Choice EXOTICA

HIGH-END DESIRABLES IN PARTNERSHIP WITH hi-finews & RecordReview

Hi-Fi Choice EDITOR'S CHOICE



Just like heaven

Honouring Franco Serblin's legacy, this latest floorstander is the walnut-hewn flagship of the brand's Accordo range

Entrusted with the legacy of his father-in-law, the late Franco Serblin, Massimiliano Favella has stuck rigidly to the design precepts which established Sonus faber as a loudspeaker maestro, and which were then the basis for Franco Serblin, the company. Favella inherited Serblin's notes and concepts, which have ensured that the eponymous brand would have a steady flow of new models and ideas for years to come. This treasure trove, and the success of the Accordo family, has resulted in a new flagship speaker for the range, the Accordo Unica you see before you here...

A mere snip at £38,500 per pair in the Solid Walnut of our review samples, or the thick end of £42,000 per pair in High Gloss Red or Graphite Grey, the Unica is the company's most expensive loudspeaker to date and it's easy to see why. It comes in above the Goldberg and Essence, and it's also the largest at 305 x 1,330 x 540mm (WxHxD). Be warned: you will need a friend (or two) to help you shift them, what with them weighing in at a whopping 96kg per pair.

Know your left from right

Employing stunning, furniture-grade, reflex-loaded enclosures, these beautifully designed floorstanders are left and right-handed. The cabinet is asymmetrical, minimising standing waves within and strengthening the structure as a whole. The chromed outriggers are also angled to suit each speaker of the pair.

The Accordo Unica marries four Scan-Speak sourced drivers. Two 220mm 'microsphere' cone bass drivers, vented through the base of the cabinet, are joined by a 150mm microsphere cone midband with prominent, chromed phase plug, and a Ragnar Lian 29mm silk dome tweeter. All are visible through the 'violin string' grille, first introduced by Franco Serblin in the form of Sonus faber's Guarneri bookshelf offering of the early Nineties.

The use of solid timber accounts for much of the weight. "This kind of construction is quite complex and requires long-term timber seasoning", explains Favella. "Aging, kiln drying, cutting to size and so on, all ensure the best wood stability".

Aside from the considerable weight, positioning is key, although small changes in angle are aided by moveable chromed discs that are positioned beneath the long, spiked feet. As with Wilson Audio's sliders, these have two benefits – protecting solid floors and enabling adjustment of listening angle without the need of a hoist or crane.

If the Accordo Unica is in your price range, you absolutely must audition a pair

You soon hear just how much toe-in is required. It is dependent on both the listener's distance from the speakers and the distance between the cabinets themselves. An overhead view is provided in the owner's manual for guidance, so you can't go far wrong. And it's certainly worthwhile putting in the effort as when you do nail the positioning, you are rewarded with a soundstage that ranks with the best we've heard for sheer scale, size and realism.

At this point we should also mention that Favella has followed Serblin's blasé, almost amusing disregard for power demand. Choosing the best amp for the Unica means dealing with a mix of pessimistic sensitivity – it's actually more sensitive than the factory specs suggest – while also facing a low-ish impedance.

Sound quality

Connected by single wires, with bi-wiring seeming to fade into disuse, it turns out that our resident Audio Research REF 75SE power amp manages the job without too much complaint. We don't exactly abuse the amp, but the sound is clearly more relaxed with the 250W/8ohm-rated D'Agostino Momentum S250 MxV. The brochure suggests an amplifier with a 25W minimum, but we wouldn't even consider these without 75W-100W on tap.

It takes all of 10 seconds for the realisation to hit that this speaker is something very special. The opening notes of The Carpenters' *Top Of The World* from *The Singles 1969-1973* heralds something truly memorable.

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Franco Serblin Accordo Unica

ORIGIN
Italy

TYPE
Three-way floorstanding loudspeaker

WEIGHT
48kg each

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
305 x 1,330 x 540mm

FEATURES
- 29mm silk dome tweeter
- 150mm microsphere midrange driver
- 2x 220mm microsphere bass drivers
- Quoted sensitivity: 89dB/W/m (4ohm)

DISTRIBUTOR
Absolute Sounds Ltd

WEBSITE
francoserblin.it/en
absolutesounds.com





Karen Carpenter possesses one of the finest voices ever to face a mic and, as this was recorded on A&M and founder Herb Alpert is a sound quality fanatic, its suitability as a reference is inescapable. There she is, her three-octave contralto range so seductive as the Unica delivers vocal textures with rare realism.

This is an exercise in openness, transparency and an awareness of tactility, and as we try it out on tape with various combinations of other amplifiers and decks, it remains breathtaking, the speaker so revealing that we can easily hear the differences between, say, Revox A77 MK IV and Technics 1500 tape decks.

Other parts force a reassessment of The Carpenters as being all about Karen, though. The baritone coming in behind her when she sings the word "down" in the line: "looking down on creation" plumbs the very depths of the midband. The pedal steel has a clarity, a ringing tone that has us digging out New Riders Of The Purple Sage's eponymous debut on vinyl alongside the CD version to savour Jerry Garcia's skills on the same instrument.

Each time, we're presented with the kind of treble that reaches the limits of one's hearing, without even a frisson of sibilance or grain. This trait remains unerringly consistent whether using valves or transistors, tape, CD or LP. This speaker is so ear-friendly, there's no way to express this other than to call it romantic.

The Unica proves to be both forgiving and commanding at the same time – a marriage made in heaven. Every track it's fed exposes another strength. Sam & Dave via Rhino Reserve's new mono 180g vinyl edition of *Hold On I'm Comin'* adds two more strings to the Unica's grille. The first is Donald 'Duck' Dunn's massive, deep and rich bass – powerful but unlikely to overwhelm your room. It's enough to make us apologise for ever judging Stax mixes as 'a bit light'.

The distinctive 'violin string' grille pays homage to Sonus faber's Guarneri

Comparing the mono LP with an original stereo pressing, we learn something else: the way the Unicas handle mono recordings makes them less of a point source experience and almost deceptively as wide as two-channel stereo. This recording duo possesses complementary but utterly dissimilar voices, the Unica presenting each with the perfect mix of textures, force and emotion.

Wondering how the Unica fares with harder funk, we turn to The Brides Of Funkenstein's *Never Buy Texas From A Cowboy*. This superb LP



features a wild cut called *Smoke Signals,* which – naturally – highlights Bootsy Collins' virtuoso bass playing, while a sassy chorus hovers over it all. Horns accentuate the flow, while the percussion has snap to die for. These loudspeakers may have originated from the land of Stradivari, but they boogie down as if they're made in Memphis.

To put all of this it into context, this Franco Serblin speaker joins a motley crew of disparate hallowed designs. It's up there with the Apogee Scintilla, Quad's ESL and Wilson Audio's Watt/Puppy. Celestial company for sure.

The Unica proves to be both forgiving and commanding at the same time

So, for those of you looking for guidance, harken to this caveat. Undoubtedly, the hi-fi marketplace is not just crowded but overburdened with costly and massive loudspeakers. If two-thirds of them disappeared, there would still be too many from which to choose. But if the Accordo Unica is in your price/size range, you absolutely must hear a pair. They're that good, and the fact they're also drop-dead gorgeous is a pure bonus.

Conclusion

You'll have to forgive the rampant use of arguably irrational superlatives, but we find the Accordo Unica a spectacular loudspeaker. It balances grace with power, transparency with warmth, scale with minutiae. Detail, dynamics, transient attack – it reminds us of how Serblin rewrote the rulebook for speakers 40 years ago, in sound and looks. The only fault we can find is that we don't actually own a pair... ●

Hi-Fi Choice OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★

VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★

BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★

FEATURES ★★★★★

LIKE: Just about everything except the hefty price tag

DISLIKE: Did we mention the price?

WE SAY: Superlative loudspeakers by every conceivable measure

OVERALL ★★★★★