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Marten Oscar Duo Review - "A Class of their own"

Pearls, as is well known, are hidden in the shells of clams. They are found mainly in the waters of the Indian Ocean. The pearls of acoustics can be found a little closer. It is enough to listen carefully to the sound of the sea waves in the Kattegat, where Marten is based on the outskirts of Gothenburg. It produces luxury speaker sets. However, not everyone knows about these pearls.

I had the pleasure to test the Marten Heritage Miles 5 speakers less than two years ago ("HFiM" 12/2018). I emphasized then that the Swedes, in addition to products at cosmic prices, also offer something for ordinary mortals - in the Django and Heritage series. Now the Django line has disappeared from the official site, and at the very bottom of the directory it has been replaced by a new one - Oscar. It currently includes two models - the stand-mount Duo and the floor-standing Trio. The first one - the cheapest in the entire offer - went to the test. It was placed on a shelf that can be roughly defined as an introduction to hi-end.

The manufacturer declares that the Oscar series was designed from scratch, which should mean no borrowings from the company's earlier models. I will not judge to what extent this statement is true. In the case of loudspeakers, the lack of borrowings cannot be understood too literally.

Structure

In the side section, the casings have the shape of a cuboid. The front and back panels were tilted from the vertical by a few degrees. Their solid thickness (25 mm) and a horizontal partition reinforcing the interior, located approximately halfway up, ensure sufficient stiffness. The crossover uses three air coils, high-quality aluminum and aluminum-oil Mundorf capacitors from the Evo series, and polypropylene Audyn Capa. Second-order filtering (i.e. with a moderate drop of 12 dB / oct.) On a split of 2500 Hz means that no radical experiments have been carried out here. There is no need to add to the fact that we are dealing with a two-way construction. The monitors are rear ventilated with a wide bass-reflex tunnel. WBT terminals accept single cabling. The manufacturer claims that he used the original designs of the drivers. I don't know how literally

it should be understood, but at least the woofer is a mass-produced model, also available to hobbyists. Either way, it's worth taking a closer look at both speakers.

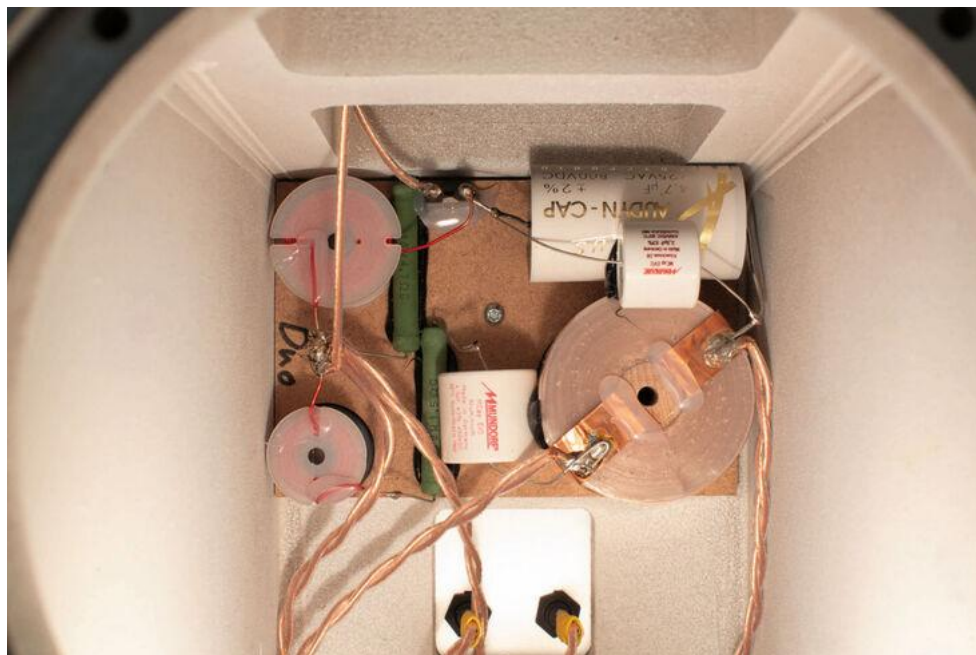
During the previous test of Marten loudspeakers, I noticed that the company defined a symbiotic relationship with Accuton, which supplies the drivers, and Jorma - its cables are used for internal connections. In addition, according to assurances at the time, Accuton was also to be the world's only manufacturer of loudspeakers with ceramic membranes.

Now the situation is a bit different. The status of Jorma - a brand previously bought by Marten, has not changed. However, the drivers for the basic Oscar series are not supplied by Accuton, but by the Danish-Indonesian company SB Acoustics. The reason is simple - the products of the German manufacture simply did not fit into the budget. Importantly, the membranes remain ceramic.

The woofer (SB17CAC35-4) is a 15 cm cone with an aluminum basket and a ceramic diaphragm held on a thick and soft spring. It is permanently covered with a profiled metal mesh cover.

More mysterious is the tweeter, labeled SB26CDNC-C000-4. It is also SB Acoustics, but it is not on the official list of models produced by this company. It is possible that it was actually commissioned by Marten. An interesting fact is the quite original silencer-cover of the top of the diaphragm.

A plug has been fitted into the central hole in the protective metal mesh, which may be in contact with the dome from the bottom - it is impossible to tell by eye. The manufacturer does not discuss this solution in detail. The analysis of the structure and nomenclature of SB Acoustics products allows us to assume that ceramics were also chosen here.



A simple but hi-end crossover. Solid cabling is of course Jorma Design.

Ceramic membranes are quite a rare phenomenon. Therefore, it is worth recalling a few facts. The material is characterized by low weight and high stiffness. In terms of the ratio of both parameters, ceramics are second only to diamond and beryllium. In addition, the concept of ceramic membranes is, to put it mildly, imprecise. Without the exact chemical composition, we will not know what we are really dealing with. However, no one has to give this composition, so it's hard to blame it. The same as using the picturesque name of sapphire by the manufacturer (speakers, not drivers). It is supposed to make a marketing impression and it does.

The Oscars are available in three finishes: piano white and black lacquer, and matt dark walnut veneer. You can also purchase optional grilles. Their approximate cost is PLN 250 per pair. I could neither watch them, nor "test" them, because they were not included in the reviewed pair.

For monitors, Duo Marten produces special stands. And they reached the test. They look very nice, and the tilt to the rear visually matches the slant of the housing walls. The stands are mounted on cones, and the speakers to the platforms can be screwed on with screws. The construction turns out to be relatively light. I do not know what material it was made of, but it is definitely not metal. A pair of coasters was valued at about PLN 3800.



The speakers can be screwed to the stands.

System configuration

The Marten monitors played with the Conrad-Johnson MF2250 power amplifier, controlled by the BAT VK3iX SE tube preamplifier. The source was the Naim 5X, powered by the Flatcap 2X.

The technical characteristics of the Swedish kits suggest that you should be vigilant when choosing a tube amplifier. The combination of a nominal impedance of 6 ohms, going down to 3.1 ohms, and an efficiency of 86 dB for some designs of this type can prove too demanding. Without checking, however, it is not worth prejudging anything. In high-end it happens that practice and theory do not fully agree.

The listening experience of

Martena turned out to be monitors in the classic sense. First of all, I would classify them as speakers that can captivate the listener only after getting to know them better. There is a certain modesty in them, which means that at the first contact, nothing special will surprise us. But this modesty comes not from a lack of arguments, but from self-confidence. The constructor resisted

the temptation to display the selected aspect of the presentation, as if with the conviction that the real values would be appreciated sooner or later. Secondly, the sound culture of Swedish monitors is associated with patterns that are more traditional than modern. They are closer to the softness and warmth, which characterized the exquisite sound from years ago, than to the superanalytical sound, which is more and more common today.

You have to get used to the sound of the Oscars Duo. Initial recognition allows one to feel only its general formula. At this stage, it can be concluded that we are dealing with good proportions, even distribution of accents, linear characteristics and high culture. These elements define a set of certainties - until the end of the listening session, they keep order in the entire acoustic spectrum.



Special coasters in all their glory.

In the case of the electronics used in the test, which subtly favors musicality over analyticality, the effect was spot on - exactly as I like.

The diameter of the Martens is pastel. With rounded contours and unimposing band edges, it resulted in very good musicality. This sound is easy to hear. And it means that long hours in the listening chair shouldn't tire anyone.

The sound stage turns out to be sensitive to the quality of the production. Recordings with carefully designed stereo are a feast for the ears, but only them. Swedish monitors will not stretch a narrow and shallow space by themselves. In such cases, we may feel a bit unsatisfied. However, this does not mean a decimation of the record library. I estimate that by choosing at random any 10 albums from my collection, after listening for a while I would like to put aside three, at most four.

The elements described above make up a specific philosophy of sound, which, despite its own characteristics, presents the level of solid high-end. It is exactly what we can expect in this "weight" and price category. The problem is that most of the direct competitors can be characterized in a similar way. Recently, I have not been able to test devices that are clearly weaker. It seems that

Also the bass is quite easy to assess - and it will be a positive assessment. Martens should be classified as medium-sized monitors, and in this case, the bass section can be set to specific requirements. The sets create a solid bass, which should be more than enough in salons with an area of "national average". The quantity and weight make it possible to build a full and weighted foundation. The lowest sub-range is a bit slack, but the more eager control provides a feeling of firmness and springiness. Of course, all this does not mean a professional level yet, but still nobody buys bookshelf sets when looking for professional bass.

The treble turns out to be very neutral. I have not noticed even a trace of balancing on the edge of sharpness or risky trips to areas threatening sand. The sopranos were recreated with panache. Supporters of a stronger drawing of treble will have to choose the right source, amplifier or cabling. Another scenario is also possible - people looking for loudspeakers for too hard-sounding systems should become seriously interested in Oscar Duo.

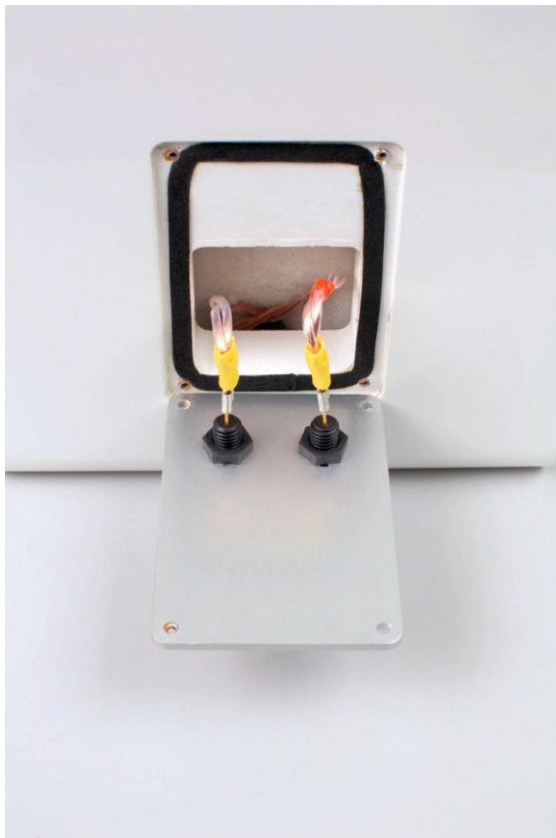


Tweeter with a profile similar to a tube, with a protective mesh and an "overlay" on the top of the membrane.

where more money is involved, no self-respecting producer will try to prey on audiophile naivety. Anyway, this naivety has long been steeped in such suspicion that it probably ceased to exist.



Woofer with ceramic diaphragm and wide suspension.



Single terminals.

Anyway, in order to break through on the market, you have to offer something more than the aforementioned high-end solidity. It turns out that for those who will be more persistent in listening, Marten has prepared a big prize. Something fleeting at first, but with each passing day more and more convincing and seductive. A hidden pearl.

The upper midrange is the main advantage and the strongest advantage of Oscars Duo. Not because it would be exposed - as I mentioned, Swedish monitors present a linear and balanced band. It's all about quality here.

The sound of the upper midrange means much more than just a segment of the band near the imaginary border with the treble. In this case, I mean the entire upper half of the midrange. This is probably the most informative fragment of the acoustic spectrum. Therefore, it must be skilfully developed so that the message reflects the intentions of both the composer and the sound engineer. You could almost feel the joy with which the Martens showed the listener all the secrets of these sounds.

I think lovers of many kinds of music will be satisfied, as long as the recordings were made at a decent level. Jazz, chamber music, piano, orchestra - Martens always paint colors and details that build emotions with the same commitment. For me, the symphonic music turned out to be the greatest beneficiary of the virtuosity of the upper midrange. Oscars Duo did not lose control of the events, even in large squads. Nothing blended in, nothing escaped attention.

The upper midrange makes the sound clear and transparent. Despite not too restrictive bass control and the general tendency to round the contours, we get a clear sound,



Two-way, rear -ventilated system .

and at the same time coherent and fluid.

Martena's greatest asset is hidden beneath the surface of time. Only around the third evening listening did I begin to appreciate the value of the upper midrange. I'm not saying that you can't find out about it earlier - a lot will probably depend on the repertoire and electronics. After we have absorbed the right sonic message, we will be able to simply sink into the music, and that's what it's all about.



View from above.

Conclusion

The sound of the Swedish monitors combines bluntness with charm, grace and clarity. Marten Oscar Duo is in a class of its own, hidden behind a veil of discretion. An acoustic pearl of the northern seas.

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