

REL T-Zero subwoofer

By Alan Sircom



As with heads and exciting sexual encounters, when it comes to subwoofers, two is better than one. The difficulty is two subwoofers can be big and expensive, and this can be a major obstacle when bringing some extra bass to small loudspeakers – which is arguably where they are most needed. Which makes the REL T-Zero all the more vital.

These are small, powered subwoofers, benefitting from all the high-performance system integration and control you get from REL designs, but in a cube not much larger than a couple of shoeboxes. The down-firing sealed box sports a 165mm long throw bass driver with a steel chassis, fed by a 100W Class D power amplifier, and featuring the full control set of the bigger RELs (although not the remote control of the really big REL devices). The gloss black or white box is well constructed, although it's not the richest, deepest gloss finish.

The big thing about the box though is the size, or the lack of it. It's small enough to nestle near or behind the loudspeaker without ruining the appearance of the room.

The installation of two small subs is relatively easy. Put them in line with the front baffle of the loudspeakers (if your speakers are back-swept, put them in line with the acoustic centre of the bass unit) and try to keep them as near as possible to the loudspeaker itself. Use the high-level connection wire, joining the red and yellow wires for the positive speaker terminal for that channel on your amplifier and the black to the negative. Leave them in phase.

Integration is tougher, but as with all RELs, start low and stay low. Your subwoofer should be almost never seen and hardly ever heard. With twice the set of level controls, you get twice the fun and games and it's all too easy to set one higher than the other. You'll notice this by a slight 'pull' to one channel. My advice. Set them up as per any good subwoofer, but be prepared to revise your initial installation later.

What you get when properly installed is an enhancement across the board. Bass gets a little deeper, of course, but this seems like a natural extension of the loudspeakers rather than additional bass energy added to the system. But that's just the starting place, because it's what the T-Zeros do to the midrange and treble that marks the subwoofers out as something special.

Put simply, the T-Zeros increase the clarity of the midrange and the articulation of voices. This is no small measure; well set up and suddenly your loudspeakers begin to sound more like they should sound. It's as if freed up from trying to deliver deep bass, the loudspeakers rise to the occasion. A handy by-product from this is the perception of a larger, deeper image.

The other big and strange change this does to loudspeakers is it makes them sound faster. Percussion, even cymbals (which don't have that much ▶



▶ low-end extension) seem taut and more precise, and possibly more dynamic. This is not quite as profound as with bigger subwoofers, but it even managed to speed up the extremely fast Athom loudspeakers, when playing some Faithless.

It's something you possibly need to experience rather than experiment, because if you try this without hearing what a well-set-up T-Zero pair can do, you might settle for just more bass. A good demonstration or home installation will show how much faster, cleaner and deeper your loudspeakers get. If you take these home and apply a more hit-and-miss imprecision to the install, you'll either end up with too much bass (the most common problem with adding a subwoofer) or too little improvement to the midrange and treble. Either give the install more time and care, or call for backup. This is all fairly obvious to those who've already gone down the REL route, but the problem of poor installation compounds with two subs, and as this is likely to be many people's first experience of good subwoofery, it's worth ramming this home once more. I don't want to scare people about the install process – good bass is fairly obvious and easy to integrate – but when you hear what a good sub can do to a female voice, it's counter-intuitive and yet extremely attractive.

Of course there's a pretty obvious limit. A 165mm bass unit, no matter how fast acting is never going to go really, really deep. Two little 'uns do well against one big 'un in the agility stakes, but there are times when the big 'un delivers. This has perhaps less of the drive needed for full bass nutcase, turn-everything-to-eleven boom-fun that everyone seems to go through when installing a sub. Because, even turned to the max, they don't have that dub remix effect other subs can have on the music. But that's not their point. These are subwoofers for people who want to start on the road to better bass management and improving the lot of those with very British sounding (as in, slightly bass light) small box loudspeakers.

The big question is if you have £600 to spend, is it better to spend it on two small subs, one big sub, or better loudspeakers? It's not an easy question and it largely depends on your current loudspeaker system and listening space. If you have two small, but decent standmounts in a small room, the move to a bigger loudspeakers may not prove successful and the big sub might not prove appropriate. In such cases, the T-Zero option is a great one. Bigger rooms in bigger speakers are more likely to go with the big sub option. And if you are starting completely afresh, then putting that £600 to a better speaker is the right answer.

But there's another concept. Take someone with a good starter system with a pair of standmounts, and a single REL T-Zero will transform its sound. Then another one can

do the same at a later date. This is a step-by-step way of achieving proper bass management without the need for expensive and possibly mis-managed upgrades. And under such circumstances, the improvements are significant and profound. Highly recommended. +



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

- Type: Sealed, down-firing active woofer
- Drive Unit: 165mm long-throw, steel chassis
- Lower Frequency Response: 38 Hz at -6 dB in room
- Connections: High-Level Neutrik Speakon, Low-Level single phono, LFE phono
- Amplifier: 100W Class D
- Dimensions (WxHxD): 216 x 241 x 260 mm
- Weight: 6.8kg
- Finish: Black or White Lacquer
- Price: £299 (per subwoofer)

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