



"Music should make you feel alive" A Flashback message from Big Country

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Hi-Fi Choice

PASSION FOR SOUND

Issue No. **533**

November 2025

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"BIG & BOLD"



Wilson Audio's Sabrina V three-way floorstander

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Big & bold room-filler

The compact SabrinaX floorstander has been reimagined from top to bottom, resulting in the aspirational Sabrina V

Everywhere, from the alphabet to Roman numerals, V comes before X, so you might expect Wilson Audio's Sabrina V to be a lesser version of the SabrinaX model, which itself was an upgrade of the original Sabrina. Not so: the Sabrina V is a redesigned and rethought version of the X, with changed and improved components, sharpened-up styling and a significant price increase to top things off.

While the SabrinaX started from just under £21,500, the new Sabrina V's ticket is heftier still, starting at £33,000. This brings it up against a range of mightily impressive rivals – especially when you consider that this is the company's smallest and most affordable floorstanding model, a very long way short of flagship designs such as the Chronosonic XVX, which are comfortably in 'POA' territory. We're talking 'add it to the dream setup' or 'lottery winners need only apply' here... Fortunately the Sabrina V, while definitely distinctive, is a lot more conventional than the sci-fi 'Mechatron meets Transformers' look of those top models.

Colours galore

Instead, the V's tapered pyramid style is a little taller, more elegant and subjectively less 'boxy' than that of the SabrinaX. Standard 'WilsonGloss' colours include Galaxy Grey, Quartz and Carbon, with 'Upgrade' options (add an additional 5 percent to the cost) of Ivory, Diamond Black and Crimson Satin. There are a further 11 pearlescent colourways – from Saffron to Blue Orchid – and then a choice of custom colours from the RAL/PANTONE automotive lists at extra cost, but when you've chucked 33 grand at a speaker what's a few extra quid? Our Sabrina V review pair comes finished in a rather fetching custom Rubellite Red Metallic (a Maybach colour!), which looks like a

very dark hue of cranberry and aubergine. Shy and retiring it ain't...

Under all this glorious colour, the speaker enclosures are built using a combination of Wilson's proprietary composite materials – mineral-loaded polymers of varying density, stiffness and damping properties. The Sabrina V still uses X-Material for the outer cabinet panels, but combines this with the slightly softer H-Material, which is said to offer better damping properties for the baffle. Meanwhile, the company's V-Material is used for the base of the cabinet, into which the supplied spikes can be bolted (of which more later).

All of the drivers here have been upgraded and are now shared across various models in Wilson's range. The

tweeter is its Convergent Synergy Carbon (CSC) design, with a lightly doped silk dome, while the midrange is a 178mm unit with paper-pulp cone and AlNiCo (aluminium/nickel/cobalt) QuadraMag 'motor', designed for: "warmth and linearity in the all-important vocal/instrumental band".

This midrange driver is mounted in its own enclosure, with a dedicated resistive vent, while the 200mm paper-composite bass driver has also

Sabrina delivers a big, room-filling sound without trading away definition

been developed not just for its light weight, but also speed and agility – these last qualities being especially evident when listening to the Sabrina V.

The three-way crossover, mounted into the base of the cabinet, is another Wilson speciality, using inhouse-made components and point-to-point wiring rather than a default PCB. Notable here are the inhouse 'Reliable Capacitors' (Rel-Caps), which are employed in all of the company's loudspeakers, and particularly the copper-wound AudioCapX-WA capacitors, claimed to provide improved low-level resolution and tonal subtlety. Additionally, Wilson's

► DETAILS

PRODUCT
Wilson Audio
Sabrina V

ORIGIN
USA

TYPE

Three-way
floorstanding
loudspeaker

WEIGHT
56kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
305 x 990 x 391mm

FEATURES
• 25mm doped silk
fabric tweeter
• 180mm paper
pulp composite
midrange driver
• 203mm paper
pulp composite
bass driver
• Quoted sensitivity:
87dB/1W/1m (4ohm)

DISTRIBUTION
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WEBSITE
wilsonaudio.com
absolutesounds.com





familiar mid/treble protection and tuning resistors are now mounted into a port at the cabinet rear, framed by a machined aluminium panel decorated with the Sabrina V logo.

Coming back to those feet, while the standard spikes supplied are of extremely high quality, their large-diameter threads are designed to make it easy for the user to substitute in Wilson's 'Acoustic Diode' feet if required.

These use a section of V-Material between the thread bolted into the speaker cabinet and the spike itself. The idea behind this is to attempt to dissipate any unwanted energy from the speaker while stopping any vibrations from the floor going back up into the cabinet. It's an odd idea and it will set you back an additional

£4,500 for a set of eight, but at this point who's counting?

Sound quality

Used on the end of the dCS Varèse streamer/DAC and Constellation Audio Revelation 2 system in the Listening Room, the Sabrina V proves that, despite its relatively compact dimensions – oh, all right then, it's not exactly ultra-huge, anyway – it can deliver a big, bold, room-filling sound without trading away any detail or definition.

From the outset, the Sabrina V impresses with the latest Rachel Podger/Brecon Baroque release, *Just Biber*, where the sound is warm and generous, but with a truly human scale. There is fine listen-in detail rather than elements being over

The standard spikes supplied are of extremely high quality

emphasised, and speed and attack in the playing, along with excellent tonality in the strings and *continuo*. The soundstaging is open and clean, relaxed but totally involving, while the tone of Podger's violin sounds nothing short of glorious.

With larger musical forces, in this case the Vienna Philharmonic under Tugan Sokhiev on the *Summer Night Concert* release, the Sabrina V delivers a vivid sense of the weight of the orchestra, again with that unforced instrumental separation. There's also a delicious growl in the basses on the *Morning* section of Grieg's *Peer Gynt*. Notable too is the drive and rhythmic acuity on Strauss' *Wiener Blut* waltz, which ends the programme, the dynamics thrilling as the piece builds, but with an easy going swing and flow to the music.

A complete change to the new remix of Jethro Tull's *Locomotive Breath*, from *Still Living In The Past*, finds the bass remaining tight, fast and extended, with excellent slam in the rhythm. The vocal here is a little recessed, but the sound is open and transparent with Steven Wilson's 2016 remix of *Living In The Past*, and

The Sabrina V's tapered pyramid style is taller and less 'boxy' than the X

Ian Anderson's flute has excellent breathiness, as one might hope.

There are times when the Sabrina Vs' seismic bass can almost be its undoing; it just about keeps the over heavy lows of the extended remix of Bronski Beat's *Smalltown Boy* under control, even though the mix always seems to be doing its damndest to submerge Jimmy Somerville's voice. And the speaker's revealing nature prove well-suited to the live version of *Firth Of Fifth* from Steve Hackett's *The Lamb Stands Up Live At The Royal Albert Hall*, even if the big, spacious sound is pretty much bereft of audience ambience, save the odd polite smattering of applause. This is one of those super-precise live recordings and while the Sabrina V brings out all the skill of the mix, there's not much it can do to inject any atmosphere.

Change to another live performance from a former member of Genesis, in this case Peter Gabriel's *In Your Eyes* from *In The Big Room*, and the speaker brings out the propulsive power of the rhythm section with crisp percussion, deep bass and great



ALL ABOUT THE DRIVERS

Wilson Audio has ploughed significant resources into its driver development, which probably explains why it has fewer individual driver types than it has speaker models. For example, its Convergent Synergy Carbon (CSC) tweeter, developed for the Alexx V, is also deployed across the range in the Alexia V, Sasha V (HFC 506), The WATT/Puppy, Mezzo CSC and Alida CSC as well as the new Sabrina V auditioned here. The 200mm bass driver of the Sabrina V is also used in the Sasha V, The WATT/Puppy and Mezzo CSC, but differs from the Alexx V's 200mm unit which was designed to complement a partnering 255mm woofer, these both derived from the flagship WAMM Master Chronosonic.

However, it's the 178mm QuadraMag midrange driver – originally developed for the Chronosonic

XVX – that's most extensively 'trickled down' into the Alexx V, Alexia V, Sasha V, The WATT/Puppy and Mezzo CSC as well as the Sabrina V.

Inevitably, both the QuadraMag midrange and bass driver are best suited to specific cabinet volumes so Wilson's expertise really comes into play where the cabinet volume falls below this 'sweet spot'.

In practice, the driver loading is optimised by adjusting the cabinet dimensions for a given air volume, in addition to the crossover, the venting and the internal acoustic damping. Ultimately, "Listening and fine-tuning this equation brings us to what sounds 'ideal' given the audio band the driver is responsible for reproducing", explains Wilson CEO Daryl Wilson, adding: "It is a blend and balance of science and art".

backing vocals behind Gabriel's distinctive voice. And yes, it also manages to sound live!

Give the Sabrina V a chill-down with the gentle beats of Azimuth's *Last Summer In Rio*, and it rewards with a gorgeously rich and detailed sound. Here the bass and drums are crisp, tight and powerful, with the guitars and keys soaring eloquently above them.

The speedy, extended sound of the Sabrina V dovetails well with the vocals and harmonies of the Eurythmics' *There Must Be An Angel*, from the 2018 edition of *Be Yourself Tonight* where Dave Stewart's

The Sabrina V's sound is warm and generous, but with a truly human scale

multilayered scoring underpins Annie Lennox's wonderful voice. And its ability to reveal fine production elevates the *Mamunia/No Words/Picasso's Last Words* sequence from the 50th Anniversary release of Wings' *Band On The Run* album.

It's all wonderfully understated musicianship and the Wilson, fed from the dCS and Constellation hardware, makes it so effortless and yet captivating right through to the distant reprise of *Jet* and its lush strings.

Conclusion

The Sabrina V may not quite scale the heights of Wilson Audio's massive flagship models, but it does still offer that same ability to communicate music that's both new and familiar with ear-opening insight and total ease. It is also more domestically acceptable, and more affordable. Well, sort of... Just be careful with those colours: with so much choice on offer there's a fine line between classy and truly garish! ●

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OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY

★★★★★

LIKE: Plethora of different colourways; splendid sound

VALUE FOR MONEY

★★★★★

DISLIKE: Nothing at the price

BUILD QUALITY

★★★★★

WE SAY: More affordable than flagship models

EASE OF DRIVE

★★★★★

OVERALL

★★★★★

