



Sonus Faber Sonetto VIII

MARTIN COLLOMS ASSESSES A HIGH POWER FLOORSTANDING LOUDSPEAKER FROM A WELL-ESTABLISHED ITALIAN BRAND

One doesn't realise how imposing this £5,700/pair Italian loudspeaker is until it's properly located in the listening room. It has physical presence and stature, displaying the five vertical-in-line drive units with characteristic panache. Fit and finish is exemplary, closely approaching the high standards set by their luxury flagship Guarneri range.

Great attention to detail is seen, from the leather top panel to an artfully concealed and massive 100mm high power bass port on the underside. Floor coupling consists of heavy duty adjustable and

locking floor spikes, with matching alloy discs for polished floors. A stylish alloy base plate of larger area gives good stability.

Options of white, black, and walnut with a piano gloss finish are applied to the side and front panels, while an acoustically effective, open weave, moulded polymer grille is retained magnetically. These loudspeakers still look great with the grilles off, and sound just slightly better. Tall and slim, the speaker narrows towards the back, giving an elegantly tapered appearance. Two pairs of high quality binding posts may be bi-wired and also work for 4mm plugs.

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Three 180mm alloy piston drivers power the bass up to 300Hz, passing on to a custom midrange driver with an open magnet pole and a low colouration pulp cone, built onto a 150mm frame. The high frequency range above 3kHz is allocated to a 27mm soft fabric dome with protective phase plate and that characteristic SF point contact to the tip of the dome. The semi-curved enclosure form is designed to inhibit resonances and this shape also contributes to a lowered diffraction signature. The speaker itself stands almost 1.2m high, but is a slim 0.28m wide, tapers to 0.43m deep. Ideally a two-man lift, it weighs 26.3kg, 58lb (rather more when boxed).

Sound Quality

This design makes a huge first impression. The sound is powerful, almost explosive, imbued with character, and with a bass line that can thoroughly shake the room. Stereo images have decent height and width, good focus, combined with quite good depth. There is a kind of 'go for it' quality, with a sense of enthusiasm and exuberance that suits rock and dance music well. Relatively efficient, this speaker makes the most of the available amplifier power, and can deliver genuinely high sound levels, filling large spaces when required.

I feared that the substantial bass port would show its presence with over-powerful low frequencies, but this was not the case, as the low end was well proportioned and operated with good extension to 35Hz, albeit slightly soft and lacking some of the percussive timing 'edge' found with some alternatives. Nonetheless the bass was presentably tuneful, offering a good foundation for the upper range.

The mid and treble sounded smooth and well integrated, and the frequency joins between the drivers were essentially inaudible, just as we would like them to be. A listener sitting directly on-axis might hear some mild roughness and brightness in the high treble, but a 10degree lateral angle (*ie* slightly pointed away from the listener), was sufficient to sort this minor difficulty out.

Dynamic expression and timing were 'good plus' and it produced most impressive results on large orchestral forces, in this respect harking back to its illustrious Sonus Faber heritage. While the substantial power and scale has been noted in an ambitious rock and dance music programme, the essentially smooth, well sorted character makes this speaker a genuine all rounder. It's easy on the ears and will deliver unfatiguing listening in a variety of venues and over a range of music genres and loudness. Positioning was also not too critical.



Conclusions

This is a lot of Italian made Sonus Faber floorstanding loudspeaker for the money. It's superbly finished, powerful, capable, with extended frequency response, deep bass and the ability to drive large rooms. Stereo images were delivered on an impressive scale, and while the frequency responses could have been more uniform, the sound outputs of the five drivers proved well integrated over a wide frequency range. It also achieves good matching to the room acoustic. Deserving audition the well made, finished and engineered Sonetto VIII achieves *HIFICRITIC* recommendation.



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RECOMMENDED

Review System

Constellation *Inspiration 1.0*, Townshend *Allegrì+* control units; Naim *NAP500DR* power amplifier, Linn LP12 player with *Keel* chassis and *Radikal* motor control, Naim *Aro* tonearm, *Lyra Delos* cartridge, Naim *Superline DR* phono pre, *UnitiServe* and *Core* network servers and S/PDIF sources; Naim *NDS* and *ND555* streamer-DAC, Auralic *Aries G-2* USB streamer; Meridian *200* CD transport; Wilson Audio *Sabrina*, Magico *S-5II*, Quad *ESL63*, BBC *LS3/5a* speakers; Naim *FRAIM* racks; Transparent *XL MM2*, Crystal *Ultra Diamond*, and Naim *NAC A5* speaker cables, Naim *Super Lumina*, Transparent *MM2* and Van Den Hul *Carbon TFU* interconnect cables.

**HIFICRITIC January 2019
Loudspeaker Measured Test
Results**

Make	Sonus Faber
Model	Sonetto VIII
Type	Moving-coil, 3-way, reflex-loaded floorstander
Finishes	piano gloss: white, black, walnut
Size (HxWxDcm)	118.8x28.3x42.7 (excl. base)
Weight	26.3kg (58lb)
Drivers	3x18cm alloy cone LF; 15cm pulp cone mid; 27mm soft dome treble
Sensitivity (2.83V)	89 dB @ 1m (2.83V) (measured)
Amplifier load	Min 2.7ohm: 4ohm spec (agreed)
Axial frequency response	55Hz-25kHz ± 3.5 dB (listener axis, good plus)
Off-axis frequency responses	See graphs and in-room response (very good)
Bass extension	36Hz -6dB (33Hz -6dB in-room) (very good)
Max loudness, in-room	110 dBA for stereo pair (will drive large rooms)
Power range	50W-300W (a versatile range)
Placement	In free space, 0.3-0.8m from wall
Terminals	4x4mm plugs/spades
Price (pair)	£5,700



Lab Report

Voltage sensitivity was high at 89dB/8ohmWatt though the amplifier related impedance loading is somewhat compromised, as is so often these days. The amplifier loading averages 4ohms with a dip to 2.7ohms at 75Hz (noting that this is a high power region of the music spectrum). Nevertheless the phase angle, here concerning the reactive content of impedance, was favourable, somewhat improving the load situation. An overall load rating of 4ohms seems fair enough, and also puts the higher than average voltage sensitivity into better perspective. (If this were a true 8ohm load, the adjusted sensitivity would be a rather lower 86dB.)

Pair matching was very good, indicating close tolerancing during manufacture, the two samples were within ± 1 dB from 50 Hz -18kHz, a fine result, and were still largely in step to a high 30kHz (the -10dB cut-off point for the high frequency unit).

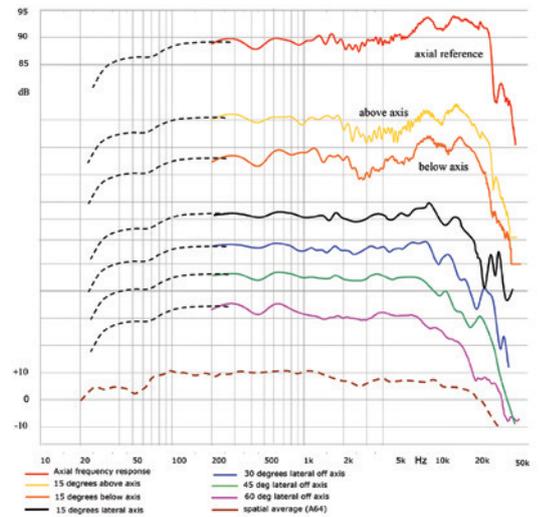
The best frequency response is found at about 10degrees lateral, on the mid-to-treble axis. The high frequencies above 8kHz are rather 'hot' dead on-axis, averaging 4dB louder than the primary frequency region, and this lift was audible. Off-axis the lateral responses were well behaved and well integrated indicating a fine power response and promising a consistent sound quality across the room. Spot checks on distortion showed an above average performance, thanks to the powerful three-way design and the generous number of bass units.

The room average response showed a mildly tapered low frequency output, a little 'dry' below 70Hz but still well extended to 30Hz. At higher frequencies there was good power to 12kHz, agreeing with the 'open' character heard.

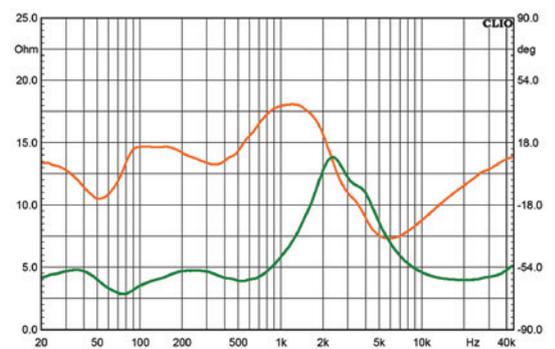
The enclosure was generally well made but some panel resonance was detected from the upper side sections, and overall coloration was not particularly low. The port was well designed and tuned and there

were less upper harmonics than is usual from this source. Distortion was moderate even at quite high powers, confirming the substantial dynamic range encountered. The energy decay with frequency graph shows the early time alignment, while the rapid decay promises crisp sounding transients. However, this aspect is followed by a fairly cluttered later decay field, perhaps indicative of a mildly impaired transparency.

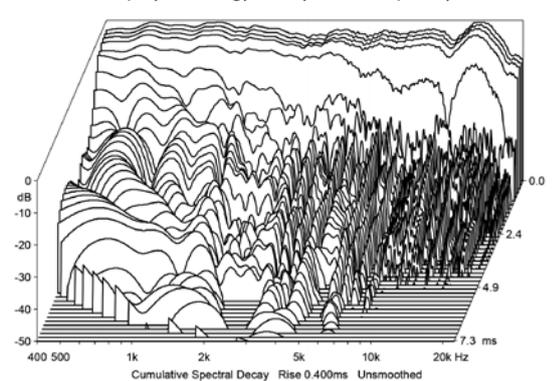
Frequency Responses 89dB/W 4 ohm sensitivity



Load Impedance (Green), Phase (Orange)



Waterfall Display of Energy Decay with Frequency



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