

VIVID *audio*
PRESS COVERAGE 2009



K1



Beautifully Designed Sound.



**"One of
the finest
loudspeakers
on the planet"**

HiFi Choice Awards
Best High-End Speaker

When designing the **K1**, the Vivid Audio engineers wanted to gain the bass response of a larger speaker yet retain the agility and speed of a smaller design. Through extensive research, they perfected a reaction-cancelling bass loading system that, when combined with a newly developed crossover, delivers progressively focused power with increasing frequency. The result? All the bass expected of a much larger design yet with the coherent detail of a simple driver.

Beauty isn't just about looks.

For more information:

t: 01903 530005 (Office)

01403 782221 (Studio)

e: uk@vividspeakers.com

w: www.vividaudio.com



VIVID audio



VIVID *audio*



Welcome to the Vivid Audio UK Review Brochure 2009.

2009 has been a great year for **Vivid Audio**. Not only have our products continued to receive critical acclaim globally, but, since the launch of our product range in the UK, we have received unprecedented accolades from some of the industry's most revered commentators.

As well as the reviews reproduced within this brochure from such respected toms as **HiFi Choice** and **HiFi World**, we have also seen our first ever review within **What HiFi? Sound and Vision (V1.5)**, where we received 5 out of 5 stars. Commenting within the review, **What HiFi?** said 'It's always nice to come across a new brand that really offers something both fresh and interesting. In doing this, Vivid Audio has come up with a product that's as good as the very best in the class. We can't wait to hear the rest of the range.'

However, the best was yet to come as we also received our first ever UK Award – the **HiFi Choice** Best of the High End Speaker of the Year for the K1.

Commenting on the Award, **HiFi Choice** said 'It has an uncannily revealing and neutral performance. It's subtle, fast and has a wide bandwidth with great timing. And, thanks to the engineering and inspiration that went into its creation, the K1 is a high-end winner.' In conclusion, **HiFi Choice** also announced that the K1 is 'one of the finest speakers on the planet.'



So we hope that you can take some time to sit back and read these reviews and enjoy them as much as we have.

As we say 'beauty isn't just about looks'

...and we are sure you will agree.

REVIEW



David Price finds Vivid Audio's all-aluminium drivered B1 loudspeaker something of a golden listening opportunity...

Midas Touch

HI-FI WORLD

HI-FI WORLD SEPTEMBER 2009

www.hi-fiworld.co.uk

There's no one single loudspeaker that does things better than all others, but there are a number of high end designs which seem particularly good in certain ways. Yet the only thing that unites the likes of Tannoy Westminsters, Quad 2905s, Martin Logan CLXs and what have you is the fact that they're not conventional box loudspeakers with cooking off-the-shelf drivers.

Now, whilst at the lower end of the market, I'd venture that a pair of decent moving coil drive units (say a cloth dome tweeter and an mid/bass cone made from some variant of plastic or glass fibre) is probably going to give you the best sound per pound, it simply doesn't happen when - financially speaking at least - you reach for the stars. Instead, at this price, a degree of innovation is involved, and/or the need to hand-make particular transducers to do the job the designer had in mind.

Vivid design supremo Laurence Dickie walks into my front room, and as he sets foot on the shagpile exclaims, ooh - NS1000Ms! He starts to talk about the production processes that Yamaha used to make their Beryllium drive units, and concludes, they were so ahead of their time. 'Interesting', I muse to myself in a Leonard Nimoy sort of way. Here's a loudspeaker engineer with the enthusiasm of a kid in a sweet shop, not your average on-message corporate type with a settled view on life, the universe and everything.

His background is impeccable; he joined B&W back in 1983 after completing an electronics degree at Southampton University. They wanted an electronic engineer to develop active speakers, which was exactly what I'd been doing in my own time so it was perfect. Actually I was more interested in the speaker part than the electronics and suggested the Matrix system for reinforcing the cabinet which became standard in all their high end models, he told me. After that John Bowers asked me to get involved with work he'd begun, which focused on removing cabinet effects using cone drivers on an open resistive baffle. It became quite clear that once you'd removed the internal resonances and external diffraction effects of typical square boxes the driver material became clearly audible. So I resolved to make a system in which the drivers remained pistonic and an enclosure which was free of resonances or reflections. For



the drivers I used a 50mm aluminium dome for the crucial midband and for the rear enclosures found the best performance from exponentially tapered tubes. The result was Nautilus.

Yes indeed, this is the man behind B&W's epic statement loudspeaker, the stuff of latter day legends. Not that you'd know this from casual conversation with him you understand, as Laurence is far more interested in talking about what's possible, how differing approaches do things well (and not so well), and the way forward for the loudspeaker world, than his not inconsiderable wealth of previous design experience. Over lunch, we chat about materials technology, plasma tweeters, the problems of ported loudspeakers and his beloved contoured cabinets. Although never coming over as an idealogue or a zealot, he's not the world's greatest diplomat, noting that many big name high end loudspeakers are more about marketing than the appliance of science...

An engineer through and through, he came to Vivid via his B&W connections, but with the original idea being simply fitting

OEM drivers in our own enclosures... I felt this would be no fun and if they were going to be serious that they should consider making their own drivers, he told me. It happened that in the years after leaving B&W, I had been developing a set of drivers which, while originally intended for use in high power studio monitors, were ideally suited to high-end domestic audio. The next four years were spent perfecting those drivers and developing the cabinet shapes. We quickly outgrew the garage where production started in 2004 and moved into our Durban factory in 2005, where we still manufacture all our enclosures and drivers from raw materials and machined parts. We've made about 2,700 loudspeakers to date.

He describes Vivid Audio, which was officially registered in 2004, as being a design and engineering led company, adding that, the flow of ideas is very much in one direction from designer to end user. To that extent the object which ends up in front of the listener is very pure. I feel a personal connection with each piece that ends up in a person's listening room.

The first Vivid design, the B1, is a largish (1,095x265x375mm including integral stand) standmounter

weighing a hefty 38kg each. It's a three and a half way design, with two bass drivers being used, the one on the front baffle being directly coupled to the second on the rear. This technology dramatically reduces the amount of mechanical energy given off by the enclosure, it's claimed.

The injected carbon fibre reinforced polyester cabinet is designed to be as dead as possible.

Initially the idea was to make the enclosure by first building a wooden matrix with front and rear baffles attached and then bending two carbon fibre reinforced sheets onto this support and joined at the top and bottom apexes, Laurence says. This would have been quite workable but the design was a bit restricted by the materials. Then we were introduced to a local polymer concrete manufacturer and immediately we realised that if we were to mould the enclosure it would give us complete design freedom. The material itself was just right for the job and the addition of

work above 100Hz. Fortunately it's quite simple to decouple the drivers from the cabinet above 100Hz by floating them on silicone o-rings. Three separate ones are used to decouple each of the two dome drivers from the enclosure and from the tapered tube absorbers. So in the same way as the B1 has bass drivers front and back it also has a pair of reaction cancelling ports.

It's not just the novel cabinetry and the clever way the drivers are mounted which deserves attention though, but the fact that all three transducers are material matched, using a magnesium/aluminium alloy, and the tweeter and midrange driver share a similar dome profile to give true phase coherence. Laurence takes up the story, actually there's very little to choose from between aluminium, magnesium and titanium in terms of density to modulus ratio, but in the end I chose 5052 aluminium/magnesium alloy because of many reports from the pro field that titanium never sounds so

"for those who share my own personal sonic proclivities, this has to be one of the loudspeaker greats..."

a small amount of chopped carbon fibre improved it still further.

To fully exploit this design, 3D solid modelling CAD software was used. The precision of the models which result is almost magical. I make liberal use of spline curves which yield particularly smooth flowing results. The use of doubly curved surfaces increases the stiffness of the shell and this rigidity is further enhanced by the use of four lateral braces. In the end we brought it all in-house, so we now have complete control over every stage of manufacture, he adds.

Although much trouble has been taken to make the cabinet as acoustically inert as possible (as a knuckle rap proves), Laurence is still a great believer of decoupling the drivers. From earlier work on small sub-woofers I'd become convinced of the benefits of using pairs of opposing drivers in a reaction-cancelling configuration, so it was only logical that we use this approach on the B1, he told me. But he couldn't have the rear driver working up to 880Hz like the front, so it's designed to start working at just 100Hz. While this sorts out the acoustics, this means that the drive is no longer symmetrical so the reaction cancelling isn't going to

sweet, but this might be an effect which is only noticeable in large compression drivers. Through the use of finite element analysis, an optimised dome/cone combination was found for the lower frequencies. This was supported by a chassis featuring an extremely open design which minimises interference with the rear cone output. The use of a radial magnet to keep the area to a minimum also helps in this respect.

The three bespoke driver designs then needed to be manufactured, and Laurence found this easier said than done. I didn't want to get involved with driver manufacture by myself so initially tried to engage some well known OEM suppliers, but they all ran a mile when they saw how different the designs actually were to their product range and used no standard parts! Fortunately my new South African friends were not faint hearted and the challenge of creating these new drivers from scratch not too daunting so we set to work. We often wonder, if we had known then what we know now, whether we would ever have embarked on this journey!

Last but not least was the crossover. Although the first prototypes were made by hand using polypropylene capacitors and hand

REVIEW

wound inductors hard wired onto drilled boards, Laurence told me that we fully expected to get the production items from one of the well known OEM suppliers. They duly sent samples which did look the part of course. All very well built with their machine wound inductors mounted on professional looking PCBs - except they just didn't sound the same. So to this day we still hand wire the components and we still wind our own inductors.

The result is a beautifully built and finished loudspeaker costing £10,500 per pair (in Graphite, Oyster, Sahara, Pearl and Copper paint finishes, with additional colours for an additional cost of £615). That distinctive shape is not, as has been reported, based on a Zulu shield, but is driven by the same logic which gave rise to Nautilus, namely that the baffle should be just the width of the drivers it supports surrounded by a generous fillet. The critical area around the mid and tweeter units is smoothly contoured for the benefit of the emerging sound field. The further you go from the tweeter the more artistic license you have with the design but in the case of B1 the guiding principle was that of symmetry so the bottom of the cabinet mirrors the top as the rear does the front, Laurence told me.

SOUND QUALITY

As you'd expect of a loudspeaker with unique and usual drive units in bespoke cabinets the like of which you don't see anywhere else, the Vivid B1 is a distinctive performer, inasmuch as it doesn't do what so many other designs at the price do. By this, I mean many others somehow manage to lose the natural timing, tonality and/or phase coherence of the original recording. Instead, the Vivid B1 brings you largely unknown pleasures - those coming from hearing the music in a direct coupled manner.

Temperamentally this loudspeaker is no shrinking violet. It's not the sort of thing you buy to put on the end of any old assemblage of components, in the hope that it will somehow make a nice noise. Indeed, if you do this, it highly likely won't. It is relentlessly revealing of the source and amplification, telling you in a matter of fact way what's wrong with them. In this respect they're eerily similar to Yamaha NS1000Ms, which can sound like ten different speakers given ten changes of source or amp. The Vivids do this too - so they're a speaker you'll have to commit to, just like you would/should a marriage. And they'll prove endlessly rewarding

if you tie the knot...

All drivers have their own patina, from Martin Logan electrostatic panels to Lowthers, and the sonic signature of the Vivid B1 is bright and spry. Indeed, to those used to the inevitable squawkery emanating from average plastic drivers of all descriptions (trendy names or not, as the case may be), the Vivids are nothing less than bracing. Rather like walking out on a beautiful bright and crisp winter morning, the music arrives brilliantly lit and with vibrant definition and dazzling colour. Switch to the likes of the similarly priced B&W 801D, and things became more nasal, more quacky, more monochrome, while the Quad 989 seems soft and silky but as veiled as a smoggy city sunset.

Annie Lennox's breathtaking cover of Don't Let It Bring You Down showcases the Vivid B1's wonderful clarity. Her close miked vocals were carried with complete immediacy, as if you were in the vocal booth with her. Yet there was utter cohesion; as her voice went up and down the scale, there were no odd phase artefacts to be heard, and when she went louder there wasn't so much as a whiff of distortion, harshness or sibilance. Meanwhile, behind those exquisite vocals, the track's expansive instrumentation pushed things along, the B1's rendering the backing analogue synth glides with complete believability. Hi-hats sparkled like ships in the night, snare drum pan rolls thumped the verse-chorus bridge transition home and gentle backing electric piano twinkled up and down, in and out of the mix.

Simply Red's Fairground was no less captivating. This song gets most speakers to simply issue you with a long list of what they're doing wrong, as they stumble and fall whilst trying to keep up with the complex (and slightly dissonant) backing rhythm track. It's that heavily processed thumping bass drum that does it for your average big box, but the Vivids didn't so much as raise an eyebrow in Roger Moore-esque repose. They showed themselves to be in complete command of the heavy percussion, deliciously fleet of foot, while Mick Hucknall's occasionally nasal vocals were flattered. He sounded creamy smooth, but just as immediate and in the room as a very close miked Annie Lennox had. Elsewhere, the house-style piano breaks were surprisingly sumptuous for something likely rendered from a mid-nineties digital sampler. For me though, aside from cutting through this dense mix like a hot knife through butter, what

impressed me most was the dynamic accenting throughout the choruses. It was plain to hear that the singer was extending himself, using every foot-pound of pressure in his fast emptying lungs. Sit on dynamic transients, the Vivid B1s do not!

Skilful though these loudspeakers may be with processed, compressed chart pop, it wasn't until I moved to the avant-jazz strains of Rain Tree Crow's Pocket Full of Change that I really became aware of what these could really do. The opening percussion came over with the speed and agility of a duelling sword, and a satisfyingly metallic clang. Hi-hats sounded beautifully realistic, with a pure zing that you just don't hear from hi-fi speakers very often, and they timed so sublimely too. There's such little overhang from the Vivid's metal drivers that the instruments simply stop when they're supposed to, rather than entering into a seemingly endless spiral of tiny aftershocks. The result is so much space around instruments in the mix, and also a

wonderfully insightful idea of the performers most subtle rhythmic nuancing. Such was the purity of their sound that it was plain for all who could care that the Rain Tree Crow project was of course Japan (the band) by any other name. Indeed, as the track moved on, in came vocalist David Sylvian with his trademark David Bowie/Bryan Ferry soundalike sound. Once again the Vivids conveyed his voice with magical ease, this time a little



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harder and more edgy than in his late-period Japan days, but with all its rich, dark chocolatey velvet intact.

The sudden realisation that I hadn't thought about the B1's bass momentarily stopped me in my tracks. It's what I normally hear first in a speaker; about 10ms after the first note of the song is struck, I am fast forming an opinion about its cabinet and/or bass port. But with the Vivids this is very hard to do. The solitary sound of a bass guitar string plucked proves quite odd, as despite the porting (which regular readers will know I'm not a passionate advocate of), I really couldn't hear the cabinets at all. I couldn't hear bumps, thumps, thrums, buzzes, hisses, chuffing, or anything else for that matter, except the bass drum and guitar. And as the bassist went up and down his fretboard, there was no magical sweet spot when things got much louder as the cabinet started vibrating like a Hotpoint on maximum spin speed, or the port started chuffing like a steamboat funnel. Amazingly, here is one of the very best implementations of reflex loading I've ever heard. Great to hear, but I'm afraid it will make listening to almost every other ported loudspeaker even more arduous...

Brilliant as the Vivids proved with jazz and pop, it's as if they were saving themselves for classical. All those great qualities, ones which to me personally are closer to heroic, of speed, transparency, grip, neutrality and phase-coherence made my time listening to my fave DG recording of Beethoven's Pastoral symphony (Karajan, Dresdner Philharmonic) quite unforgettable. The magic served up by the marriage of those tweeters and midband drivers, and the way that they work with the cabinet, makes strings a joy. Every last sinewy ounce of the violins was served up with breathtaking clarity; stark, explicit and unsullied, the B1 has tremendous tonal accuracy. Yes, although there was that trademark brightness you get from metal drivers, but conversely there was none of the thrum, plump or squawk of Bextrene, paper or polypropylene. Although the Vivid B1's drive units have a naturally well lit nature, they never descend into harshness or grain - unlike so many others which can be dull one minute and screaming at you the next.

The other wondrous element of their performance was soundstaging. After a not inconsiderable run in period, and after that about twenty minutes per day warm up type, the B1s were able to throw images around my listening room with

greater precision than any THX multi-speaker surround system I've heard. Once again, I feel this is a function of the brilliantly designed cabinets and the phase coherence between tweeter and midrange domes. The expression out of the box was invented for these loudspeakers.

As eagle-eyed readers may have surmised, I liked the Vivid B1 loudspeaker very much, for the exact same reason I love my Yamaha NS1000Ms. It is lightning-fast, beautifully integrated, very cohesive and musically expressive. But just like the Yams, the Vivid has issues. As I've previously alluded to, they won't be for everyone. Those wonderfully matched metal tweeter and midrange driver might sound a little to brightly lit for some, so you'll have to be meticulous about your system matching if you don't want a bassoon to sound like an enormous comb covered in tracing paper. Go for a smooth vinyl source if possible, or an ultra low distortion DAC, plus a seriously smooth Class A transistor amplifier - cheap CD player users need not apply.

Then there's the other aspect of the bass which I've so far neglected to mention, which is that there isn't all that much of it. The B1 does not go down low in the way a similarly sized floorstander does, for example. Its bass is brilliantly articulate and tuneful, but you simply don't get an immersive low frequency experience. This is for better and for worse, as many live in houses where this is simply not domestically acceptable (from a neighbour or spouse point of view). The Vivid B1 lets you hit the loud pedal and run high levels of very clean and engaging sound, without telling everyone else in the street about it.

CONCLUSION

Loudspeakers are impossibly difficult things to gauge. Three very well engineered but different designs

can elicit three highly divergent opinions. As for me, I know what I like, and what I like centres around clarity, incision, speed, dynamics and phase coherence from top to bottom. That's why I've ended up with Yamaha NS1000Ms, which are at the top of this particular game, and also adore the Martin Logan CLX, Apogee Synergy 1.5 and Usher Be-10. Well, to this little list I must add the Vivid B1. They're an altogether smaller scale speaker than the aforementioned, but are no less enthralling a listen. As well as any of these greats, they give you that direct-coupled, brain-plugged-into-the mixing desk sound. Just so long as you know what you're buying in to, they have very few flaws (and these are relatively insignificant), which makes the B1 an incredible all round package for those with small to medium sized rooms. For those who share my own personal sonic proclivities, this has to be truly one of the loudspeaker greats.

REFERENCE SYSTEM

Sony TT-S8000/OL Silver/Ortofon Winfield turntable
Icon Audio PS3 phono stage
Sugden IM4 integrated amplifier
Audio Research VSi60 integrated amplifier
MF Audio Passive Pre/Nu Force Ref 9SE pre/power
Yamaha NS1000M loudspeakers
Quad 989 loudspeakers

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VERDICT

Breathtaking transparency, superlative coherence, dizzying speed and an unyielding musicality all conspire to make one of the best compact loudspeakers currently made.

VIVID B1 £10,500
Vivid Audio
www.vividaudio.com

FOR

- rousingly musical
- superlative soundstaging
- searching incision
- seamless cohesion
- dramatic dynamics

AGAINST

- no low bass extension
- meticulous matching needed

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Our published frequency response analysis, using a stepped, gated sine wave signal, clearly shows the Vivid B1 to be very flat right across the audio band with none of the usual treble emphasis seen in so many modern loudspeakers. Look closely, however, and it is apparent that the dome midrange unit is prominent from 1.5kHz up to 5kHz and, in conjunction with increased acoustic power from wider dispersion over cone drivers, the B1 will have a forward and perhaps 'obvious' midband. It certainly will not lack presence, that's for sure and both speech and vocals should be very clear, with great intelligibility. Upper treble does not rise, so there should be little sign of a high end 'sting'.

Bass output is fairly constrained; even a third octave analysis of pink noise, which shows in-room energy build up, confirms limited low bass, the lower limit being 60Hz (-6dB). However, this does mean the B1 will sound well damped and the port peaks at 35Hz to add in some bottom end weight. Output from the port is limited however, measuring just +2dB on forward response at 80Hz, although there are two ports.

Impedance measured 6 Ohms and sensitivity a normal enough 87dB from one nominal watt (2.8V) of input.

The loudspeaker's spectral decay over 200ms was quick and clean, suggesting very low colouration.

The Vivid B1 measured well. It will sound forward and projective with vocals and instruments. Bass output is restrained; this is not a bass heavy loudspeaker by any means, but near wall placement should suit it. NK

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



Green - driver output
Red - port output

IMPEDANCE



VIVID AUDIO

G1 GIYA

With stunning aesthetics and a sound to match, this relative newcomer bowls us over

PRICE £32,000 per pair CONTACT Vivid Audio Ltd ■ 01903 530005 ■ www.vividaudio.com

Speakers just aren't supposed to look like this: beautiful, strikingly original and utterly dramatic. Maybe Vivid called upon the ghost of Henry Moore to act as design consultant? Wherever one's flights of imagination lead, the Giya still subscribes to a 'form follows function' discipline.

Relative newcomer Vivid Audio makes a number of smaller models, but this Giya flagship is on an different scale. It's certainly a very large loudspeaker, standing 1.7m tall, but the way it tapers from a rather bulbous base, up to the slim and delicately curved top adds lightness and gives a delightfully organic appearance. High-gloss automotive paint adds further zest.

It might share some of the ingredients found in the earlier models, but the scaling-up operation proved anything but simple. Had Vivid applied the same construction materials and methods used in its smaller models – with appropriate structural rigidity – to this giant, the final speaker would have been immensely heavy. Instead, the Giya enclosure is a composite, consisting of two skins of fibreglass sandwiching a balsa wood core and vacuum-formed into shape, providing a good combination of stiffness and damping without excessive mass.

The four-way driver line-up consists of two 280mm bass drivers with 225mm diaphragms, facing outwards and operating below 220Hz; a 160mm unit with a 125mm diaphragm handling the two octaves between 220Hz and 880Hz; and a 50mm catenary profile dome covering 880Hz-3.5kHz. Above that, a similar 26mm dome takes over.

All five drive units have lossy mountings to avoid exciting the enclosure, which is also reinforced by several internal braces. The rear of each of the three forward-facing drivers is loaded by an internal tube with absorbent material, to inhibit rearward radiation reflections.

The bass drivers – and their carefully shaped ports for that matter – are mounted back-to-back, so any mechanical reaction forces cancel themselves out. While the bulk of the speaker enclosure is a twin reflex-ported space, the tapered top section acts as a transmission line to absorb and resonances created in the main cavity. The shape ensures fine inherent stability, while six optional and exceptionally sharp spikes effectively nail the speaker to a floor.

SOUND QUALITY

The Giya's two large port-loaded bass drivers inevitably meant rather too much bass in our 4.3x2.6x5.5m listening room. But because the bottom end is basically clean and well-timed, the

excess was by no means unpleasant. The speaker's dramatic appearance perhaps leads one to expect an equally dramatic sonic presentation, but that isn't the case at all. In fact, this loudspeaker is subtly personified, with a warm, rich and decidedly laid-back character.

However, getting the listening experiments underway, it quickly becomes apparent that this speaker is actually more truthful than most. While its basic sweetness and unflappability remains a core characteristic, it also proves exceptionally effective in revealing the strengths and weaknesses of the different media and the various components with which it is fed. Although much of the listening is done using a Naim NAC552/NAP500 pre/power amplifier

combination, a DarTZeel CTH-8550 integrated amp is also on hand. This proves the better match, as the treble sweetness of speakers and amplifier seem to complement each other beautifully.

The Giya not only sounds sweet – it's also unusually smooth throughout the upper reaches of the audio band"

The Giya not only sounds sweet – it's also unusually smooth and coherent throughout the upper reaches of the audio band. It can handle as much power as any likely amplifier is able to dish out and can go very loud indeed, without ever becoming aggressive. Sensitivity comes out at a generous 91-92dB on our measurement, close to that specified, though the load drops below 6ohms at low frequencies (sub-120Hz), so amplifier current demands can be quite significant.

Enclosure colorations are clearly vanishingly low – no vibrations could be felt, even when the speaker pounds out tasty, block-rockin' beats. This has two distinct consequences. First, stereo images seem entirely separated from the speakers themselves. The ability to distinguish the individual voices in a choral work, for example, is captivating and the total performance remarkably convincing.

The Giya's exceptionally wide dynamic range and low noise floor is dramatically revealed in a live BBC Proms broadcast from the Royal Albert Hall. Not only is the familiar, large acoustic space revealed more clearly and coherently than ever before, but the applause at the end of the performance sounds particularly real.

While the Giya's radical appearance won't be to every taste and its generous low bass is best suited to large rooms, or those with lossy bass characteristics, it's unquestionably a remarkable loudspeaker. If you like your music served up with refinement and restraint, step right up. ■■■

Paul Messenger





Vivid Audio G1 Giya
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EDITOR'S CHOICE
HI-FI CHOICE
magazine
★

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Vivid imagination

From the designer that brought us Bowers and Wilkins' snail, Vivid dishes up a wood-free wonder

PRODUCT Vivid Audio K1

TYPE Integral standmount loudspeaker

PRICE £14,495

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 28x130x45cm
 • Weight: 56kg • Drive units: 26mm metal dome tweeter, 50mm metal dome midrange, 4x 158mm metal coned bass units • Sensitivity: 89dB • Impedance: 6 Ohms • Finish: Five high-gloss automotive colours

CONTACT ☎ 01903 530005 🌐 www.vividaudio.com

Vivid Audio is a pretty unusual loudspeaker manufacturer. Based in South Africa, it makes all of its own metal drive units and encloses them in high tech cabinets with not a scrap of MDF or wood of any sort in sight. The Vivid Audio speakers are designed by Laurence Dickie, the man who is responsible for the original B&W Nautilus, or snail speaker. It's also a design that has had a profound influence over that company's entire range since it was created in the early nineties.

Nowadays, Dickie works at Turbosound, the live PA specialist and Vivid speakers are his only domestic creations in production.

The Vivid K1 was the biggest speaker in the range until the arrival of the mighty Giya, which will be appearing in 2009's *The Collection*. It stands 1.3m high on its moulded-in stand and while its slim shape ensures that it does not impose too much, it still makes its mark in the room. The distinctive form is achieved using a cast carbon fibre reinforced-polyester compound for the cabinet. This is a material that is selected for its ability to be moulded into an acoustically desirable shape from the perspective of both stiffness and the removal of diffraction.

With a box cabinet, sound radiates not only away from the drivers but across its front surface until it reaches an edge at which point it diffracts or bounces off. The curved shape around the mid and high frequency drivers, in particular on the K1, ensures that this does not happen. The final benefit from using this material is that it can be finished with almost any spray paint available on the market, apparently, the Korean Vivid distributor launched the Giya with a sample finished in a daring Lamborghini orange.

Like the smaller Vivid B1 that we reviewed in 2004 (*HFC* 261) the K1 has mid/bass drivers on both the front and the back of the enclosure, in this case four in total and these

operate in a very unusual fashion. For bass below 100Hz, all four are in use. For frequencies above this point, the output of the two rear units and the lower front unit is rolled-off leaving only the top front unit to produce bass and midrange up to 880Hz, where it hands over to the midrange dome.

Dickie calls this crossover a series parallel square because it maintains linear impedance

clearly going on here. Noise floor is not the right description really as it's more like a lack of overhang. What you are not hearing is a box joining in or drive units not being able to contain resonances.

This speaker is so fast and devoid of box coloration that it just doesn't join in with the music the way that so many others do. It's a quality that's so common that we accept it ▶

“Clearly amplifiers used with this speaker have got to be quiet and need to be highly resolute.”

across the band and it's a good example of the ingenuity that he has brought to this and the other Vivid speakers.

The Nautilus influence can be found in tapered tubes that extend behind the mid and treble domes within the cabinet and have their ends covered on the rear side. By designing these domes with external ring magnets the rearward radiation can be absorbed by damping in the tapered tubes.

The two anodised aluminium domes are not hemispherical but catenary in shape, which is like a suspended chain. This shape, more precisely described as a rotated catenary, was chosen because it pushes the first break-up mode of the driver up to 50 per cent higher than can be achieved with regular aluminium domes.

The K1's crossover is in the relatively flat base of the speaker with the signal being carried to the drivers via van den Hul cable. The base itself discreetly houses bi-wire WBT terminals and no fewer than five threaded holes for spikes, not something we chose to use, but hours of levelling fun could be yours should you feel the urge.

SOUND QUALITY

The first thing you notice when firing up this speaker is that it seems to have a lower noise floor than other speakers. Backgrounds are distinctly quieter. This makes no sense at all, as speakers don't have a noise floor because speakers are passive devices that transduce electrical energy into acoustic energy and, therefore, should all be intrinsically silent. And yet this is not the first time the phenomenon has been encountered so there's something



Vivid Audio K1 loudspeaker [Review]

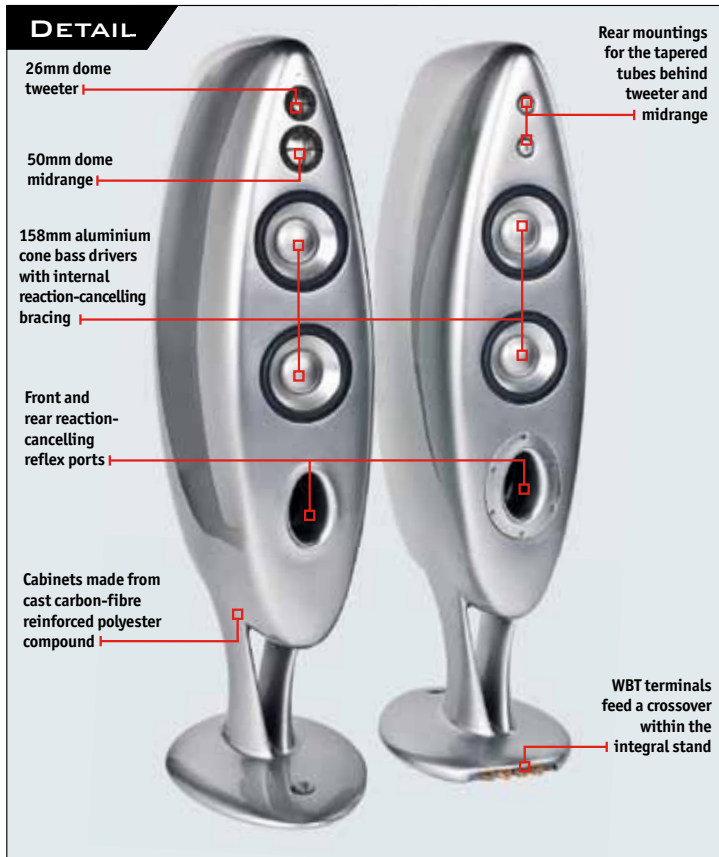
❑ as part of the music rather than as a distortion. But, take it away and you know that you are hearing a cleaner result.

This seems to be most obvious with piano pieces, the first disc to be spun was one of the Schiff Beethoven sonatas on ECM. At this stage, it was only clear that there seemed to be less noise on what is an extremely quiet recording, which in turn produced a more musically engaging result. And also one with more dynamic range than is usually perceived, which is a sure sign that there is less noise coming out of the system.

It was not until we put on Keith Jarrett's *Carnegie Hall* disc that it became clear that the piano sounded less fulsome and woody than usual, but also that it was more realistic in its solidity. After all, concert grands stopped sounding woody a long time ago.

This result could be interpreted as the K1 being short on instrumental timbre, but the sheer level of detail that's on offer here rather rules that out. Each instrument still has a character, Avishai Cohen's double bass is quite woody enough and for some subtle reason his playing, along with that of his two cohorts, takes on a greater sense of occasion in this speaker's hands.

The longer you listen with the K1, the more you can hear and one thing that's perhaps less



REACTION CANCELLING

The dipole arrangement of the bass drivers here has a fairly significant structural purpose. Between the magnets of each opposing pair of drivers is a tensioner that couples the two units rigidly together.

In this way, forces produced by the recoil to the cones movement can be cancelled out as both drivers receive identical signals below 100Hz where this approach is most effective.

Above this frequency, a differential force begins to appear due to the series parallel square crossover. In order to offset this, the drivers are compliantly mounted on elastomeric o-rings.

The same reaction-cancelling approach has been used with the twin ports on the K1, something that's pretty obvious when you look into one and can see right through to the other.

This was done because like the movement of a cone, the air movement within a port exerts a small reaction force on the cabinet. As a consequence, the nature of the port resonance becomes sensitive to the coupling of the cabinet to the ground with spike mounting producing a higher Q than if such things are avoided. By adding a second port, Vivid claims that the problem of cabinet reaction is completely eliminated.

“Leema’s Pyxis preamp and Altair IV power amps, are revealed to be even better than we thought they were.”

welcome is that it's highly revealing of the amplification with which it is partnered. We tried the Trilogy pre/power pairing that we also tested this month because they are similarly fast and have such great musicality. But they aren't quiet enough, as the low level hiss that the valves produce undermines the end result.

On the other hand, Leema's Pyxis preamp and Altair IV power amps, are revealed to be even better than we thought they were, thanks to the K1. They bring a degree of speed and transparency to the result that is in the very top league.

Clearly amplifiers used with this speaker have got to be quiet and need to be highly resolute. The same applies to the source. You may not need the very best, but you will have little difficulty in assessing the good from the OK. We got spectacular results with the EMM Labs TSD1 transport and DAC2 with the K1 and Leemas, a set-up that delivers digital audio gratification of the very highest calibre.

Discovering just how resolute this speaker is makes us wonder if we ever got the best out of

the B1 some five years ago. Somehow we doubt it. The Vivid K1 is undoubtedly one of the finest speakers on the planet. Lord only knows how the Vivid Giya manages to improve on its performance. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy

VERDICT	
SOUND ★★★★★	PRO Uncannily revealing and neutral speaker that uses a number of original technologies to raise the state of the loudspeaker art.
EASE OF DRIVE ★★★★★	
BUILD ★★★★★	CON Aesthetics may not be suitable for all tastes and you do need top quality source and amplification to do the job properly.
VALUE ★★★★★	
CONCLUSION Subtle, fast and wide bandwidth with great timing. There isn't a lot more that you can ask of a speaker. It might seem expensive, but for the engineering and inspiration that's gone into it, the value is in fact unusually high.	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE ★★★★★	
URL: www.techradar.com/625361	



B1



Beautifully
Designed
Sound.



The best loudspeaker is one that you can't hear. Sounds odd, doesn't it? But it should be all about the music; you don't want to have this disturbed by the distortions and reflections a traditional speaker enclosure presents.

The **B1** features our own patented drivers coupled to tapered tube absorbers. This technology eradicates the rear firing information from our drive units leaving just the pure sound that makes the speaker disappear.

Beauty isn't just about looks.

For more information:

t: 01903 530005 (Office)

01403 782221 (Studio)

e: uk@vividspeakers.com

w: www.vividaudio.com



VIVID audio

Contact Details

Vivid Audio UK Ltd.

The Old Barn
Rosier Business Park
Coneyhurst Rd
Billingshurst
RH14 9DE

email uk@vividspeakers.com

Office +44 (0) 1903 530005
Studio +44 (0) 1403 782221
Mobile +44 (0) 7950 274224

Vivid Audio (PTY) Ltd

6 Chelsea Industrial Park
17 Chelsea Avenue
New Germany 3601
South Africa

Factory +27 31 705 4168
Fax +27 86 510 2484

www.vividaudio.com
www.vividaudio.co.uk



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