000W RMS amplifier, with four 400W MOFSETs. The Predator II's amplifier is perhaps the clearest illustration of REL's philosophy of subwoofer design. It features level and crossover dials, a basic 0/180 polarity switch, and... that's it. REL eschews the type of digital signal processing found on most other competitor subwoofers, preferring the most basic of analogue filter circuits, which REL dubs the 'Perfectfilter'. This stripped back approach to filter design, REL contends, reduces signal delay, thereby contributing excellent time-domain performance.



Readers may note that REL has not published any measurement data for the HT/1510 Predator II, which is unfortunate. A subwoofer's output capability is core to its performance and without measurement data (ideally in CEA-2010 format), it's difficult to evaluate what one is buying. Fortunately, REL did confirm to me that their measurements validated those produced by James Larson for Audioholics, so interested readers should check those out.

Set Up and Operation

As usual, I positioned the Predator II in the rear right hand corner of my room, and then connected it via XLR to my Trinnov Altitude 16, setting the crossover on the amp plate to its maximum value of 200Hz, as I would be relying on the Trinnov for bass management.

... there's relatively little to do by way of set up

Beyond simply connecting the REL and turning it on, then calibrating using one's room correction of choice, there's relatively little to do by way of set up. This might be off-putting to some buyers, who could look at competing products and see far more sophisticated control options, featuring phone app control and PEQ adjustment. For me

though, those features are of trivial importance in the home theatre context, where subwoofers are invariably used (and should be) with AVR or processor-based room correction. I would far rather subwoofer manufacturers invested all the money spent on those features into beefy amplifiers, drivers and cabinetry, as REL appears to have. That said, I would at least have expected some form of variable phase control instead of a basic 0-180 degree switch.

Performance

Although the Predator II is aimed at the home theatre market, REL, as a company, has always touted its subwoofers' musical capabilities, so I began my testing accordingly. I started with *Evil Dub*, on Danish electronic musician Trentemøller's excellent *The Last Resort*. Within the first few seconds of the track, it became clear that I'd handed the REL the perfect vehicle to show off with. The track is underpinned by a punchy, repetitive beat sitting in the 50-60Hz frequency range, an area in which the REL has plenty of output and which is associated with the type of tactile response felt in one's chest. And feel it in my chest I most certainly did. The physical sensation of the repetitive, driving beat was almost hypnotic, and elevated the track to new heights for me. Skipping to track 6, *Nightwalker*, produced more of the same: clean, chest-slammng, room-pounding bass.

... an impressive capacity for tactile response and outright slam

Having put in such an impressive performance with Trentemøller I wasn't quite ready to move onto evaluating movies. I needed more electronic music, and reached for another favourite of mine, Jon Hopkins' *Singularity*. Track 2, *Emerald Rush*, reveals Hopkins' classical music training, beginning with a gentle, ethereal piano track, that's accompanied by a slowly developing beat that gradually increases in tempo. At the 1:47 mark, the build-up peaks and the song changes character entirely. The foregoing delicacy is rent open by an aggressive bassline, shifting the song into a pounding dance track that the REL absolutely laps up. Here once more the Predator II shone, demonstrating yet again an impressive capacity for tactile response and outright slam. This is particularly interesting to me, because I've positioned a variety of other subs in the same spot, using broadly similar calibrations, and none have been quite so tactile. The more I listened to this sonic trait, the more addictive I found it.

For evaluation with movies, I began with something of a torture test. The opening scene of *Edge of Tomorrow*, at around 00:25. Fans of the film (or just its bass) will know this scene involves a sub-20Hz tone that, in the right hands, will interrogate a room's structural integrity. Surprisingly, the Predator II performed well, and produced a formidable amount of bass during the scene. I say surprisingly, because I know the REL is

not an ultra-low frequency monster like some ported subs in its price range; its output around 20Hz is considerably south of THX reference levels. Certainly, I have heard this scene delivered with more awe-inspiring authority than the REL managed, but its performance here was still respectable and, I'd wager, comfortably enough for most listeners.



I skipped to another favourite demo scene in Edge of Tomorrow, the drop scene at the 18-minute mark. Here the HT/1510 Predator II was back on home territory. As the bottom of the drop ship opened to reveal the sea below, the Predator II underpinned the action with a low, ominous drone, presaging the chaos about to unfold. The REL came into its own during the subsequent firefight on the beach, giving believable weight to each explosion. One of the parts of the scene I watch for, at the 20:57 mark, involves the engine of a stricken drop ship breaking off the ship's hull and thudding into the sand. This thud, when delivered by the Predator II, was most impressive, feeling convincingly like the engine had just landed on my living room floor.

The REL lived in my system for two weeks and I was sad to see it go

The Predator II's performance with Edge of Tomorrow pretty well sums up what the Predator II is about and its value proposition. It won't quite deliver reference output on the truly subterranean ultra-low frequencies, but this is a conscious design choice; instead, the Predator II favours impactful performance at 30Hz and above. For me, that is a worthwhile trade off. Of course, those with the space and funds for multiple Predator IIs could have the best of both worlds, and a multi-Predator II system would, undoubtedly, be a force to be reckoned with.

I went on to try the Predator II with a wide variety of other content, from HBO's (surprisingly entertaining) House of the Dragon and my season-one-rewatch of The Expanse, to the more usual suspects, John Wick, A Quiet Place and Blade Runner 2049. The REL lived in my system for two weeks and I was sad to see it go.

Now, all I need is a spare £22k to buy a triple-stack array for each corner...



Conclusion

REL HT/1510 Predator II Subwoofer Review

The REL HT/1510 Predator II is a no nonsense, well-designed subwoofer that performed admirably in my room. Although I'm used to dual sealed 18" subs, I didn't feel I was missing out using the REL, aside from with the most demanding ultra-low frequency content. For the home cinema enthusiast, at which the 'HT' line is squarely aimed, the HT/1510 Predator II presents an interesting proposition and possibly something of a dilemma.

On the one hand, in terms of 20Hz and below output, the Predator II is unlikely to comfortably hit 115dB THX reference peaks in typical UK-sized rooms. For those who need, or simply want that, there are alternative subwoofers at this price point that would be more suitable, although they are typically ported designs.

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On the other hand, from 30Hz on up, the Predator II will cleanly drive reference levels in quite large rooms and will sound fantastic doing it. For me, whilst I like ultra-low frequency authority, it is the 30-70Hz region that I am most interested in, and the REL's output here is extremely respectable. I'm a sucker for chest-slam and tactile response, which the Predator II provided in spades. Couple this with the excellent driver, powerful amplifier and generally pleasing aesthetics, and we have in the HT/1510 Predator II a subwoofer that would, almost certainly, be my choice at its price point.



Scores

