

HI-FI CHOICE

SPECIAL EDITION



THE

COLLECTION

EXPERT REVIEWS OF THE WORLD'S FINEST HI-FI



THE COLLECTION 2008



£4.99



techradar.com

WILSON AUDIO

SOPHIA SERIES 2

There is nothing 'middling' about Wilson's speaker in the middle

PRICE £11,998 CONTACT Absolute Sounds ■ 020 8971 3909 ■ www.wilsonaudio.com

It is easy to dismiss the Wilson Audio Sophia Series 2 as a 'lite' version of the System 8. After all, the rectangular box with a pyramid top is common to both. Yes, the pyramid part of the System 8 design is wholly separate from the bass section, but you can see the family resemblance. They even notionally share some components, like the inverted 25mm titanium dome tweeter. Trouble is, this 'lite' concept is wholly wrong; the Sophia Series 2 is a worthy product in its own right.

It is a ported three-way design, standing a little over 110cm tall on its spiked feet. It has a separate port for the treble/mid enclosure and a far larger port for the single bass unit in the main section, both ports rear-firing and made of the sort of aluminium you could make fighter jet engines from. Alongside that Focal-designed titanium dome tweeter is a 178mm ScanSpeak paper cone midrange unit and a 250mm aluminium cone bass unit.

All of these drivers are built to Wilson's specs – the tweeter is used up and down the Wilson range right up to the MAXX 2. The Sophia 2 is a chunky 72.5kg speaker, but a surprisingly no-nonsense one; it is single wired, sits on four big spikes and, although it demands a thorough, high-quality install, is flexible enough to fit into a wider range of homes than most high-end speakers. In this respect, at least, the Sophia 2 has learned something from the go-anywhere Duette.

Those with existing Sophia speakers will see a lot in common, but there are differences. That tweeter is new to the Sophia 2 a move that required a completely new crossover network derived from the design used in the MAXX 2. This has meant improvement to time alignment as well as lower noise and higher resolution. Finally, the old Velcro grilles used in 20th century Wilson designs have been replaced with the pin-style grilles first seen on the Alexandria. These are said to improve diffraction, and in all other places increase the transparency of the grilles.

These might appear mild changes to the design, but the original Sophia was not exactly struggling to keep the pace anyway. As before, the cabinet is an amalgam of Wilson's two secret materials, both chosen to best interact with different cabinet resonances; 'M' material – presumably for 'midrange' – for the top pyramid to improve mid and top-end clarity and 'X' material – presumably for 'X-Files spooky stuff' – designed to help mass load the bass and keep resonance in check.

Like most Wilson designs, on paper it seems a relatively easy load; claimed sensitivity of 89dB so that any amplifier from



“This is a demanding speaker, requiring quality over quantity, but happiest with oodles of both”

15 watts on up can drive it. Don't be fooled. This is a demanding speaker, requiring quality over quantity, but happiest with oodles of both. It is not as utterly eviscerating of system shortcomings as the Wilson System 8, but it is not far from that indefatigable benchmark. We could certainly and clearly hear the move from four ohm to eight ohm coil taps on the back of the Audio Research power amp tested elsewhere in this issue (page 44).

HABIT FORMING

In a way, this is the Wilson speaker for those people who do not like Wilson speakers. You are at a party saying: “No, I don't do Wilson speakers”, then someone gives you a taste of the Sophia Series 2. Fast-forward a couple of years and you have a serious Wilson habit and are mugging

grannies to pay for those MAXX 2s.

This speaker has that big, potent and powerful sound common to Wilson designs. It doesn't sound like the company's

smallest floorstander, because there are far larger rival speakers that make a far smaller sound. It might not have the cavernous bass of the bigger designs, but the difference is scarcely an issue and the full bass is more than good enough. It also has that large, bolted down soundstage with seemingly endless depth. But where designs like the System 8 go for maximum detail, the Sophia Series 2 chooses a smoother, more integrated path.

You could consider it to be 90 per cent of the System 8 for about 50 per cent of the price, but the ability of the Sophia Series 2 to back away from the edge, presenting music in a more relaxing, less edge-of-the-seat manner makes it all the more listenable. Of course, if the music is edge-of-the-seat, it will present that sound accurately, but it does not have the 'push' of the bigger speaker, nor does it have that bottom-end 'thwack'.

Paradoxically, this is perhaps its strongest point. The System 8 represents the ultimate in audio analysis, capable of discerning the slightest difference in equipment. It is also capable of discerning these differences to a great extent, but the speaker moves past that and puts you in touch with the music more readily. The Sophia Series 2 is perhaps the most coherent sounding in the Wilson range, and that's saying something.

This Wilson Audio speaker doesn't just live in the shadow of its bigger brothers, but stands out as an entertaining, accurate loudspeaker that gives a full introduction to Wilson sound, without automatically making you hungry for more. ■

Alan Sircom



The Sophia Series 2 has that potent and powerful sound common to Wilson designs