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SOUND AND VISION

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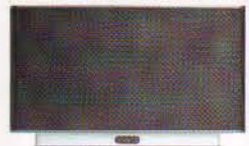


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Stylish Liutos show their class

STEREO SPEAKERS
SONUS FABER LIUTO
MONITOR WOOD



£ 1649

↑ FOR

Seamless integration between drivers; fine stereo imaging with well-projected sound; decent build and finish; dedicated stands work well

↓ AGAINST

Not the last word in dynamics or precision

→ VERDICT

The Liuto Monitors are as classy as standmounters come. With the right kind of music they can sound magical

Taking their name from the Italian word for 'lute', these speakers shine with acoustic instruments. And naturally for a Sonus Faber product, they look sensational too

THERE ARE FEW things in the world of hi-fi that look classier than a Sonus Faber speaker. Irrespective of whether the brand's traditional leather and wood mix appeals, there's no denying the Liuto Monitors are as luxurious as speakers come.

The positive news extends to the build, which is even more solid and polished than the price would suggest. These speakers could have cost a grand more and we still would have been impressed.

Standing just 35cm high, these Liutos are relatively small. Each speaker features a combination of 15cm mid/bass unit and 25mm soft dome tweeter. As with most of the direct competition, a reflex port is used to tune bass performance – in this case it's

a rear-firing one. A port allows the speaker to produce more bass for a given cabinet size, as well as improving sensitivity. Certainly, the Liutos produce greater bass than their small stature would suggest.

None of the engineering noted so far is particularly special, but – as with most high-end products – it's the details that matter. In getting these fine points right, the engineers have produced neat, mechanically well-behaved cabinets that give the drive units a firm and well-damped foundation to work from. These drive units may not boast flashy cone materials, but they work seamlessly together.

Pricey stands are a worthy purchase

Unlike many speaker manufacturers, Sonus Faber also makes good dedicated stands for its monitors. Costing £499 a pair, they consist of heavy top and bottom metal plates held together by wooden pillars. And in action, they work brilliantly. Normally, stands made by speaker manufacturers tend to be an afterthought, but not here. The Liutos performed better on their dedicated stands than any alternative we tried, including Partington's similarly priced and rather excellent Heavis.

The Liutos take the best part of a week to run in properly, and it's vital that any pair you listen to have been given that time, otherwise they'll sound bright, thin and rather uninvolved. But

once ready, these are lovely speakers. Fast and articulate, they cast out a sound of impressive cohesion across the frequency band.

The Liutos are at their considerable best when asked to produce acoustic instruments. They work a charm with an old mono recording of Miles Davis's *Birth of the Cool*, where the speakers' agility, lightness of touch and low-level dynamics come to the fore. The same strengths are equally apparent with larger-scale symphonies such as Tchaikovsky's *Symphony No. 6*, but here they are coupled to an impressively expansive soundstage that pleases with both its range and layering.

The Liutos are rather fussy about positioning,

performing best away from all walls and (in our testing room at least) with much angling towards the listening position. Do this and you'll be greeted with a sonic image of great solidity and scope. The way these speakers project sound is a big strength, meaning that once properly set up, the Liutos simply 'disappear'

within their well-crafted soundstage.

Move to electronic music and these standmounters are less confident. If the likes of Kraftwerk or The Chemical Brothers are a large part of your musical diet, the Liutos' slightly soft, deep bass and lack of rhythmic precision tones down enjoyment a touch. These speakers aren't bad in these respects, but they're behind the class leaders. The Liutos aren't the most neutral speakers we've heard at this price level, either – similarly priced ATCs and Spondors get closer to that ideal – but their presentation remains even enough to convince.

There's much to admire in these Italian monitors. We can't see anyone disliking their build or enthusiastic approach to music replay. If you listen predominately to vocals or acoustic instruments, these speakers would make a fine choice. If not, there are better options for the money. ★

“Fast and articulate, the Liutos cast out a sound of impressive cohesion across the frequency band”



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Stands from speaker manufacturers tend to be made for marketing rather than sonic reasons – but not in this case



TYPE

Standmounters
SENSITIVITY (dB/W/M) 86
IMPEDANCE (OHMS) 8
MAX POWER HANDLING (WATTS) 150
BIWIRABLE No
FINISHES 2
DIMENSIONS (HWD, cm)
35 x 19 x 34



Sonus faber