

# AUDIO ESOTERICA

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# AUDIO ESOTERICA

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## Loudspeakers

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### REVIEW DYNAUDIO FOCUS 600XD

This is not just a loudspeaker... inside is a digital-to-analogue converter, an electronic crossover, plus four power amplifiers each in control of its own driver: two bass drivers, one midrange and a tweeter.

50

### REVIEW MARTEN DUKE 2

Marten's Duke 2 speakers are little 'uns with a sound on par with big 'uns, while sporting the most luxurious of finishes.

78

### REVIEW YAMAHA NS-F901

From the world's largest music company comes a speaker with design and fine-tuning from an expert team of technicians — and a little make-over help from the massively successful piano division.

94

### PRODUCT FOCUS DEVIALET PHANTOM

It's a mini spacepod with a sound system on-board. Devialet's Phantom miracle-in-a-box claims to feature everything you need for sonic bliss, including twin opposing woofers quoted to dip down to 16Hz!



# MARTEN DUKE 2

**Reviewer** Edgar Kramer

## LOUDSPEAKERS

**T**he Scandinavians have always had a flair for unpretentious elegance, drawing in the eye with a seemingly effortless aesthetic simplicity. At one end of the scale is Sweden's IKEA, the mass-market homewares global success story, with its multitude of strangely-named, unfussy-design products. At the other end you have that country's jaw-dropping Koenigsegg Agera advanced supercar with its organically fluid lines, and devastating performance (0-100km/h in a mind-boggling 2.8 seconds!).

Marten — not a Nordic denizen but the Swedish loudspeaker manufacturing company — carries its region's tradition of understated beauty and solid engineering into its products too. Here we have the Duke 2 — the entry point of the mid-level Heritage range — an elegant mid-sized sharp-angled stand mount dressed in an oh-so classy gloss veneer.

And design aside, these standmounts have the promise of high performance; they come

from a company that has the engineering gravitas to produce the state-of-the-art half-a-mill-US Supreme 2 statement *tour de force*.

### PRECIOUS CERAMIC

The two-way Duke 2 also features ingredients that take it beyond your run-of-the-mill standmounter. It's quite a deep design, with non-parallel cabinet walls all-round. The front baffle angles backwards while the sides are tapered inwards towards the rear panel, forming a trapezoidal shape.

Marten has been using high quality Accuton drivers from Germany throughout its lines for some time now and the Duke 2 is no different. The ceramic driver concept goes back to the early to mid-1980s when Bernard Thiel (no relation to the US-based speaker manufacturer of the same surname), back then an engineer with Backes & Müller, designed his first drivers using hard natural materials such as corundum, a form of sapphire. Thiel subsequently went on to form his own company — Thiel & Partner GmbH — which has evolved into the current Accuton.

So here we have Accuton's 25mm (1-inch) ceramic tweeter and a 180mm (7-inch) ceramic







△ CERAMIC DRIVERS ARE USED THROUGHOUT THE MARTEN PRODUCT RANGE, WHILE SUPERB TIMBER FINISHES ARE ALSO COMMON TO ALL ITS SPEAKERS.



mid/bass driver placed in a rather solid rearported 23mm MDF-walled enclosure. While on the cabinet, our review sample came in a stunning gloss walnut veneer. There are a number of gloss and matt veneer options available. The single speaker binding posts are high quality WBT models while internal wiring is from high-end cable specialist and fellow Swede Jorma Design.

Marten specifies the Duke 2 as having a frequency response of 38Hz to 40kHz  $\pm$ 3dB — that's a respectable range for a standmount. Sensitivity is quoted as 88dB/W/1m while the impedance is 4 ohms with a 3.7 ohms minimum, all pointing to ease of drive for a good quality mid-power amplifier of any technology. The second-order crossover point is at 3kHz, and the crossover itself features high-quality



Ceramic diaphragms are extremely light and implementations we've heard in a number of different designs have exhibited transient-fast and detailed sound...

components including low loss copper-foil coils and silver/gold/oil Mundorf capacitors.

#### DUKING IT OUT

Accuton's ceramic diaphragms are extremely light and implementations we've heard in a number of different designs have generally exhibited a resultant transient-fast and detailed sound. No surprise here then that the Duke 2 provides a sonic signature bearing those very same traits. Fast fingers on steel guitar strings showed what these drivers can do best. There's an ultra-clean handling of transients at the notes' leading edge and a delivery of profound levels of detail that can become addictive. You find yourself searching through your collection for music with plentiful transient attacks and richness in the minutiae of micro-detail.

Those qualities follow through to a satisfying by-product — that of excellent separation. Dense musical passages or complex multi-tracked modern recordings exhibit clean and obvious delineation between strands and this makes it easy to follow various lines of vocal or instrumental musical structures. A minor condensing or congesting which presents itself in the upper mids/lower highs along with a subtle reticence in that area makes for a polite presentation — this is a subtle effect and in some systems, especially those with forward-sounding sources and amplification, it could actually restore a satisfying balance.

The bass register is rich and surprisingly ample. The 7-incher punches solidly with kick drum, in particular, attacking quite powerfully and with bass notes, be they acoustic or electric, having a boogying sense of rhythm and pace. The prowess in the bass is carried up into the midrange, especially in the lower mids, where the Duke 2's rendition of voices and instruments come across with good body and heft. Dynamics



△ SHOWN HERE IN A STUNNING PIANO WALNUT FINISH, THE DUKE 2 IS ALSO AVAILABLE IN PIANO BLACK/MAPLE AND MATT WALNUT/MAPLE.

are quite good for a speaker of this size and this is seemingly augmented via the Duke 2's superb handling of transients. The speakers' noise floor, no doubt due to the well-designed crossover network, is also very low, as exhibited by the silences between notes and the overall ease in the musical event.

Again, speaking in general terms, standmount speakers tend to image and soundstage extremely well. No surprises here either. The Duke 2 is able to disappear while producing a vast soundfield that stretches laterally and with good soundstage depth. Of note is the angled baffle's ability to project an image with appropriate height too — singers have realistic stature rather than hovering just off floor level.

Over the years, I've reviewed and auditioned speakers with all-manner of high frequency transducers, from cloth, titanium, beryllium and diamond domes to exotic ribbon and air motion transformer units. A first for this writer was a review of a speaker with a ceramic tweeter. And the outcome was a most enjoyable one. The Duke 2's tweeter

was sweet and reasonably extended and possessed a beautiful tonality. There was not a trace of harshness or imbalance — something that, rightly or wrongly depending on the design, has been associated with this type of driver. Of course, I've already talked about the detail and speed and those are firmly attached to this high frequency driver's design. And indeed it's mirrored by the mid/bass unit which, aside from keeping up with its qualities, integrates quite seamlessly with the tweeter. There have been considerable crossover design and tweaking skills applied here.

### CONCLUSION

The Duke 2 is a highly refined transducer with a consistent set of satisfying qualities across important performance criteria, namely, detail, transient speed, soundstage and tonality. Audio performance is high and, given the form factor and the choice of veneers and finishes, it will suit any appropriately-sized environment, be it classic or contemporary. **A**



## SPECIFICATIONS

### MARTEN DUKE 2 LOUDSPEAKER

**DRIVE UNITS:** Accuton 25mm ceramic tweeter, and 180mm ceramic mid/bass driver

**FREQUENCY RESPONSE:** 38Hz-40kHz ±3dB

**SENSITIVITY:** 88dB/watt/1m

**IMPEDANCE:** 4 ohms (3.7 ohms minimum)

**POWER RATING:** 150 watts

**INTERNAL WIRING:** Jorma Design

**DIMENSIONS (WHD):** 220 x 400 x 330mm

**WEIGHT:** 13kg

**PRICE:** \$11,290 in matt finishes, \$11,890 in gloss finishes

**WARRANTY:** Three years

**DISTRIBUTOR:** Absolute Hi End on 0488 777 999

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