

# audition

equipment review

## Sonique Diamond 550 Standmount Loudspeakers

**S**onique Audio doesn't launch a new product all that often, but when it does, the first thing boss Steve Lund does is hit the road and take his new speakers around the country so that dealers can have a listen. About a year ago he was doing the same with the then brand new Slim 6 in-wall speaker and Steve has recently been back on the road with what he claims is a new Sonique speaker that has received more dealer interest than any other he can remember in his 25 or so years in the business. So what's causing all this claimed excitement? Well, the

morning before I was meeting up with Steve to find out, a courier arrived at with one of only three finished production models, literally a couple of days after they'd rolled off the production line. This pair sported a new finish too - something called Espresso and so new were the speakers, that Steve himself hadn't actually seen the finished article in this new veneer.

The box said 'Sonique Diamond 550 Reference Monitor.' It's not until I unpacked the speakers though that the Diamond part became apparent. The trapezoidal shape of these new Soniques is quite unlike any other cabinet shape I'd seen before. Sure, the days of sticking to square or rectangular boxes are no more, as designers become increasingly inventive with cabinet shapes and dimensions. In the case of the new Diamond 500 Series (there will be more models released over the ensuing months) the cabinets' angled edges and the fact that there are no parallel sides are quite deliberate. The idea behind the unique shape is to reduce diffraction as well as internal standing waves, both of which can colour the sound. The cabinet shape is similar to that of a kite diamond cut, with tapering side, top and bottom panels. The angled edges also contribute to its unusual frame and quite by chance, means the speaker sits angled upwards slightly when positioned horizontally as a centre channel speaker in a home theatre

**Sonique's  
getting set to  
roll out its new  
generation of  
Diamond 500  
Series  
loudspeakers**

### Vital Statistics

**Dimensions:**

525 x 210 x 270mm

**Weight:**

11kg (each), 12kg (SE model)

**Distributor:**

Sonique Audio Pty Ltd

**Telephone:**

(08) 8285 9722

**Facsimile:**

(08) 8285 9744

**Website:**

[www.sonique.com.au](http://www.sonique.com.au)

By Nic Tatham



system (which is also one of its planned uses).

The drivers that have been used in these new Diamond 550s are also quite special. Sonique has chosen a bass/midrange component from driver brand Peerless and one of the best tweeter components available from another well known industry name, Vifa. This is a tweeter device found in many an exotic loudspeaker and has proved one of the best tweeter designs of recent years. It and the woofers are mounted in a time aligned D'Appolito 2-way configuration and the tweeter is surrounded by acoustic felt which helps control dispersion and diffraction distortion that a bare cabinet surface would otherwise contribute.

Similarly, the Peerless HDS woofers are some of the best midbass drivers available, offering genuine low frequency extension in a vented enclosure and low levels of distortion. These small 134mm drivers aren't what you'd expect to deliver useable low frequency extension, but going by the specs, Sonique measures the Diamond 550s down to around 50Hz, which is low for a loudspeaker of this physical size. Twin drivers and a large rear-firing bass reflex port helps tune the low

frequency response and I was keen to hear if these Soniques do in fact go as low as the specs claim. The remaining specifications suggest a friendly, but not overly so, speaker to drive. Sensitivity is a reasonable 90dB, although the 4 ohm impedance means the amplification needs to be capable of delivering the current.

On his travels with this new loudspeaker, Steve told me he'd heard them on the end of almost every type of amplification possible, from low wattage valve amps, to your run-of-the-mill AV receiver, right through to Halcro's immense dm68 – regarded as the world's finest power amplifier. I too had a cross-section planned to use with the Diamonds – namely my ME 24/500II combination and a Chinese valve integrated amp from Dared - it's VP-845 model which generates just 18 watts per channel, albeit all Class A watts.

The pair that turned up for review were brand new and only a couple of days old - with that 'new' loudspeaker smell, so I let them play for a week before putting them genuinely through their paces. But, even straight out of the box, the Diamond 550s more than hint at what they are capable of. Before

returning to South Australia, Steve Lund came over and we spent about an hour listening to them. Having them run in has certainly improved things, but right from the word go, it was clear that this new design has a lot of sonic goodies on offer.

Atop a pair of 80cm stands, the 550s were perched at just about the right height. Toed-in slightly towards the listening position and with a decent amount of wall space at the rear and sides is where these speakers perform best. And what a performance they give! On the end of the ME amps, these new Soniques lapped up the power on offer. For a mid-sized monitor, there's nothing average about their sound quality performance. There's that sumptuous bass for starters. It's impressive for both its depth and control, but also speed. I'm used to a fair degree of articulation in this regard from my favoured standmounters, the Quad 11Ls, but they don't keep up with the pace as well as these new Soniques.

As capable with a gentle piano concerto as with rip-roaring rock, the Diamond 550s always create a terrific sense of scale, especially from such relatively compact cabinets. I listened to a wide variety of music, from J.S. Bach

## Technotalk

**Product Type:**  
Standmount loudspeaker

**Driver Complement:**  
2 x 134mm bass/mid drivers  
1 x 26mm dual concentric tweeter

**Cabinet Configuration:**  
2-way, 3-driver, trapezoidal  
time aligned, rear ported

**Frequency Response:**  
55-20kHz (±3dB)

**Power Handling:**  
220 watts RMS (maximum)

**Nominal Impedance:**  
4 ohms

**Crossover Type:**  
Minimum phase, 1st order

**Sensitivity:**  
90dB

**Crossover Frequency:**  
2800Hz

**Finishes:**  
See text

Technotalk specifications and recommended retail prices are supplied by the manufacturer

**“As capable with a gentle piano concerto as with rip-roaring rock, the Diamond 550s always create a terrific sense of scale, especially from such relatively compact cabinets. I listened to a wide variety of music, from J.S. Bach to Goldfrapp and regardless of the music, the 550s never lose sight of subtlety, sounding as smooth as silk and as intricate as lace.”**

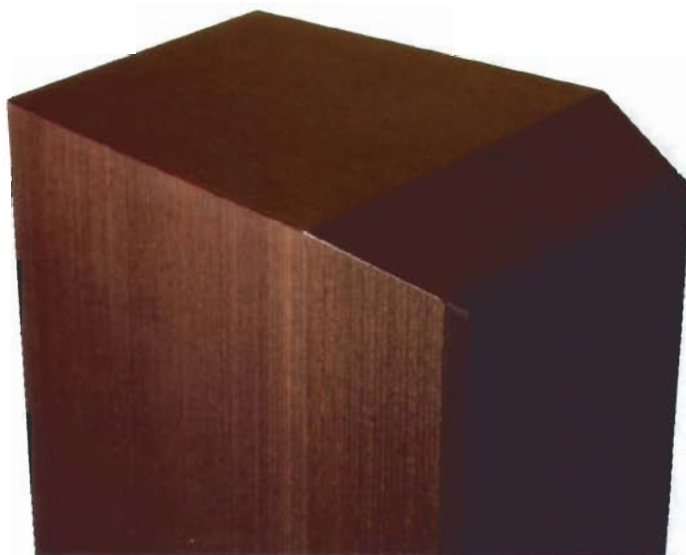
to Goldfrapp and regardless of the music, the 550s never lose sight of subtlety, sounding as smooth as silk and as intricate as lace. Both instruments and vocals are effortlessly thrown free of the cabinets, creating that's almost. Indeed, if you're a fan of a loudspeaker that images with almost laser-guidance like accuracy, these will certainly do it for you.

But these speakers are about far more than just accuracy. Sure, there's undeniably impressive precision and dynamic articulation, but also plenty of straightforward, toe-tapping musicality as well. Musically, there are very few holes in the Sonique's repertoire - save, perhaps, material overly aggressive in its recording. This became less of an issue on the end of the Dared valve amplifier, which despite its modest output, still drove the Soniques without bother. Quality amplification and source are a must though - anything too rich or bright and they'll audibly complain, as any revealing loudspeaker design should.

In keeping with previous ranges, there are Special Edition (SE) versions available of the Diamond 500s. In the case of the 550s that means upgrades to the crossover, internal wiring and internally the cabinets are lined with inert Barium loaded panels to further reduce cabinet colouration.

A variety of real wood veneers are available, including the one named 'Espresso' the finish in which this review pair came. Build and finish quality are both excellent and the other choices are Atlantic Jarrah, Tasmanian Oak and Black Oak.

There are two floorstanders in the pipeline to join the 550s and on this showing, Sonique's next generation of loudspeaker looks set to continue Sonique's well earned reputation. A solid five star performance from a very capable reference monitor. **AVL**



**Angles and tapered edges make up the unusual, but highly effective Diamond 500 Series cabinet shape.**

**Ancillary Equipment:** Teac VRDS-10 CD transport, ME Sound 25/550II pre/power amplifiers, Wasatch Cable Works interconnects, Nordost Flatline Silver loudspeaker cables, Concorde equipment support, SAP Relaxa 1 isolation platform, Black Box mains conditioner.

## Opinion

The 'Opinion' expressed here is that of the reviewer, summarised in the form of a 5-star rating system, and should be considered as an integral part of the full contents of this Audition Equipment Review. As such, each category should be judged on its own merits and not necessarily used as a comparison with other equipment reviews in this, or other editions of Audio & Video Lifestyle magazine.

- ★ Shocker
- ★★ Average
- ★★★ Good
- ★★★★ Excellent
- ★★★★★ Perfection

**“The idea behind the unique shape is to reduce diffraction as well as internal standing waves, both of which can colour the sound.”**

- Performance ★★★★★
- Build Quality ★★★★★
- Compatibility ★★★★★
- Value For Money ★★★★★