

DeVore Fidelity O/93

The smaller of DeVore's 'Orangutan' loudspeakers still achieves that elusive goal of offering high sensitivity and an amp-friendly load, but without full-fledged horn-loading
 Review: Ken Kessler Lab: Paul Miller

Here's a platitude which should adorn a t-shirt made mandatory attire for all audiophiles: 'It's OK To Like More Than One Thing'. In my view, hi-fi is no more cut-and-dried than wine, cars or shoes. Components are not mutually exclusive. With speakers in particular, there are more competing, different-sounding technologies than just about any other part of the chain. And what DeVore Fidelity has in its £9998-per-pair Orangutan O/93 is a design which ticks numerous boxes, all the better to alleviate any guilt about loyalty to a single topology.

I admit to loving ribbons and 'statics and two-way mini-monitors. A pair of O/93s, on the other hand, is a *bouillabaisse* that allows you to profess multiple affinities in one speaker, brand owner/designer John DeVore unapologetically ignoring slavish adherence to the restrictions of a single genre. So, the O/93 employs a paper-coned woofer, dual-ported enclosure, a simple crossover and high-sensitivity dome tweeter. The tweeter plate has a short flare that manages both high frequency dispersion and provides a hint of horn-loading, the latter, along with the minimalist crossover network, figuring into the O/93's high sensitivity [see PM's boxout, p65].

NO JACKET REQUIRED

Specifically, the crown of the O/93's SEAS 28mm silk dome tweeter is recessed by about 10mm into the faceplate, and as the speakers are likely to be used *sans* grilles, that depth is also a boon to the naked drivers' survival. DeVore points out that even its carefully designed, magnetically attached grilles will affect the speaker's performance and recommends not using them for 'serious' listening. So I didn't...

Unlike the next model up, the O/96 [HFN Apr '21], the 902x381x254mm (hwd) O/93 is a single-piece floorstander – the wider-baffle 902x457x254mm (hwd) O/96 comes with dedicated stands. Both employ the same tweeter, but the O/93's 250mm

paper-cone woofer is a simplified version of that in the O/96. The O/93's has a shorter voice-coil and a smaller magnet, which reduces the claimed sensitivity by around 2dB [see PM's Lab Report, p67], while the tweeters remain at the same height relative to the listener.

As for lowering the cost of the O/93 by some £3500, DeVore attributes most of that to the smaller cabinet and no need to supply separate lacquered-wood stands. Yes, the cabinetry is *that* lavish, and therefore a major part of the pricing, up with the finest woodwork of Sonus faber and the recently reviewed Lowther Almira [HFN Nov '22], and there's a vast selection of exotic woods on offer,

'I discovered the speakers have an "evil twin" nature'

as well as custom paint finishes. It's also worth pointing out that both loudspeakers deservedly boast a rare longevity in a market obsessed with fresh models:

the O/93 was released in late 2012, some 18 months after the O/96. John DeVore told editor PM for our review of the O/96 that his goal was to create speakers which could work with the burgeoning number of low-power amplifiers and also fit into space-deprived, urban flats. This mission statement meant that buyers would not need to seek vintage or current high-sensitivity designs typically of massive dimensions, while expanding the usability of low-power amps around 10-20W. There is no escaping the irony of the diametrically opposed

RIGHT: The partially horn-loaded 28mm silk fabric dome tweeter is married to a long-throw 250mm paper-cone bass/mid driver with soft rubber surround. The latter is a variation on the classic Müller blue paper cone

profusions of the past 40 years of hungry speakers and unsuitably low-powered amplifiers, especially single-ended triodes, some delivering as little as 5W/ch. That said, the O/93s can handle much more.

With the O/93's manageable size and weight of 21kg per piece, one person can handle the installation. Indeed, setup is a breeze due to single instead of bi-wiring and no fiddling with spikes thanks to the fitted hardwood feet. Even the positioning is hassle-free, with floorplans in the owner's manual providing a guide.

A TALE OF TWO ROOMS

To ensure that we got the measure of this remarkable speaker, as per the manual, I undertook two completely different listening sessions. At PM's larger and less cluttered space, I heard the O/93 set up as an isosceles triangle, powered by the Western Electric Type 91E tube amp

SENSE AND SENSITIVITY

Loudspeaker efficiency is notoriously low, typically <1%, but *measuring* efficiency as 'electrical power in/acoustic power out' is complex, involving integrating the output over a full 360° in both vertical and horizontal planes. As a result, this is more typically expressed by speaker sensitivity – the SPL realised at 1m distance from an input of 2.83V (equivalent to 1W/8ohm). Of course, applying 2.83V across a '4ohm' speaker is equivalent to 2W, so one brand's 1W/1m spec. is not equivalent to another's at 2.83V/1m. Frequency, too, is vital. Measured at just 1kHz, 'sensitivity' is at the mercy of a peak or dip, which is why we also publish an RMS value across 500Hz-8kHz. How loud your speaker *sounds* will depend on both response *and* level, as defined by the ISO 226 'equal loudness contours'. PM

[HFN Feb '23], and with the recommended toe-in. Thus I was able to experience both the speaker's room-filling capabilities and its ability to sing with the limited 14W/ch power available.

Then, in my smaller listening room, I was able to try them with the layout of an equilateral triangle (2.5m per side), but with higher power on tap. I know: maybe the amps should have been swapped, using a behemoth in PM's room and a small amp in mine, but those in my arsenal under 30W are not in current production. Instead, I drove the O/93s with an Audio Research REF 75SE and D'Agostino Momentum Stereo MxV S250 (rated at 75W and 250W, respectively).

Suffice it to say, the O/93s delighted in the extra power, even though they worked beautifully with Western Electric's Type 91E. There's no escaping the seeming contradiction that these loudspeakers will satisfy most listeners with sub-20W amplification, but offer them triple that power – let alone 10x – and it's like taking the limiter off a car, or more accurately, unleashing a beast. As refined, delicate and charming as the O/93s were with Western Electric's magnificent 300B triodes providing the power, they know how to rock with more.

To put this split personality into perspective, it's like handing a Gibson Les Paul guitar to its creator, whose playing was fast and precise, but always super-smooth. Like that combination,

LEFT: Seen in standard Fiddleback Mahogany veneer, custom finishes include walnut, maple, oak, cherry, fig, and customer-requested paint colours

the DeVore O/93s, via the Type 91E amp, delivered fluidity which I haven't heard since the Apogee Scintilla ribbon speakers [HFN Sep '85]. It's this flowing sound that rendered the pedal steel on Confederate Railroad's 'Trashy Women' from *Greatest Hits* [Atlantic 82911-2] – just when you reach the lyric 'heart of gold' – as sinuous and liquid as ever I have heard it.

SCALING NEW HEIGHTS

Grab the axe from Les Paul himself and hand it to Jimmy Page and you'd swear it wasn't the same instrument. That's what happens when the O/93s are fed either raucous music or truckloads of power – or both. The textures and tones segue as if from Jekyll to Hyde, exactly the manner in which the O/93s made the transition when I turned to bigger amps and Mountain's *Climbing!* [CBS Sony Japan 25AP-1277 LP], just to hear the wail of 'Mississippi Queen' at full bellow. What I did not expect was a sensation of (sonic) time travel.

Conversations with a seasoned listener of longevity similar to mine highlighted a quality I hadn't expected, especially as a number of recent reissues of classic speakers, *eg*, revived JBLs, haven't quite recaptured that magical sound of yore. Perhaps they're not supposed to mimic their ancestors. The DeVore O/93, however, does reference past values. Maybe it is the character of paper cones which predate Bextrene and polypropylene, or the high sensitivity. Whatever the reason, I was hearing a freshness, a rawness, a lack of pretence – in other words, the sound of music rather than the sound of hi-fi.

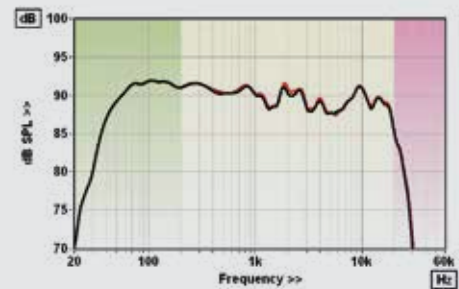
Arguably the most perplexing aspect was the extraordinarily huge soundstage, accompanied by a vanishing act I normally associate only with panel-type speakers. The soundstage was vast, yet with an image specificity denied to the classics of which the DeVore O/93s reminded me despite obvious, modern differences. As much as I miss my vintage Acoustic Research 2AXs, they were hard to drive →



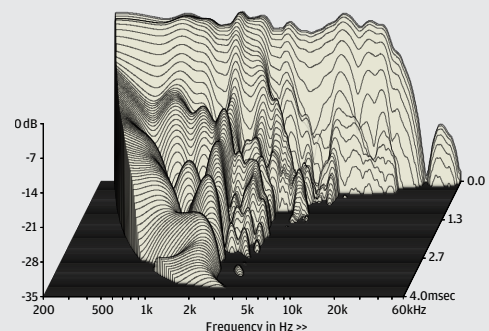
DEVORE 'ORANGUTAN' O/93

Sharing the same 28mm silk dome tweeter and similar 250mm pulp-coned bass/mid driver with the O/96 [HFN Apr '21] means there are parallels between this latter model and the lower sensitivity O/93. 'Lower' is not 'low', however, for DeVore still rates the O/93 at a high 93dB/1W/1m. With a nominal impedance of 10ohm (actually 17ohm/1kHz), this brings sensitivity closer to 92dB at the standard 2.83V/1m [see boxout, p65], a figure that's still higher than the 90.3dB/1kHz measured here. The slightly downtilted presence/lower treble [see Graph 1] drops sensitivity to 89.7dB from 500Hz-8kHz but, in practice, the O/93 only loses 1.8dB to the 96dB-rated O/96. Again, this fine sensitivity is not achieved at the expense of a punishing load as the O/93 only momentarily drops below 7ohm (155-185Hz) and, with swings in phase angle of +54°/-60° through the bass, presents the partnering amplifier with a worse-case 3.1ohm/99Hz EPDR, putting it in the top few percent of 'easy-to-drive' loudspeakers.

The 90cm-tall O/93 has been engineered to be heard on an above-cabinet axis where its response errors amount to a mere ±1.9dB (200Hz-19kHz) and pair matching a fine ±0.6dB. However, (port/cabinet) resonances are visible on the impedance/phase spectra at 190-550Hz while a driver mode at 1.9kHz, and harmonics, are visible on both the forward response and CSD waterfall [see Graph 2]. While this may contribute some 'colour', conventional distortion remains a low ~0.5% (re. 90dB SPL) through the bass and midrange, the former augmented by the 35Hz tuning of its two rear-firing ports to yield a steeply rolled-off but deep bass extension of 36Hz (-6dB re. 200Hz). PM



ABOVE: Response inc. nearfield summed driver/ports [green], freefield corrected to 1m at 2.83V [yellow], ultrasonic [pink]. Left speaker, black; right, red



ABOVE: Modes associated with the bass/mid cone are present at 1.9kHz and 3.9kHz but treble is very clean

LEFT: The O/93's simple crossover does not support bi-wiring/amping, so a single set of 4mm copper binding posts suffice. Note that the lower cabinet, below the two ports, is sealed off, limiting internal volume

no, I am not attributing this consistency to both albums being Sony Japan releases.) Ported the O/93s may be, but there was no woofly sound down below. The bass simply covers the floor and creates an impeccable foundation.

WAY OUT WEST

In direct contrast to the slick pedal steel of Confederate Railroad, the scream of Leslie West's guitar and the rasp of his vocals through the O/93s took me back to the year Mountain's LP was released – 1970. The sound was as welcoming and involving as hi-fi playback used to be, before we got wrapped up in the tweaky minutiae that distracted us from the music.

What really overwhelmed me, however, was an open-reel tape of big band lushness. The BB King track 'Don't Get Around Much Anymore' was included on HFN's *All Time Greats* cover CD in 1994; now I can play it closer to its source, on Maxwell Davis' *Compositions Of Duke Ellington & Others* [Crown ST110]. It took but seconds to seduce me, especially King's rich vocals. The O/93s filled the room, wrapping the sound around the system such that it vanished. All that was left was the music – and me wishing I had £9998. ☺

HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

I've heard it said, and concur, that DeVore's O/93 sounds like 'a state-of-the-art 1968 speaker, but with 21st century transparency and soundstage recreation'. This compact floorstander made me recall the bliss of 1970s AR-3As and large Advents, yet with dynamics, detail and scale unimaginable back then. Yet the O/93 isn't about nostalgia. Rather, it merits the description 'timeless'. I so badly want a pair...

Sound Quality: 89%



and could sound amorphous. But they were always inviting, and *that* is the overriding quality of the O/93s, irrespective of amplifiers, source components or material. They suck you in completely, so forget truncated listening sessions.

SCALE AND WEIGHT

However much the first impression of the O/93s is one of finesse, as if they're begging for some late-1950s Nat 'King' Cole recordings on Capitol, all satiny and warm, they showed me that the move from the Western Electric Type 91E to the surplus wattage of the D'Agostino Momentum could be taken in their stride. By way of comparison, although I used the same recordings heard with the Western Electric/DeVore combination in PM's room, the discovery of the speakers' 'evil twin' nature demanded some additional torture testing.

Back to Mountain. I cranked up the volume and noted that the mass, airiness, scale and weight of Corky Laing's percussion enjoyed the same tactility and presence as that of Kodō's *Warabe* [Sony SRCL4671], if not the tonal nature because the types of drums differ wildly. (And,

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Sensitivity (SPL/1m/2.83V – 1kHz/Mean/IEC)	90.3dB / 89.7dB / 87.8dB
Impedance modulus: minimum & maximum (20Hz–20kHz)	6.9ohm @ 163Hz 61ohm @ 82Hz
Impedance phase: minimum & maximum (20Hz–20kHz)	-60° @ 72Hz +54° @ 54Hz
Pair matching/Resp. error (200Hz–19kHz)	0.6dB / ±1.9dB/±1.6dB
LF/HF extension (-6dB ref 200Hz/10kHz)	36Hz / 20.4kHz/20.2kHz
THD 100Hz/1kHz/10kHz (for 90dB SPL/1m)	0.35% / 0.3% / 0.55%
Dimensions (HWD) / Weight (each)	902x381x254mm / 21kg