

audition

equipment review

Sonique SAV4 SE Loudspeaker System

There aren't too many loudspeakers that turn up at the AVL offices that have been 'drop tested.' Sure, lots of them are tried out or run-in before they leave their respective factories, but the pair of Sonique SAV4 SEs we received sported a few battle scars. According to Sonique Audio the pair travelled interstate in non-standard packaging, without the usual internal foam bits and were not handled with care by the courier. The result is the speakers' timber veneered cabinets have a couple of minor dents - I was expecting a lot worse looking at the state of the box.

And that's one of the main differences with these new Soniques, which are 'Special Editions' of the popular SAV4 MK2 model. The SAV4 SEs use a double veneered MDF cabinet with extra internal bracing and a sand or lead fillable cavity to reduce cabinet resonance. The veneer is American Oak, available in Natural, Jarrah or Black finishes. Apart from the external differences, the Soniques have a new and more complex crossover than their predecessors and features such as gold-plated bi-wireable terminals and hardened steel spikes are standard on the new model.

The new SAV4s are clearly a crafted piece of hi-fi. The wood veneer and overall build quality is up there with the best of Australian and overseas competition. Each speaker contains two

130mm bass/mid drivers and a single 25mm fabric dome tweeter, all of which are located above two forward-firing bass reflex ports.

Like most rivals the Soniques are relatively easy load for an amplifier to drive. Sensitivity is good at 89dB and nominal impedance is rated at 6 ohms, while Sonique recommends between 25 and 200 watts RMS per channel to drive them. And as with pretty much every new floorstander these days, the SAV4 SEs have been designed with AV in mind - all three drivers are magnetically shielded and the speakers are part of a range comprising centre channels, rear surrounds and subwoofers for home theatre use.

This sample pair were obviously run-in, displaying none of the usual bass flabbiness and lack of integration most floorstanders take a while to shake off, straight out of the box. A couple of the design features of the new SAV4 SEs attribute a lot to their overall sound quality and the way the speakers work in the listening room.

The twin bass reflex ports and the damping factor the filled cavity both contribute to the Sonique's bass response, which is one of the speakers' main attractions. It all comes down to room positioning, and here, the Sonique's are pretty much fuss-free. The distance from the back wall isn't too critical, thanks to those forward-firing ports, though with most loudspeakers, they should always be kept away from side walls.

Sonique has taken its Award-winning floorstanders and made them even better. Is it possible? We take a listen...

By Nic Tatham



Sonique has done a fine job with the speakers' crossovers, the drivers gelling seamlessly to give a sound that is rich, powerful and very cohesive. Overall, natural music flow is where the Soniques excel, letting music breathe with seamless grace. While their detail lets nothing go unnoticed, the whole is a smoothly integrated image that makes for a soothing listen. Lean, though full and wholesome, the Sonique's immediately sound invigorating and substantial, and the bass comes to the fore with a lot of different music, be it the Whitlams or Beethoven. And the classical composer's *9th Symphony* shows the SAV4SEs to be masters of scale, managing to reproduce the drama of the orchestra without compressing dynamics, and recreating the densely-populated soundstage with decent focus and perspective. And despite having a distinct sonic character the Soniques still present instruments accurately.

their spring-loaded stride, and project the bubbling rhythms and blissed-out vocals far beyond the cabinets.

Bass is supplied in large, wholesale helpings, while treble is crisp, bright and sparky. Best of all, however, is stereo imaging, which is very deep, three-dimensional and surgically precise in placing instruments.

The result is a soundstage that enthral. David Sylvian's beautifully crafted *Orpheus* sounds captivatingly crisp and fresh. Guitar, horns, strings and double bass are clearly separated and presented with natural impact, while Sylvian's voice sounds vibrant and unchained.

Given their sensitivity, the Soniques work well with a wide range of amps, particularly the muscular Yamaha RX-V1 (also reviewed this issue) and the speakers' display a neutral character with a wide range of music. They show superb alacrity when asked to perform at speed, so that the drum rolls on

Switching to the more upbeat *Jesus Came From Outta Space* from Supergrass and the Soniques hurl out the dynamic basslines with real welly. Those twin bass units dig deep and stay true, and even at high volume levels the sound is clean.

This sort of music gives the Soniques every reason to shine. Vocals are adeptly projected with real presence and excellent articulation, yet the speakers keep the hard-hitting beat and complex mix in check.

With the charging attack of a nimble-footed rhino, the SAV4 SEs take The Charlatans' *Just When You're Thinkin' Things Over* well within

Everything But The Girl's *Walking Wounded* sound as separate and dynamic as you could wish. This speed gives them an easy air with almost all types of music.

But the SAV4 SEs aren't too clinical. The sound certainly grows on you, providing musical information without forcing it down your throat.

And it's only sometimes that this poised delivery fails to totally excite. Turn to a nastier, more energetic piece, like The Prodigy's *Breathe*, and the Soniques can become slightly pedestrian, trailing the pounding, adrenaline-charged basslines breathlessly. The grinding electro-bass riff is somewhat softened, the flaring, screaming guitars emerging as an almost soothing wall of sound. Perhaps I'm being a bit too harsh, but with this sort of music, the Soniques are a little too polished.

Switching to a different role completely, the SAV4 SEs also make totally capable front speakers in an AV system. With Yamaha's new flagship receiver in control, the Soniques are able to show just what they are capable of in this role, and they don't disappoint. Clarity is excellent, the tight, focused treble highlighting non-direct voices and small off-screen events cleanly even in the midst of the bike chase in *Tomorrow Never Dies*. Midrange punch is also plentiful, with a taut punchy character that really brings out the snap in *Starship Troopers'* heavy-calibre gunfire.

With Pro Logic material the Soniques deliver plenty of bass, though the furniture's not likely to rearrange itself, and although they're well endowed in the bass department, switching to Dolby Digital or dts material begs the addition of a subwoofer to further plumb the depths of such soundtracks.

Sonique needn't have made the changes to the original SAV4Mk2s - that design picked up this year's AVL Best Buy award in the \$1,000 -2,000 price category (that alone should sell a few pairs)! But not content with this, it has decided to make an excellent design even better and the SEs are worthy of their Special Edition tag. The internal tweaks and changes have improved the sound quality, while visually, the SAV4 SEs are far more appealing.

What's even better news is the price hasn't received the same level of attention.

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Given the extent of the improvements, the extra cash outlay is chicken feed.

Admittedly, there is absolutely no shortage of competitors for the Soniques - quality floorstanders for this sort of money are two-a-penny. But local loudspeaker manufacturers have a couple of advantages over foreign competition at the moment - firstly, their product is as good, and secondly, more affordable. If ever there was a local speaker that was testament to this, these new Soniques are definitely one of them. **AVL**

TECHNOTALK

SONIQUE SAV4SE

Product Type:	Floorstanding loudspeaker system
Driver Complement:	2-way, three driver system 2 x 130mm shielded midrange/woofers 25mm fabric dome tweeter
Enclosure:	Bass reflex, dual front ported, mineral fillable
Amplifier Connection:	Standard or bi-wireable
Frequency Response:	39Hz-20kHz +/-3dB
Sensitivity:	89dB
Impedance:	6 ohms (nominal)
Amplifier Power:	25-200 watts RMS per channel
Cabinet Finish:	American Oak veneer, Black, Jarrah or Natural
Dimensions:	930 x 200 x 260mm
Weight:	20kg each
Distributor:	Sonique Audio Pty Ltd
Telephone:	(08) 8285 9722
Facsimile:	(08) 8285 9744
Website:	www.sonique.com.au

**Technotalk* specifications and recommended retail prices are supplied by the manufacturer*

THE LAST WORD

The 'Last Word' is included so as to be used in conjunction with the full contents of this equipment review. The ratings in each category are determined by the reviewer as an overview of this product only, and should therefore be considered as an integral part of this 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 issues of Audio & Video Lifestyle magazine.

“The wood veneer and overall build quality is up there with the best of Australian and overseas competition.”

- 1 Shocker! Don't even think about a product that scores so low!
- 2 Just OK, but this could be better.
- 3 Average to good, the minimum requirement.
- 4 Very Good! What should be expected of today's technology.
- 5 Excellent, 100 percent perfection. A rarity!

	1	2	3	4	5
Performance:	★★★★★★★★★★★★				
Build Quality:	★★★★★★★★★★★★				
Compatibility:	★★★★★★★★★★★★				
Value For Money:	★★★★★★★★★★★★				