



Marten Django L

By Alan Sircom

Marten speakers run like a red thread woven through much of the magazine's history, so it's fitting to celebrate our century with a review of one of the magazine's best-loved brands. Most loudspeaker companies would love to be judged by the best they can do. Sometimes though, that 'best' is so lofty as to be from another world. Such is the case with Marten; its top Coltrane range of loudspeakers runs from the 'reassuringly expensive' Soprano to the 'how many oil fields do you own?' Coltrane

Supreme and all of them set a powerful standard to beat. But few realise the dynamic range of Marten; yes, you can buy a pair of speakers for more than the price of a new S-Class Mercedes, but the Django L costs not much more than a Dacia Sandero.

Perhaps obviously, the Django L is the smaller brother of the Django XL, the currently two-model Django series having more curved lines than either the more up-scale Heritage range or the cinema-chummy and angular Form models. This is a two-way, three driver design; the tweeter retains the ▶

► inverted ceramic Accuton unit common to many models in the Marten range, but the ceramic-only domes and cones found elsewhere are replaced by two custom 200mm SEAS aluminium-ceramic sandwich.

A backswept reflex design (with a downward firing port) finished in piano black or silver grey and no sign of a grille in sight, this is not a shrinking violet of a loudspeaker. It doesn't need to sit too far out into the room compared to other products in the range, and is as such the Marten for those 'lucky' owners of small rooms. That being said, the depth of the loudspeaker does give it a physical presence that makes it seem larger than it actually is in a smaller room, and some might find that somewhat imposing. But perhaps it's time not to try to apologise for good audio and enjoy the physicality of the speaker design.

Besides, the speaker has a bluff charm to its looks. Take the 'plinth' for example; two black metal outriggers with large cone feet that bolt to the underside of the loudspeaker. Simple and elegant, albeit in a fairly functional manner. Armed with a spare pair of hands to set up the speakers, you can go from box to positioning inside of a quarter of an hour, which is a rare joy. A single wire set of terminals at the back panel later and you are into the positioning part of the whole equation. This is possibly the most drawn out part of the whole Marten process, in that the longer you spend positioning the loudspeakers, the better the overall performance. But even here, the stuff of Marten legend remains mostly just legend.

Truth is, the review pair of Django L had a lot of air miles under their belt before they got to me. So, any discussions about run-in are academic at best. They were a well-thumbed pair and came ready to roll. You may find your pair of speakers takes minutes or months to settle in; I have no accurate frame of reference, aside from Marten's past 'form' (in the horse-racing sense, nothing to do with the brand's other speaker line).

Unfortunately, past form doesn't seem to hold much sway with the Django L. Where Marten speakers are notoriously fussy about positioning, these are more forgiving. Where bigger Martens need very careful system matching to give of their all, these could be summed up in three soundbytes – 'good', 'moderately powerful' and 'solid state'. Even the last is more of a guideline (Marten speakers traditionally partner well with valves), but the aluminium/ceramic sandwich bass cones do seem to need some damping factor behind them. As a rule of thumb, the Martens responded better to 'smooth', 'clean', 'detailed' and slightly soft sounding solid-state electronics than a drop of the hard stuff. This is a loudspeaker that will sing with the likes of Electrocompaniet, but sing a bit off-key with the likes of Naim.

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This, I believe comes down to tonal balance. The Django L's insightful sound gives a similar sense of immediacy as something like a Naim amplifier, but it does it in the presence region, where the Naim has that strength in the brilliance and presence region. And the two in combination seem to form a distinct hardness to the sound.

It's that insight into the music that marks the Django L out. Music of all kinds work well with this, but perhaps not surprising given the name, small tight acoustic bands sitting in a natural acoustic fare best of all. It's an obvious thing to partner loudspeakers named after jazz greats with that jazz great, but the music of Django Reinhardt is not really the best thing to assess modern hi-fi, as his best work was around 70-80 years ago and varies according to transfer. But modern interpreters of Django's work fare much better, and it's that small and cool jazz combo (or, for that matter, a string quartet) that really allow the Django L to shine. It scales well – I even played the last movement of Mahler's Eighth to good effect – but while the sound of the Django L gives good image size and depth to big orchestral passages, I was more drawn to the less sturm und drang end of the musical spectrum.

Although many focus on the performance of high-end loudspeakers with acoustic instruments in live spaces, an acid test that should be used more is playing music with more bombast to it. Big graunchy rock guitars, wubby-wubby bass lines from dub sound systems or dubstep bedroom superstars... something with a bit of meat to it. There are a surprising number of very good speakers that ultimately sound not so very good fed even the lightest diet of AC/DC, but here the Martens stepped up to the plate well. Predisposition toward 'lean' or no, they made a powerful, rockin' sound that might make lesser mortals don inappropriate shorts and headbang like Angus Young. That's the joy of the Django L... ►



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Type: Two-way bass reflex

Drive units: 2x200mm aluminium/ceramic,
1x30mm ceramic

Frequency range: 27-30000 Hz +/-3dB

Power rating: 200 W

Sensitivity: 88 dB / 1 m / 2.83V

Impedance: 6 ohm (3.8 Ohm min)

Crossover frequency: 2nd order 1800Hz

Terminals: WBT single-wiring

Internal wiring: Jorma Design

Cabinet: 22 mm MDF

Stands: Anodised aluminium with Marten cones

Dimensions (WxHxD): 25.3 x 120 x 41.5 cm

Net weight: 34 Kg

Available in Piano Black or Silver Grey

Price: €6,900 per pair

Manufactured by: Marten

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they do all the audiophile things well, but they do it with some fun too. Cerebral, civilised speakers with a wild child side... it gets no better.

There's an interesting paradox with loudspeakers. We often discuss 'speed' in speaker design, but it's a very difficult thing to pin down in print. As a consequence, it's one of those terms (like 'PRA') that is easily dismissed as so much audiophile hot air. And yet, when you hear the Django L, one of the first things most people will comment on is their 'speed'. Things sound fast through the Django L; not accelerated or fast-paced, just quick and clean and detailed. Play something with fast tabla runs (like the delicious cover version of Take Five performed by the Sachal Studios Orchestra of Pakistan) and many good, big speakers almost fall over themselves trying to render the speed and attack of this little drum-like instrument. Not here, the Django L makes a tabla sound like a tabla; fast, percussive and the underpinning of this remarkable rendition. Naturally, the sound of sitar, guitar and the rest of the orchestra is equally well resolved too, but it's the correct speed of that tabla that gets you every time.

From a UK perspective, there's one big thing about the Martens? Why aren't they here? These are fabulous speakers at a keen price and should be on many folk's shopping list, and yet, if you want a pair, it's off to mainland Europe with you. Surely we can't all be this inward looking as to not want to hear such a fine speaker as the Marten Django L? +