



Italian craftsmanship allied to a sophisticated sound make the new Sonus faber Olympica 1s a very desirable loudspeaker, finds Jon Myles.

Fabulous Fabers

National stereotypes are a dangerous thing – but somehow they are hard to avoid with the likes of Sonus faber. Their range of loudspeakers are handsome, hand-crafted items that simply ooze Italian style and elegance.

Even the names, Il Cremonese, Guarneri etc, evoke the country's rich heritage of making fine, immensely covetable instruments – often with prices to match.

Recently, though, the company has been pushing into new markets, aiming to bring its loudspeaker-making talents to hi-fi enthusiasts

who cannot quite stretch their budget to the likes of the company's flagship models.

It started with its Venere range which, while still designed and engineered at Sonus faber's Italian base in Vicenza, are put together in China to keep production costs down.



A novel grille composed of strings is a distinctive feature - as is the asymmetrical cabinet shape.

Now comes the new Olympica range comprising two floorstanders, a centre 'speaker and the standmount Olympica I on review here. These are Sonus faber's middle range – standing above the Veneres and below the Homage Tradition series with all production taking place in Italy.

As you'd expect from Sonus faber the Olympicas are a striking-looking loudspeaker, the lyre-shaped cabinet being constructed from walnut wood allied to a sculpted, leather-covered front baffle. It's also asymmetrical with one side being slightly deeper than the other. There's two reasons for this – first the shape



The large 29mm silk dome tweeter uses a wave guide for optimal sound dispersion.

helps reduce internal resonances and secondly it accommodates Sonus faber's new bass reflex system. This consists of a full range vertical slot at the rear which is covered by a stainless steel foil with precisely positioned perforations to manage airflow.

As well as this innovative shaping the 'speakers also feature an unusual grille. Instead of the traditional fabric type employed by most manufacturers Sonus faber has designed one consisting of a series of strings which means you can still see the outline of the drive units when it's attached.

Those drivers are also all new, the mid/bass being a 150mm unit made from cellulose pulp and other natural fibres while the 29mm tweeter is Sonus faber's proprietary silk DAD (Damped Apex Dome) which has been developed from the one used in the £79000 high-end Aida model.

Despite all this craftsmanship the Olympicas come in at £4998 per pair plus another £898 for the optional matching stands. While you can use your own stands the dedicated ones are recommended as the 'speakers bolt onto them and provide a slight backward tilt to time align the drivers.

Put all this together and in the style stakes the Olympica I's undoubtedly show a clean pair of heels to the more mundane box-type models. If I had a wife she'd no doubt approve.

SOUND QUALITY

Possibly because of the names it appends to many of its products plus its Italian heritage (despite being part of America's Fine Sounds Group which counts McIntosh and Wadia amongst its other holdings), Sonus faber loudspeakers are often perceived as mainly purposed for classical and opera replay. These Olympicas put the lie to that.

Yes, they are deliciously rich and smooth with the San Francisco Symphony's rendition of Beethoven's 'Symphony No 9' (24bit/96kHz) – violins especially having a lifelike presence – but they can also belt it out with more hard-charging material. With Nirvana's 'Nevermind' album Dave Grohl's drumming sounded thunderous but was whip-crack fast with no obvious overhang. Kurt Cobain's hoarse, growling vocals were

intelligible and laced with emotion.

On the end of our muscular McIntosh MC152 power amplifier the Olympicas also threw out a wide, expansive soundstage, punching images with height and depth well out into the room.

While these 'speakers are not strictly 'handed', the slanted reflex port positioned on one side of the rear means you can use it facing inwards or out. In truth there's not a great deal of difference but I did find having it facing towards the side walls brought better stereo imaging and slightly deeper bass.

And while there might not be sub-sonics on offer due to the size of the cabinet, the Olympicas do unearth a good deal of low frequency information. Listening to the opening



The rear of the Olympica 1s feature Sonus faber's new bass reflex port which extends down the whole of one side and is covered by a stainless steel foil.

of 'Debaser' by the Pixies I was struck by just how big and bouncy the bass sounded.

Sometimes that quality can come at the expense of detail and refinement but the Olympicas are not short on either of these attributes. On Bruce Springsteen's sparse, atmospheric 'Racing In The Street' the opening piano was clipped and precise and the subsequent two restrained drum beats with one simple bass note wonderfully evocative. As the pace gathered



Twin 'speaker binding posts at the rear allow for bi-wiring if required.

toward the end the 'speakers handled the change of tempo with aplomb so I could just sit back and allow the music to wash over me. It was a sophisticated, natural presentation with a sense of ease about it.

And that just about sums up these loudspeakers. If you want a striking design allied to sumptuous sound then take a listen - I have a feeling they'll seduce you.

CONCLUSION

The Olympica 1s look good but, more importantly, sound even better. They have a free-flowing, musical nature which makes them a joy to listen to.

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The (optional) matching stands are tilted to time align the drivers. The loudspeakers also bolt on for maximum stability.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

For a smallish stand mounter the Olympica 1 produced unusually flat and extended bass, right down to 60Hz, as our analysis shows. The low end is very well controlled, the port providing support at 55Hz where it is quite sharply tuned. Below this frequency bass cuts off, but this is to be expected in a cabinet of the size.

Overall, the Olympica 1 delivers very good bass quality under measurement and will sound well balanced, tuneful and quite lively.

Sensitivity was good at 86dB Sound Pressure Level from one nominal Watt (2.8V) of input so 40W-60W will be more than enough to play very loud.

Above the bass region the speaker has a smooth midrange suggesting low

colouration. With no dip in the 2kHz-4kHz crossover region detail will be strong and the presentation forthright.

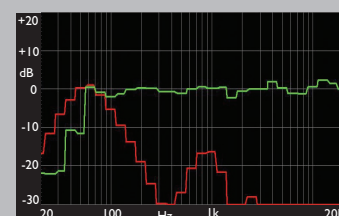
The tweeter also has relatively even output, a stepped and gated sine wave analysis (not shown) revealed. This is a tonally accurate loudspeaker then with no undue treble emphasis.

A 4 Ohm bass unit gives the impedance curve 4 Ohm minima, but reactive components lift the overall value to 7 Ohms, our analysis showing the usual residual peaks around the port dip at 55Hz, plus a steady rise to 3kHz due to voice coil and crossover inductances.

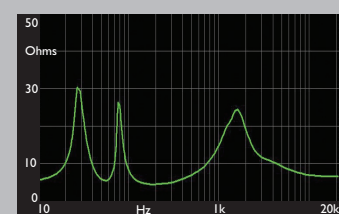
The Olympica 1 is a well engineered stand mounter that's accurate in tonal balance and has extended bass for a small cabinet. NK

FREQUENCY RESPONSE

**Green - driver output
Red - port output**



IMPEDANCE



**SONUS FABER
OLYMPICA 1
£4998 (OPTIONAL
STANDS £898)**



OUTSTANDING - amongst the best

VERDICT

The Sonus faber Olympica 1s marry style with sound quality. Rich and detailed but able to step up to the mark and pound out a tune when needed.

FOR

- large soundstage
- stereo imaging
- detail
- striking looks

AGAINST

- nothing to speak of

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