

Sonique

SAV-5SE LOUDSPEAKERS



What do you do when you tire of designing sonar and weapon control systems? If you're Greg Waldren, who's now responsible for research and development at Sonique, you start a loudspeaker company. Founded exactly 20 years ago, in partnership with Steve Lund, Sonique has grown to be one of Australia's largest and most successful speaker manufacturers. Its South Australian factory includes one of best-equipped audio research and development laboratories in the country.

Equipment

The SAV-5SE is a three-driver two-way, with the two bass/midrange drivers and the tweeter arrayed in an MTM or 'D'Appolito' array, to guarantee equal path lengths at the listening position. We had difficulty getting them from their boxes because Sonique had kindly pre-filled the special recess at the bottom of the speaker with kiln-dried sand. You don't have to fill your SAV-5s, but we'd recommend you do, because it not only improves the sound of the speaker, but also the stability, because it moves the centre of gravity 'way down low.

All three drivers are fully shielded, as you'd expect, so you could push the cabinets right up close to the telly if you wanted. Each bass driver's overall diameter is 174mm, but the moving diameters are 120mm (cone) and 142mm (cone plus the rubber roll surround) for an ECA per driver of 113cm². The system ECA is therefore 226cm², equivalent to a single bass/midrange driver with a nominal diameter of around 203mm. The cone is polypropylene (reinforced with mica), which operates from a pressed steel chassis that's recessed into the front baffle, gasketed and secured with four speed-head particle-board screws that bite directly into the front baffle.

The tweeter's 26mm dome is made from fabric, and sits slightly proud of its 100mm faceplate. Like the bass/midrange drivers, its lead-out wires are soldered.

The crossover network is in a most unusual location: the underside of the top of the speaker, where it's accessed by removing the uppermost bass/midrange driver. The network is beautifully made, with air-cored coils that have been wound from extraordinarily thick wire and are both clamped and epoxied to prevent movement and vibration from affecting the sound.

Sonique's cabinetwork is renowned in the industry, and the superb SAV-5SE cabinets were ample proof of the reason. The veneer is real American oak, but our sample had been hand-polished with a jarrah stain. You can also have a black stain, or Sonique will finish the American oak with a clear lacquer. But the beauty is more than skin deep, because inside the cabinet, there's the same painstaking attention to detail. 'Crate' foam is applied to one internal wall, and acoustic 'wool' to the other surfaces. The bass-reflex cabinet is vented to the front via two ports, mounted in-line, above each other. Each one is approximately 65mm in diameter and 170mm long, and is flared at the exit.

Standing on their (very sharp!) spikes, we measured the cabinets as being 1080mm high, 221mm wide and 308mm deep (including the front grille). If you don't want spikes for any reason, Sonique can (optionally) provide rubber feet. Sonique rates the design at 6 ohms (nominally) with a minimum of 4 ohms, with efficiency rated at 92dB SPL.

Performance

On firing up Sonique's SAV-5SEs, we were absolutely floored by the realism of the

stereo imaging, both the solidity of the central image and the incredible depth. This image is also very robust, you can even turn your head sideways and experience the full depth. A real standout. From there on in, things just got better with every CD we tried. The level of detail is brilliant. Not only was Sara K's voice reproduced exactly, we could even hear the faint sound of her lips separating every time she opened her mouth to sing. Male vocals were handled equally well, with the sound wonderfully tailored, so that the sound was deep and powerful but never 'cheesy'. Listening to Livingston Taylor drop into his low register to sing the words "made for love" on his track *Isn't She Lovely* is so achingly beautiful it will raise the hairs on the back of your neck.

Bass extension is very good, stretching easily low enough to contain the lowest notes of the piano with a good deal of power, and also enough to capture the deep bass on the opening to *Sibley Sanctus Lydian* (Empire Brass Quintet). Speaking of piano, the piano sound on Airtio Moreira's *Nevermind* is tight and cohesive right across the keyboard range. Great piano sound also on the ABC release 'Over the Hills and Far Away' (Leslie Howard plays Percy Grainger), particularly the repeated treble motifs in *The Immovable Do*.

Conclusion

Sonique is in the happy position of being large enough to deliver the economies of scale that make for consumer-friendly price tags, yet small enough that the speakers it builds are still the results of passion, rather than production line. Take an oxygen mask with you if you're going to audition the new SAV-5SEs, because they'll take your breath away.

Bb

Sonique SAV-5SE

WARRANTY: 5 years


Sound quality

Cabinet finish



Sand-hole location

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