



A kind of magic

The entry speaker to Wilson Audio's range has an eye watering price tag, but even so **Ed Selley** reckons it represents great value

Let's start by getting one thing out the way. The £10,998 price tag at the top of the page is not a misprint or reflective of a one-off special edition. In fact, it doesn't even include the cost of the grilles for Wilson Audio's smallest speaker yet that pays homage to the company's first ever design created to solve a specific installation challenge. This is an unashamedly high-end solution, but for a sense of perspective the TuneTot sits at the foothills of a strong product range extending all the way up to the WAMM Master Chronosonic built-to-order flagship priced around £700,000. Wilson Audio has cemented its reputation as one of the world's premier high-end loudspeakers

The TuneTot never demands perfectly mastered material to deliver its virtues

manufacturers. Founded in 1974 by Dave Wilson, it has refined long-held design principles in the pursuit of the best possible performance that has included some of the world's most striking loudspeaker designs. The TuneTot was Dave's final project before he passed away last year and is an entirely new design in cooperation with son Daryl (see Q&A), but the name and ethos harks back to the very beginning of the company. One of its earliest products was the WATT (Wilson Audio Tiny Tot), a two-way standmount that was later augmented by a 'Puppy' woofer that eventually became a fixed combination. The TuneTot goes back to the idea of the original WATT and is intended to offer the performance values it holds dear in what it rather dramatically describes as "hostile environments". The TuneTot is designed and built with a view to being isolated from the

outside world and *vice versa*. The cabinets are made from the same materials as the company's larger designs using two composites called 'X material' and 'S material.' Naturally, given the names, the ingredients are something that Wilson keeps to itself but construction feels utterly inert and even when pushing it hard at high volume levels, the amount of energy expelled from the top or sides of the cabinet is minimal.

To minimise internal reflections the cabinet has no parallel surfaces and contains a 146mm doped paper mid/bass driver and a 25mm soft-dome tweeter. The rectangular aperture of the rear port is angled downwards and is fairly benign when placed close to a wall, but a foam bung is supplied to be completely sure of its docility.

But this is just the start of a toolkit of components that work to realise Wilson's design aims. There are adjustable spikes that can be fitted to the bottom of the cabinet to adjust the front panel to help with time alignment. If you wish to isolate it further and use the TuneTot on a surface such as a shelf or cabinet, you can add a pair of ISOBase platforms priced at £2,498 a pair. Constructed from a combination of alloy and the same composite materials as the cabinet, they effectively make it immune to any surface it's placed on.

Available in five gloss colours: teak, quartz, ivory, carbon and crimson, other optional extras are more focused on the TuneTot's cosmetic concerns. It doesn't come supplied with speaker grilles, but these can be added in a range of six colours costing £350 a pair or if you decide not to go for grilles, anodised trim rings are available in grey (pictured), clear, black or red for £750 a pair. Regardless of what you choose, the standard of finish is immaculate. After experimenting with placement and consultation with the manual, I put the TuneTot with the ISOBase

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Wilson Audio TuneTot

ORIGIN
USA

TYPE
2-way standmount loudspeaker

WEIGHT
13kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
219 x 377 x 259mm

FEATURES
• 1x 25mm soft-dome tweeter
• 1x 146mm doped paper mid/bass driver
• Quoted sensitivity: 86dB/1W/1m (8ohm)

DISTRIBUTOR
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platforms on a pair of relatively lightweight Soundstyle stands. My listening room dictates that speakers be positioned fairly close to the rear wall, so the port bungs are employed. Connected to a Musical Fidelity M6 500i integrated amplifier and a Naim ND5 XS 2 network music player/DAC (HFC 446), listening starts in earnest.

Sound quality

The form factor-to-price ratio of the TuneTot is sufficiently different to products I typically review and there is an element of entering new territory here. After two minutes of *Brace* from Twin Shadow's *Caer*, it becomes apparent that the allowances you need to make for the Wilson's size are negligible. Even with the bungs in place, there is enough bass extension to ensure the deep notes underpinning the music are a palpable and convincing presence. The laws of physics will only stand up to a little bending, of course, and there are limits to what it can do compared with larger cabinets at the same price – see How It Compares – but in all but the very largest of rooms, it doesn't feel like it is going to struggle.

The TuneTot gives a tantalising taste of what larger Wilson loudspeakers are capable of delivering. The sheer three dimensionality of the stereo image it manages to create is something that has to be experienced to be believed. Listening to material I feel I know intimately, the TuneTot

Even with the bungs in place, bass extension is incredible



Q&A

Daryl Wilson
CEO Wilson Audio



ES: Tell us about the design brief?

DW: One of TuneTot's main design objectives was to be as compact as possible while still providing relatively good LF extension. TuneTot uses the same high-quality parts and proprietary materials as the WAMM Master Chronosonic and we are thrilled with the results, both sonically and aesthetically.

Is its ability to work in almost any location a reflection on how many of us build hi-fi systems today?

We wanted flexibility of installation and a level of adjustability that would accommodate just about any compact system. With the built-in driver alignment tools, included vent plug and all the other elements we offer, you can sonically and visually customise your TuneTots more than what we've ever offered.

What would you say inspired the optional ISOBase platform?

As we developed the WAMM Master Chronosonic we engineered the upper modules, supported by the micrometer platform, to be minimally impacted by external vibrations. We wanted as much vibration isolation as possible. When you look under the WAMM enclosure platforms you'll see the proprietary material nested in the aluminium frame. The enclosure spikes do not rest on the aluminium, they are coupled to a very damped material. With TuneTot we knew the types of environments and installation surfaces would vary greatly and found a beautifully effective way to take what we learned from the WAMM development and scale it to work very effectively with TuneTot. The ISOBase is a fantastic solution for installations on undamped surfaces.

Has its development been useful to Wilson Audio's larger designs?

Every element of TuneTot's design was distilled and refined from a larger design. The area of vibration control is an area we are continuing to mine. The Alexia 2 and Sasha DAW have this technology built into the enclosures and there will be more of this kind of integration into future designs.

IN SIGHT



- 1 25mm soft dome tweeter
- 2 Downward-firing bass port/vent
- 3 Single wire binding posts
- 4 146mm doped paper mid/bass driver

delivers in a manner that I had previously assumed was all but impossible within the confines of my listening space. Without exception, the tangibility of the soundstage it creates is something I hadn't imagined being feasible from a loudspeaker of this size in this room.

This is a very neutral and revealing loudspeaker and one that easily shows the characteristics of the components it's partnered with. Both the aforementioned Musical Fidelity M6 500i amplifier and my resident Naim Supernait 2 integrated are able to provide perfectly solid bases for the TuneTot to demonstrate its incredible spaciousness and exceptional detail retrieval, but I have little doubt that moving further up market will yield even greater rewards – provided, of course, that you have a reasonable amount of power at your disposal.

Best of all is that the TuneTot never demands a constant supply of perfectly mastered material to deliver on its virtues. My music library contains more than a few rough diamonds and no journey into these areas leaves me unhappy with the results as it consistently delivers an engaging performance without fear or favour on every occasion. The balanced manner in which it allows you to hear the limitations on some recordings its fed while effortlessly connecting with and delivering the music's emotional core is one that is perfectly judged.

Naturally, give it a high-quality feed and the result is breath taking. The vinyl pressing of Dead Can Dance's *Dionysus* takes on a quality that bypasses the feeling of any

mechanical transmission of the music at all. It is simply you and the shifting, undulating sonic space. There is an element of contradiction to the idea that a product so grounded in material science and applied engineering can generate a performance that feels more akin to magic, but there have been times with the TuneTot that this best describes my listening experience.

Conclusion

For some people the TuneTot will never make sense – as the price for such a compact speaker will forever be better spent on something larger and more imposing – but I take a different view. Short of a lottery win, I am resigned that my listening space will never be vast and will always be somewhere that serves other functions. The idea that the TuneTot delivers jaw-dropping sonics regardless of its surroundings is an intoxicating one and for some lucky people represents the start of an astonishing journey into Wilson Audio ownership ●



For £2,000 less Revel's F228Be floorstander (p88) has more low-end extension (as you'd expect) and generates sound levels that are beyond what the Wilson can achieve. But the TuneTot delivers a beguiling soundstage that achieves better three dimensionality from its vastly smaller and easier to accommodate cabinet. In smaller spaces where the Revel will most likely be too dominant – both sonically and physically – the TuneTot delivers on its strengths. In many ways, the two aren't rivals at all, but it does highlight just how impressive Wilson Audio's TuneTot is.

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

- SOUND QUALITY** ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Spacious, accurate and engaging performance; build
- VALUE FOR MONEY** ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Some limits to bass extension; needs care in setup
- BUILD QUALITY** ★★★★★ **WE SAY:** Outstanding standmount that delivers a high-end experience almost anywhere
- EASE OF DRIVE** ★★★★★

OVERALL

