

hi-fi news

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& Record Review

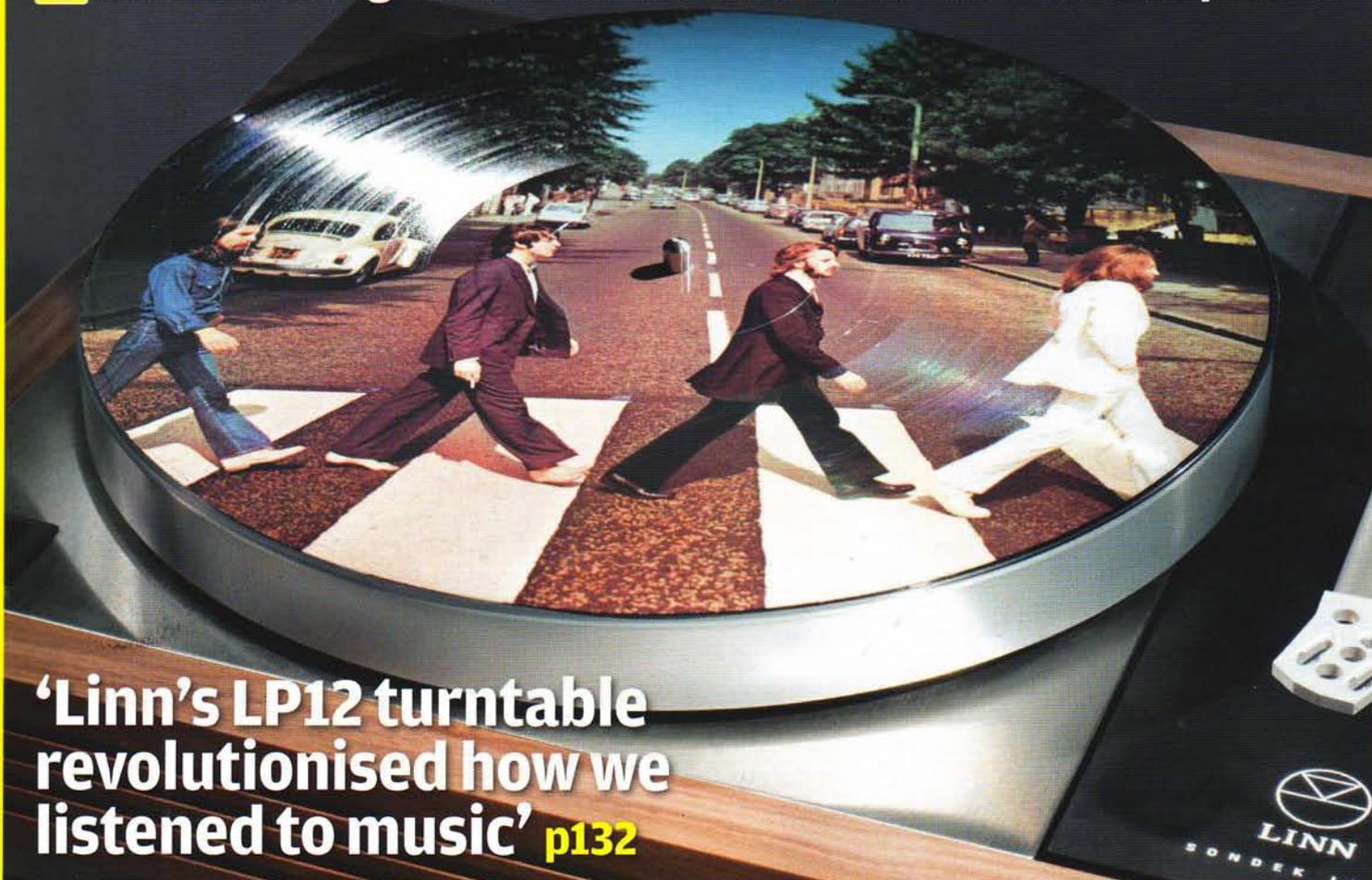
ULTIMATE HI-FI 2009

We choose the year's best products



THE BEATLES RE-MASTERED
Mono and Stereo releases reviewed

The Beatles Box Set – Worth the wait? Read our Verdict
+ Re-mastering the music – behind the scenes at Abbey Road



'Linn's LP12 turntable revolutionised how we listened to music' p132



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UK £4.00 US \$9.50 Aus \$9.95



AUDIO
FILE

Powered hybrid electrostatic loudspeaker
 Manufactured by: MartinLogan Ltd
 Supplied by: Absolute Sounds
 Telephone: 020 8971 3909
 Web: www.absolutesounds.com


 hi-fi news
 EDITOR'S
 CHOICE

MartinLogan Spire (£7990-£8460)

MartinLogan knows exactly what a dilemma the scenario of full-range electrostatic versus hybrid (the sane compromise) presents to audiophiles, as it manufactures both. It's been one of the few makers of hybrids able to 'unruffle' purist feathers, simply because ML speakers don't sound like hybrids.

For more than 25 years, MartinLogan has, beginning with its iconic curved panels, addressed frame material and rigidity, dispersion, crossover seamlessness, woofer speed and every other detail, eventually applying them to the bottom models. The Spire benefits from every one of the ML's trademarked technologies.

Its 1120mm-long diaphragm is the see-through, curved CLS XStat

'Fed by Son of Dave's *02* album, the Spire turned the room into a jukejoint'

panel mounted in the patented AirFrame, operating down to 320Hz, where a 10in PoweredForce woofer takes over. (There's a 35Hz ± 10 dB level control for tuning the speaker to the listening room.) The bass driver consists of a cast basket with a high excursion, long-throw aluminium cone, housed in a chamber behind and below the panel; built like a fallout shelter this also houses a 200W amp.

WIDESPREAD

We are quite at a loss to figure how MartinLogan has managed to halve the woofer/amplifier count of its Summit model and yet deliver an apparently fuller, richer sound.

Fed by Son of Dave's raunchy album, *02*, a speaker which had earlier demonstrated its prowess with the silkiest of material – Cat

RIGHT: Bass frequencies are handled by a 10in driver, working into a sealed lower enclosure. The split crossover facilitates bi-wiring/amping while the LF roll-off may be fine-tuned

Stevens' remastered *Tea For The Tillerman* – suddenly turned the room into a jukejoint. Harmonica rasp, heavy footfalls, breathy vocals with a sneer: the openness of the Spire allowed the atmosphere of the recording to breathe into the room, derived from sounds that are both urban and primitive at the same time. The lower registers and fast treble of the Spire are just what's needed to reproduce manic harmonica and makeshift percussion, with weight down below and fast transients up above placing this eccentric blues belter into the space between the two speakers.

Abba's breathtaking 'Take A Chance On Me' spread across the room, filling it from left-to-right

and front-to-back. With harmonies meshed, the guitar licks and strings and synth fills popped in and out of the sonic picture with speed and surprise. The Spire sounds so clean, so clear, so naked and so transparent that you soon understand why Abba is as irresistible as a newborn kitten.

VERDICT

Although there's a tendency to focus on the Spire's bass performance, not least because of the lushness and control, the meat of the speaker is the ESL component. But the Spire satisfies on all levels: tonal quality, authentic recreation of space, detail retrieval... For ESL fans who need bass *and* level, it's as welcome as anything MartinLogan has delivered over the years. ☺



HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Sensitivity (SPL/1m/2.83V – Mean/IEC/Music)	84.7dB / 86.8dB / 86.5dB
Impedance modulus min/max (20Hz–20kHz)	0.9ohm @ 20kHz 62.4ohm @ 20Hz
Impedance phase min/max (20Hz–20kHz)	–87° @ 20Hz 16° @ 848Hz
Pair matching (200Hz–20kHz)	± 3.8 dB
LF/HF extension (–6dB ref 200Hz/10kHz)	– / 36.5kHz/38.3kHz
THD 100Hz/1kHz/10kHz (90dB SPL at 1m)	0.4% / 0.2% / –
Dimensions (HWD)	1500x320x451mm