

KEN MICALLEF

# DeVore Gibbon Super Nine

## LOUDSPEAKER

I've watched the DeVore Fidelity factory develop from its humble start as an early tenant in the Brooklyn Navy Yard—once a sprawl of crumbling ruins, now a sleek high-tech hub—into a thoroughly professional facility housing a cabinet shop, assembly, and R&D. It is also the legendary Monkeyhaus, where late-night listening sessions and pizza feasts are a tradition.

I've owned several DeVore Fidelity speakers, from the original Gibbon 8 and Super 8 to the Gibbon Nine and the O/93. I currently own the O/96. What unites DeVore speakers—the singular quality that has earned them a devoted following—is their versatility. All of DeVore's primates—whether tall, sleek Gibbons or squat, broad Orangutans—possess at least above-average sensitivity and relatively unchallenging impedance characteristics,<sup>1</sup> meaning that they can sing with almost any amplifier. But it's their voicing that truly sets them apart. They reproduce vocals and instruments with natural tone, lifelike texture, and human-scale dynamics. Since the company's founding 25 years ago, CEO and designer John DeVore has won over hundreds of discerning listeners, many of them for the long haul.

"I think the brand DeVore Fidelity is widely known in the industry, but I'd argue that our speakers can't really be considered popular," DeVore demurred over email. "We are a tiny company hand building only about 200 pairs of speakers a year, sold through a small dealer network. This makes us far smaller than the average hi-fi manufacturer."

Each beautifully finished DeVore Fidelity Gibbon Super Nine (\$9990/pair) stands 37" high × 8.5" wide × 13.75" deep and weighs 50lb. It is a 2.5-way, reflex-loaded floorstander made of bamboo, plywood, and composite. The frequency range is specified as 28Hz–38kHz—impressive for a small floorstanding tower—its sensitivity as 91dB/W/1m, and its nominal impedance as 8 ohms, with a 5.5 ohm minimum.

"Gibbon cabinets are made from solid, butcherblock-style bamboo sheets, with multiple plywood braces within the cabinet," DeVore told me in an email. "The front and rear baffles are made from a composite material, with the front being a full 1" thick, the rear being 0.75". The cabinet walls vary from 0.75–1.5" thick. The drivers are attached to the baffles using T-nuts and machine screws for a precision, repeatable, metal-on-metal connection.



<sup>1</sup> The Orangutans are especially easy loads, with sensitivity that's way above average and remarkably benign impedance curves, but even the Gibbons have sensitivity in the low 90s, 8 ohm nominal impedance, and impedance curves that don't drop much below 4 ohms.

## SPECIFICATIONS

**Description** 2.5-way, reflex loaded, floorstanding loudspeaker with solid bamboo, plywood, and composite enclosure. Drivers: one proprietary 0.75" (19mm) textile-dome tweeter and two 7"

(178mm) paper cone woofers. Frequency range: 28Hz–38kHz. Sensitivity: 91dB/W/1m. Nominal impedance: 8 ohms  
**Dimensions** 37" (940mm, not including feet) H × 8.5" (216mm) W × 13.75" (349mm) D. Weight:

55lb (25kg).  
**Finishes** Cherry, Mahogany, Mink.  
**Serial numbers of units reviewed** S915B112 (both).  
**Price** \$9990/pair. Approximate number of US dealers: 20.

Warranty: 5 years limited.  
**Manufacturer** DeVore Fidelity, 63 Flushing Ave., Unit 259, Brooklyn, NY 11205. Tel: (718) 855-9999. Email: info@devorefidelity.com. Web: devorefidelity.com.

The internal wiring of all Gibbon models is a proprietary cable, custom-made using copper and silver with an air-and-Teflon dielectric and vibration damping built into the insulation. We use Cardas solid, unplated copper binding posts. The feet are also custom-made for us. ... They are machined from solid brass with a polished nickel plating.”

John, please detail the damping and bracing within the Super Nine cabinet.

“The panels of the cabinet are all tuned to complement each other,” he wrote, “so that they don’t share any resonance modes. This is done with panel size, material, thickness, and several treatments inside.”

DeVore has always been tight-lipped about his crossover designs, long presumed to be his secret sauce ... and so it is with the Super Nine. “Like every crossover for every speaker since the very first DeVore Fidelity model, it is a proprietary crossover circuit we call the ‘Gibbon’ circuit that is point-to-point hardwired with no circuit boards and potted for isolation from vibrations.”

Since I used to own and enjoy a pair of the original DeVore Nines, I was curious as to how the Super Nines differ from the originals.

“Like the Gibbon Nine before it, the Gibbon Super Nine is the most ‘normal’ speaker we make with regards to impedance,” he continued. “It is an 8 ohm load primarily, but it drops to about 6 ohms in the bass. While probably not the best option for a single-ended 300B, it is still a very easy load.”

“Similar to how the Gibbon X is related to the Silverback Reference, the Gibbon Super Nine is the same basic circuit as The

Nine, updated with technology and techniques I’ve learned in the intervening years,” he responded. “The Nine was the last DeVore Fidelity model to use a plastic woofer; we use paper in the Super Nine. In my opinion, this gives bass reproduction more realism, texture, clarity of tone, and dynamics. The original Nine used our original Silverback 0.75” textile tweeter, while the Super Nine uses the new 0.75” tweeter we designed for the Gibbon X. The new tweeter performs within a similar envelope to the older unit but has a broader listening axis, significantly lower distortion, and higher dynamic capability.”

The original Nine used side-firing woofers that, while producing room-filling bass, were occasionally bloblike and boomy in my room. Why the change from side- to front-firing woofers in the Super Nine?

“Moving the lower woofer to the front improved the sound and significantly increased flexibility of in-room placement,”

John told me. “While the original side-mounted design had great upper-bass detail and low-bass extension, the new design far better integrates these two bass regions and improves dynamic impact. And the new design simplifies the way the speakers play music into the room and so are less affected by placement or other furniture.”

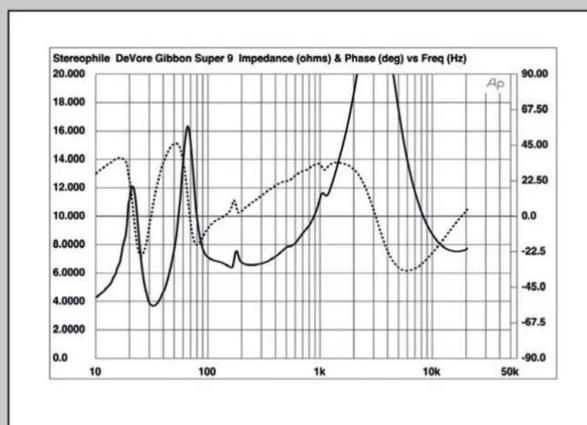
Each speaker features a proprietary 0.75” textile-cone tweeter and two 7” paper-cone woofers. While many speaker brands use high-tech materials like beryllium, carbon, synthetic diamond, ceramic metal, Honeycomb Laminate, silicon, and aerogel silica in their drivers, DeVore prefers paper for woofers and textile for tweeters.

“As with the Nines before them, the Gibbon Super Nine drivers

**“The new tweeter performs within a similar envelope ... but has a broader listening axis, significantly lower distortion, and higher dynamic capability.”**

## MEASUREMENTS

I measured one of the DeVore Fidelity Gibbon Super Nines that had been auditioned by KM; it had the serial number S915B112. I used DRA Labs’ MLSSA system and a calibrated DPA 4006 microphone with an Earthworks microphone preamplifier for the farfield frequency behavior and dispersion measurements. I used an Earthworks QTC-40 mike for the nearfield responses and Dayton Audio’s DATS V2 system to measure



**Fig.1** DeVore Fidelity Gibbon Super Nine, electrical impedance (solid) and phase (dashed) (2 ohms/vertical div.).

the impedance magnitude and electrical phase angle.

DeVore Fidelity specifies the Super Nine’s anechoic sensitivity as 91dB/W/1m. While my B-weighted estimate was slightly lower than the specified figure, at 89dB(B)/2.83V/1m, this is still higher than average.<sup>1</sup> The Super Nine’s impedance is specified as 8 ohms, with a minimum value of 5.5 ohms. My measurement lies above 6 ohms for most of the audioband (fig.1, solid trace), with a minimum value of 3.7 ohms at 33Hz. The higher value at high frequencies than at low frequencies means that the treble will sound exaggerated if this speaker is used with amplifiers having a high output impedance. As the electrical phase angle (dashed trace) is sometimes high, the effective resistance, or EPDR,<sup>2</sup> drops below 3 ohms between 26Hz and 53Hz, with a minimum value of 1.8 ohms at 40Hz. Although the EPDR remains above 3.7 ohms above 380Hz, the Super Nine is a demanding amplifier load at bass frequencies.

The discontinuities in the traces just

below 200Hz and at 1020Hz in fig.1 imply resonances of various kinds in these regions. I investigated the enclosure’s vibrational behavior with a plastic-tape accelerometer; the highest-level resonant modes I found lay at 176Hz, 355Hz, 492Hz, and just above 1kHz on the rear wall level with the upper woofer (fig.2). These modes were also present on the sidewalls at much lower levels. I could hear all the resonant modes with a stethoscope when I played a swept sinewave tone, but they are low in level, even on the rear wall, and have a high Q (Quality Factor). I doubt that they will have audible consequences.

The saddle centered at 33Hz in the magnitude trace in fig.1 indicates that this is the tuning frequency of the two ports at the base of the enclosure’s rear wall.

<sup>1</sup> As the Super Nine has a specified nominal impedance of 8 ohms, the values in both units—dB/W/1m and dB/2.83V/1m—are identical.

<sup>2</sup> EPDR is the resistive load that gives rise to the same peak dissipation in an amplifier’s output devices as the loudspeaker. See “Audio Power Amplifiers for Loudspeaker Loads,” *JAES*, Vol.42 No.9, September 1994, and [stereophile.com/reference/707heavy/index.html](http://stereophile.com/reference/707heavy/index.html).



## measurements, continued

The red trace in fig.3 shows the nearfield response of the ports. It reaches its maximum level at the tuning frequency, but the upper-frequency rollout is marred by high-level resonant peaks at 176Hz, 348Hz, 645Hz, and 853Hz. The frequency of the mode at 176Hz is suspiciously the same as one of the resonant modes I found when I examined the enclosure's vibrational behavior. I could hear this mode as a "hooty" coloration when I listened directly to the output of the ports both with a slowly swept sine wave and

with recorded male vocals. The higher-frequency modes in the ports' output added audible coloration to the sound of pink noise when I stood behind the Super Nine. The ports face away from the listener, which should reduce the audibility of the resonances at the listening position.

The blue trace in fig.3 shows the nearfield response of the upper woofer, the green trace that of the lower woofer, both offset by -6dB for clarity. Both have minimum-motion notches close to the port tuning frequency, which is when the back pressure from the port resonance holds their diaphragms stationary. But note that the lower woofer's output slowly rolls off above 100Hz, and its level is 12dB lower than that of the upper woofer at 600Hz. This confirms that the Super Nine is what is called a "2.5-way" design, where only the upper woofer's response extends to the crossover frequency of the tweeter.

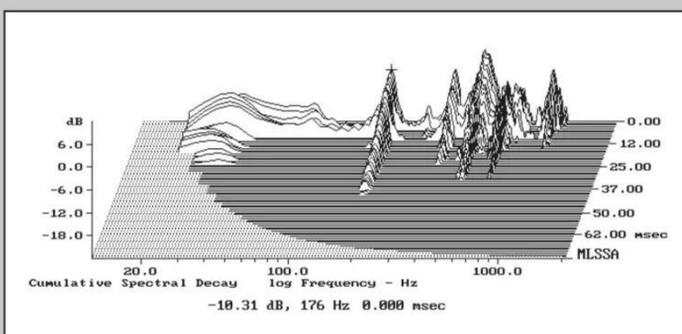
There is only a modest rise in the midbass of the complex sum of the

woofer and port responses (black trace below 310Hz in fig.3) due to the nearfield measurement technique, which assumes that the drive units are mounted in a true infinite baffle.<sup>3</sup> The Super Nine's woofer alignment is thus slightly overdamped. The low frequencies start to roll off at 60Hz, reaching -6dB at the port tuning frequency of 33Hz.

The black trace above 310Hz in fig.3 shows the Super Nine's quasi-anechoic farfield response, averaged across a 30° horizontal window centered on the tweeter axis. The response is generally smooth and even, though there is a slight lack of energy in the middle of the midrange and a peak between 4kHz and 6kHz.

Fig.4 shows the Super Nine's horizontal

<sup>3</sup> This means that the loudspeaker is firing into hemispherical space rather than a full sphere. A speaker that has a truly flat response in the usual "4π" space will therefore appear to have a boosted upper-bass output with a nearfield measurement, the center frequency of that boost depending on the physical dimensions of the speaker and the woofer alignment. See [stereophile.com/content/measuring-loudspeakers-part-three-page-6](http://stereophile.com/content/measuring-loudspeakers-part-three-page-6) or [aes2.org/publications/elibrary-page/?id=7171](http://aes2.org/publications/elibrary-page/?id=7171).



**Fig.2** DeVore Fidelity Gibbon Super Nine, cumulative spectral-decay plot calculated from output of accelerometer fastened to center of the rear wall level with the upper woofer (MLS driving voltage to speaker, 7.55V; measurement bandwidth, 2kHz).

are all made for DeVore Fidelity by SEAS in Norway,” DeVore explained. “I went from polypropylene to treated paper for the woofer cones. From years of experience designing the drivers for our other models, especially the Orangutan series, I believe paper is the best material for a midwoofer, meaning it has the best properties to cover the frequency range of both midrange and bass. Likewise, the new tweeter design incorporated a lot of what I learned with the Orangutan horn-loaded tweeters.”

The Super Nine looks similar to the larger Gibbon X, so I asked JD how they are similar and how they are different. Like the earlier Nine, the Super Nine is a 2.5-way; the Gibbon X is a full three-way. “This means the crossover and drivers are doing slightly different things in the two models,” DeVore responded. In the Gibbon X, totally different signals are sent to the tweeter, midrange, and woofers by the crossover, with minimal overlap. In the Super Nine, the tweeter gets its own signal, and both woofers work together to reproduce bass, but only the upper woofer receives midrange signal. “Additionally, the Gibbon X is much larger, with two larger woofers optimized for low bass, the dedicated midrange driver has its own enclosure, and the tweeter is also isolated in its own enclosure within the cabinet.

“The Gibbon Super Nine is designed to be very flexible for room size and placement, more than any other Gibbon model to date. They are very full range but somewhat forgiving while maintaining great transparency to the music and the rest of the gear in the system.

“I truly do think of every speaker I am working on as ‘the ideal speaker,’” DeVore added. “Within the parameters I’m working—size, cost, or whatever—the speaker evolves and improves over the years I take to finish a design until it really is the ideal version

of what I’m trying to do. With the O/Bronze finished and in production, the DeVore Fidelity line is pretty complete, and the models we release always have very long production lifespans. I don’t have a specific future project in mind at the moment.”

Visitors to the Monkeyhaus are typically wowed by the wide variety of sources and amplifiers used to voice DeVore Fidelity loudspeakers. The sources include a modified Garrard 401 turntable with various arms and cartridges, the phono-centric (but also line-level) EMT JPA 66 preamplifier, an Intel NUC computer running Roon, a Totaldac streamer, and a Totaldac d1-six tube DAC, alongside huge racks of vinyl. Add tasteful paintings and sculpture, and the Monkeyhaus is a music- and gear-lover’s dream.

**The sound isn’t overly romantic, but its tonality and flavor are “tasty,” to borrow a term from 1970s musicians.**

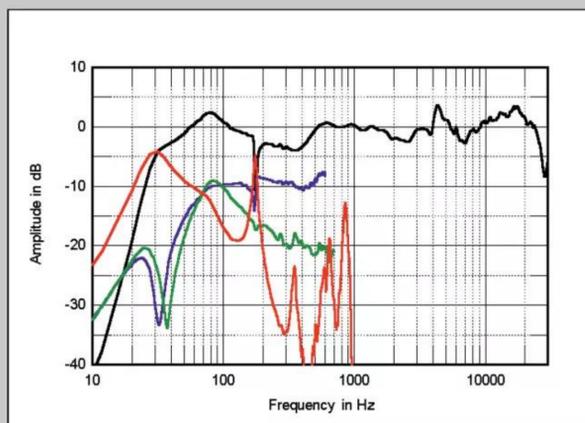
“Since the beginning of my company, I’ve made use of a number of different amps for the speaker design process, covering various technologies and power levels,” DeVore wrote.

That long list includes “Air Tight and Komuro 300B SET amps, Audio Research VT130SE, Pass Labs Aleph 3 and First Watt SIT-2, Parasound A21, and Sugden MPA-4 class-A monoblocks.”

At the end of our interview, I asked DeVore to share his views on the current US import tariffs. How are they affecting a US-based manufacturer, the kind of business that tariffs are intended to help? “The tariffs are going to badly hurt the entire market, both because they cause uncertainty in the financial markets, reducing consumer confidence in the economy, and by interfering with the established markets for all brands: whether that’s by making imported brands more expensive in the US or by raising manufacturing costs for American brands that use a lot of imported parts or assemblies—or as in our case making our speakers more expensive in overseas markets with reciprocal tariffs. It’s a lose-lose-lose.”

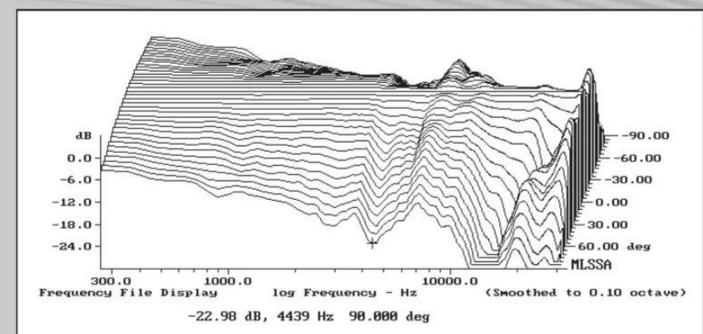
## measurements, continued

dispersion, normalized to the response on the tweeter axis, which thus appears as a straight line. The radiation pattern is generally even, which correlates with accurate and stable stereo imaging. Comparing this graph with the black trace in fig.3, it looks as if the peak in the mid-treble and the

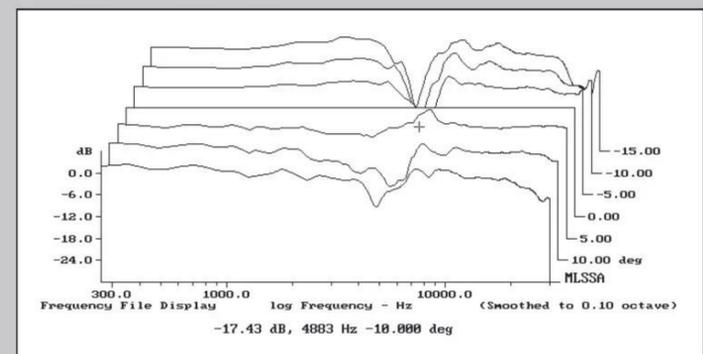


**Fig.3** DeVore Fidelity Gibbon Super Nine, anechoic response on tweeter axis at 50", averaged across 30° horizontal window and corrected for microphone response, with the nearfield responses of the upper woofer (blue, offset by -6dB), lower woofer (green, offset by -6dB), port (red), and the complex sum of the nearfield responses respectively plotted below 600Hz, 800Hz, 975Hz, and 310Hz.

small suckout just above it both flattened at off-axis angles. This suggests that the Super Nine’s treble will sound at its most even if the speakers are not toed in to the listening position, though the fact that the dispersion narrows above 10kHz will reduce top-octave “air”; these two factors will need to be balanced in positioning the Super Nines. The DeVore speaker’s radiation pattern in the vertical plane, again normalized to the response on the tweeter axis, which is 36" from the floor with the speaker supported on its spikes, is shown in fig.5. A large suckout centered on 4.88kHz appears in the loudspeaker’s output more than 5° above the tweeter axis, which implies that this is the crossover frequency between the upper woofer and the tweeter. There is more mid-treble energy 5° below the measurement axis. Like many speakers, the Super Nines are best experienced while seated.



**Fig.4** DeVore Fidelity Gibbon Super Nine, lateral response family at 50", normalized to response on tweeter axis, from back to front: differences in response 90°–5° off axis on port side of baffle, reference response, differences in response 5°–90° off axis on tweeter side of baffle.



**Fig.5** DeVore Fidelity Gibbon Super Nine, vertical response family at 50", normalized to response on tweeter axis, from back to front: differences in response 15°–5° above axis, reference response, differences in response 5°–15° below axis.

“We aren’t raising prices, because tariffs don’t affect our costs much,” he continued. “Aside from the drivers made in Norway, everything is made here in the US with primarily US materials. However, it has affected our export business enormously, as it has for all US companies with markets outside the country. The tariff war is making it impossible to maintain a healthy export business.”

### Setup

John DeVore delivered the Gibbon Super Nines to my Greenwich Village walkup and set them up in my vinyl-packed listening room. His placement surprised me: close to the sidewalls firing straight into the space. I kept this setup throughout the auditions.

Vinyl is my medium of choice, so that’s what I listened to. The front-end consisted of the J.Sikora Standard Max Supreme turntable with KV9 tonearm and Aidas MC Tru-stone Gold Web cartridge. The Aidas cartridge’s signal was routed through my Tavish Audio Design phono stage. I started out listening with the Unison Research S6 Black Edition, a tubed, 40Wpc integrated amplifier. Later, I employed the 30Wpc solid state Riviera Labs Levante integrated, the Sugden LA-4 preamp paired with 60Wpc Elekit TU-888 class-AB monoblocks and then the Air Tight ATM-1 2024 Edition power amplifier.

I started out by mining Craft Recordings’ Original Jazz Classics (OJC) reissue series. Sourced from a catalog that includes classic titles from Prestige, Riverside, Contemporary, Debut, and Jazzland, these releases feature AAA lacquers cut directly from the original tapes by Kevin Gray and pressed at RTI. While they may not have the visceral impact of an original or early pressing, I’ve found them to be exceptionally quiet, pressed flat on high-quality vinyl, and presented in not-too-thick jackets that don’t take up more shelf space than they need to. The sound is consistent across titles.

The OJC titles I employed to audition the Super Nines were

the Red Garland Trio’s *Groovy* (Craft Recordings CR00719), Lee Morgan’s *Here’s Lee Morgan* (Craft Recordings CR00857), The New Miles Davis Quintet’s *Miles* (Craft Recordings CR00722), and Yusef Lateef’s *Eastern Sounds* (Craft Recordings CR00615). For good measure, I added an original stereo pressing of John Coltrane’s *Coltrane’s Sound* (Atlantic SD 1419) and a less well-known album, cosmic pop purveyor Sébastien Tellier’s *L’Aventura* (Record Makers REC 115).

### Listening

With the 40Wpc Unison Research S6 Black Edition, the sound was clear, lush, and physical. Imaging was first-rate, with excellent separation of images and commendable scale. Assisted by the rest of the system, the Super Nines brought those OJCs to life. Music practically leaped into the room.

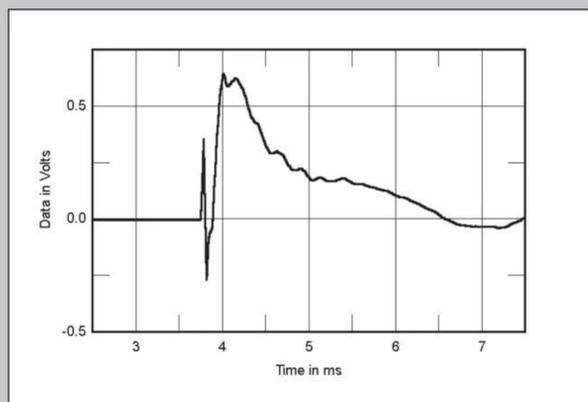
Jazz recorded in the 1950s at Rudy Van Gelder’s Englewood Cliffs studio doesn’t have soundstage depth to marvel at, but the DeVores mined everything *else* Red Garland’s mono *Groovy* and the stereo *Here’s Lee Morgan* have to offer. In the contest among octaves, my award goes to the highs, which afforded brass instruments bite, punch, and energy, carousing in my room like they owned the joint but without ever developing a bad attitude. The tweeter minded its manners. The music felt *physical*.

The Super Nines’ rendition of *Coltrane’s Sound* was rousing. Drums and piano surged in the right channel, while Coltrane’s tenor saxophone glowed large and flowed powerfully in the center. Turned up loud, this was a full-bore sonic assault.

Sébastien Tellier’s hippie-electronic music flowed out of the Super Nines, filling the room with its dense images. A liquid-soft bass drum pulsed below as an angelic choir soared above, framed in an amphitheater of twinkling, physical sounds. The Super Nines’ presentation of this dreamy music was daydream-worthy. The Super Nines came across as linear, with no frequency range or other

### measurements, continued

In the time domain, the Super Nine’s step response (fig.6) indicates that all three drive units are connected in positive acoustic polarity. The tweeter’s output arrives first at the microphone, followed by that of the woofers. The decay of the tweeter’s step blends relatively smoothly with the start of the woofers’ step, which implies an optimal crossover implementation; this blend appears best just below the tweeter axis. The Super Nine’s cumulative spectral-decay plot (fig.7)

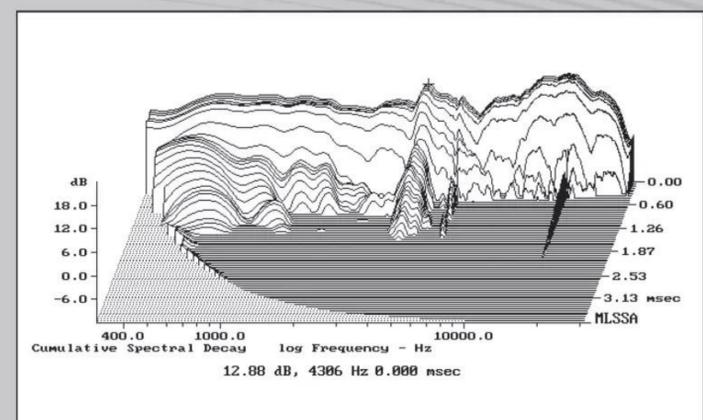


**Fig.6** DeVore Fidelity Gibbon Super Nine, step response on tweeter axis at 50" (5ms time window, 30kHz bandwidth).

is extremely clean in the midrange, the low treble, and the top two audioband octaves. (As always with my waterfall plots, ignore the ridge of delayed energy close to 16kHz, which is due to interference from the MLSSA host PC’s video circuitry.) However, the peak in the presence region in the on-axis response is associated with a narrow ridge of delayed energy.

In most respects, the DeVore Fidelity Gibbon Super Nine offers respectable measured performance, but I must admit that I was bothered by the presence of resonances in the ports’ output and by the ridge of delayed energy in the presence region.

My experience of other speakers designed by John DeVore is that he carefully balances the overall presentation so that measured defects don’t intrude.<sup>4</sup> After I had finished measuring the Super Nine, I set it up in my listening room, driving this single speaker with a Parasound JCA100 Tribute amplifier. The



**Fig.7** DeVore Fidelity Gibbon Super Nine, cumulative spectral-decay plot on tweeter axis at 50" (0.15ms risetime).

upper bass did sound slightly exaggerated, but not enough to interfere with the speaker’s reproduction of bass guitar and double bass. However, the forward-sounding presence region was relatively unforgiving of recordings that were themselves overcooked in this region, even when I was listening well to the side of the speaker.—John Atkinson

<sup>4</sup> For example, read my concluding comments at [stereophile.com/content/devore-fidelity-orangutan-o96-loudspeaker-measurements](http://stereophile.com/content/devore-fidelity-orangutan-o96-loudspeaker-measurements).

characteristic standing out—well-balanced, consistent, forceful, whole. For all that, they demonstrated a sweetness that made this music engaging. The sound isn't overly romantic, but its tonality and flavor are “tasty,” to borrow a term from 1970s musicians. Like a session drummer whose performance is both rhythmically solid and uniquely creative—think Andy Newmark, B.J. Wilson, or Harvey Mason—the Super Nines supported the music while adding its own flavor.

Replacing the Unison Research S6 Black Edition integrated with the 30Wpc Riviera Labs Levante integrated brought subtle but notable changes. Now the soundstage was even more physical. What was lost in tube sweetness—the Levante is a tube/solid state hybrid—it gained in attack, materiality, and scale. In the light of the Levante, what I was hearing before with the Unison Research amp now seemed a little bit soft. I was now hearing more detail, more resolution. Less romance, more assertiveness and power.

With the clarity added by the Levante's solid state output stage, the large mono spot of sound that is Red Garland's *Groovy* expanded, and instruments became more distinct. Bass took on more weight and better texture. Paul Chambers's acoustic bass on Lee Morgan's *Here's Lee Morgan* was tighter, deeper, funkier, and more dynamic, highlighting the Super Nines' command over the low end—or was it the Levante's command over the Nines' low end?

When paired with a suitable amplifier, these speakers are exceptionally adept at extracting the full depth and impact of the bass in any recording—impressive for such small speakers.

With the Levante in the system, the Sébastien Tellier record was transformed, taking on a completely new character. This music now sounded less spacy, tougher, more deliberate, and more forceful. Cymbals were more vivid—a shimmering gold—while the (formerly) indistinct bass drum gained definition. The angelic choir also underwent a remarkable shift: What was once a soft, ethereal chorus now presented as a grouping of individual singers.



## ASSOCIATED EQUIPMENT

**Analog sources** J.Sikora Standard Max Supreme turntable with KV9 tonearm and Aidas MC Tru-stone Gold Web cartridge.

**Preamplifiers** Sugden LA-4, Rogue RP7 (line). Tavish Audio Design Adagio, Manley Chinook (phono).

**Amplifiers** Riviera Labs Levante, Unison Research S6 Black Edition (integrated amps). Air Tight ATM-1 2024 Edition, Doshi Evolution Series Stereo Amplifier, Rogue Audio Stereo 100 (stereo power amplifiers), Elekit TU-888 monoblocks.

**Cables** Interconnects: AudioQuest Pegasus and Firebird, Triode Wire Labs Spirit II (RCA), “Spirit 75” S/PDIF (RCA/BNC). Speaker: Auditorium 23 (9'), AudioQuest William Tell Zero (10').

**Accessories** Pro-Ject VC-S2 ALU, HumminGuru record cleaning machines; AOCISKA soft bristle brush; AudioQuest PQ-707 and IsoTek EVO3 Aquarius power conditioners; Salamander five-tier Archetype rack (2); Pangea audio rack; A/V RoomService Ltd. Equipment Vibration Protectors (EVPs); IKEA Aptitlig bamboo chopping boards (under Thorens TD 124 turntable, preamp, power, and integrated amps); mahogany blocks (three to a stack), under IKEA boards.—Ken Micallef

Switching from an integrated amplifier to separates delivered an even more dramatic transformation. The first addition was the Sugden LA-4 preamp paired with 60Wpc Elekit TU-888 class-AB monoblocks. Each monoblock features two KT170s per side, producing a sound reminiscent of a high-quality single-ended triode. The change was immediately apparent on Coltrane's “The Night Has a Thousand Eyes.” The performance revealed by the Super Nines was alive, brisk, animated. Steve Davis's acoustic bass was soft, warm, and weighty; McCoy Tyner's piano and Elvin Jones's drums burst with specific, intricate detail. Coltrane's tenor saxophone stood out in deep space; his rich, slightly coarse lower midrange tone and gritty textures were laid bare.

Next up: The Air Tight ATM-1 2024 Edition power amplifier. I also replaced the AudioQuest William Tell Zero speaker cables with my old-school Auditorium A23s with their green fabric cover.

Though creamier and quieter, the Air Tight recalled the liveliness and after-the-rain purity of the Elekit monos but more coherent and less forward. The OJCs now sounded closer to my early pressings. *Coltrane's Sound* barked at me, with Trane's tenor sleekly howling and Elvin Jones and McCoy Tyner's drums and piano chattering away like combustible, warring bird calls. The Super Nines plus the all-tube Air Tight produced a satisfying, whole-cloth sound.

### Conclusion

The DeVore Fidelity Gibbon Super Nine joins the company of other DeVore Fidelity speakers that don't *require* top-tier amplification but nevertheless thrive with it. Every speaker has a character of its own, but the best still manage to express the character of the partnering hardware—source components, those amplifiers—and each record. That might be the Super Nine's most notable virtue.

Or maybe its most notable virtue is its balance. The Super Nine's treble is articulate and revealing but never bright or harsh. Its midrange is a clear, polished window. For so small a speaker, the bass goes deep, and there's enough of it to satisfy with most kinds of music. A pair of Super Nines projects expansive, precisely layered images across a large soundstage. The music the Super Nines make is rich in tone and timbre. There was a time—and here the original Nine comes to mind—when DeVore speakers had a reputation for being laid-back. Not so the Super Nine. Highly recommended. ■