

REL S/3 subwoofer revisited by Nicholas Ripley

I finished my review of the £1,299 REL S/3 subwoofer (issue 110), when two things happened. These happened soon after the review was printed, but are worth a revisit.

First, while changing nothing on the system at all, the sound of the system of the S/3 suddenly just 'filled in'. This was nothing you could point out, nothing you could point a finger at, and the change was possibly very subtle. But there was nothing subtle about what it did for the sound; this wasn't bass reinforcement, it was full-on bass management. The S/3 already provided a solid underpinning of the loudspeakers, allowing them to open out and clean up in the midrange and treble, but now that was improving the apparent stage width, the clarity and detail across the midrange and, naturally, a deeper bass of both depth and tonality.

The process of reviewing seems to be a process of gradually overturning all those things you dismissed as nonsense in 'civilian' life, and this time it's the idea of 'running in'. I understand that the moving parts of a loudspeaker need time to settle down, but science says everything should be resolved in a matter of minutes, not weeks. But something very definitely changed, and changed for the better several weeks after opening the box; it sounded good fresh out the box, but a lot better with 100 or more hours of music played.

The next was a spot of repositioning by REL expert Kev Starkie. I'd placed the S/3 in line with the loudspeakers and

this appeared to work well, but a well-trained ear and a spirit of experimentation ended with the speaker closer to the corner of my room. I thought this would be one of the worst places for a subwoofer; that this should be a place of trapping, rather than generating, bass. But this repositioning, coupled with a few careful minutes of resetting the level and cut off controls to improve interaction between sub and speakers, paid huge dividends. Once again, this improves the underpinning of the loudspeaker, freeing up the midrange and treble, while adding a sense of tonality and 'shape' to the bass. This is all best represented by that most challenging of instruments for the stereo, the piano. My two-disc copy of Rachmaninov's *Études-Tableaux*, played by Rustem Hayroudinoff [Chandos CD] show the pianist in fine form, but occasionally I find a sense of it being two players working at two subtly different instruments. After run-in and with repositioned controls, the S3 brought these two sounds into one coherent piano tone – dynamic, expressive, and beautiful.

My original review of the S/3 stands, but I'm even more impressed by the REL subwoofer now. It just adds more depth to the bass and control to the upper registers. I've become something of a convert! +

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See issue 110 for the original review