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UK £5.99
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Three-way floorstanding loudspeaker
Made by: Franco Serblin Studio, Vicenza, Italy
Supplied by: Absolute Sounds Ltd, UK
Telephone: 0208 971 3909
Web: www.francoserblin.it; www.absolutesounds.com
Prices: £38,500 (£41,998, Red/Graphite Gloss finishes)

AUDIO
FILE

LOUDSPEAKER

Franco Serblin Accordo Unica

Honouring Franco Serblin's legacy, this latest floorstander is the walnut-hewn flagship of the brand's Accordo range
Review: **Ken Kessler** Lab: **Paul Miller**

Entrusted with the legacy of his father-in-law, the late Franco Serblin, Massimiliano Favella has stuck rigidly to the design precepts which established Sonus faber, and which were the basis for Franco Serblin, the company. Favella inherited Serblin's notes and concepts, which have ensured that the eponymous brand would have a steady flow of new models and ideas for years to come. This treasure trove, and the success of the Accordo family, has resulted in a new flagship speaker for the range, the Accordo Unica.

At £38,500 per pair in the solid walnut of our review set, or £41,998 per pair in high gloss red or graphite grey, the Unica is the company's most expensive loudspeaker to date. It comes in above the Goldberg [HFN Mar '24] and Essence [HFN Jan '21], and it's also the largest at 1330x305x540mm (hwd). Be warned: this is a two-person lift at 96kg per pair.

'The stunning, furniture-grade enclosures are left- and right-handed'

STRING THEORY

Employing stunning, furniture-grade, reflex-loaded enclosures, the speakers are left- and right-handed. The cabinet asymmetry is most visible in our rear shot [p55], minimising standing waves within and strengthening the structure as a whole. The chromed outriggers are also angled to suit each speaker of the pair.

The Accordo Unica marries four Scan-Speak sourced drivers. Two 220mm 'microsphere' cone woofers, vented through the base of the cabinet, are joined by a 150mm microsphere cone mid with prominent, chromed phase plug, and a Ragnar Lian 29mm silk-dome tweeter. All are visible through the 'violin string' grille, introduced by Franco Serblin in the Sonus faber Guarneri [HFN Dec '93].

The use of solid timber accounts for much of the weight. 'This kind of construction is quite complex and requires long-term timber seasoning', says Favella. 'Aging, kiln drying, cutting to size and so on, all ensure the best wood stability.'

Aside from the weight, positioning is key, though small changes in angle are aided by moveable chromed discs that are positioned beneath the long, spiked feet. As with Wilson Audio's sliders, these have two benefits – protecting solid floors and enabling adjustment of listening angle.

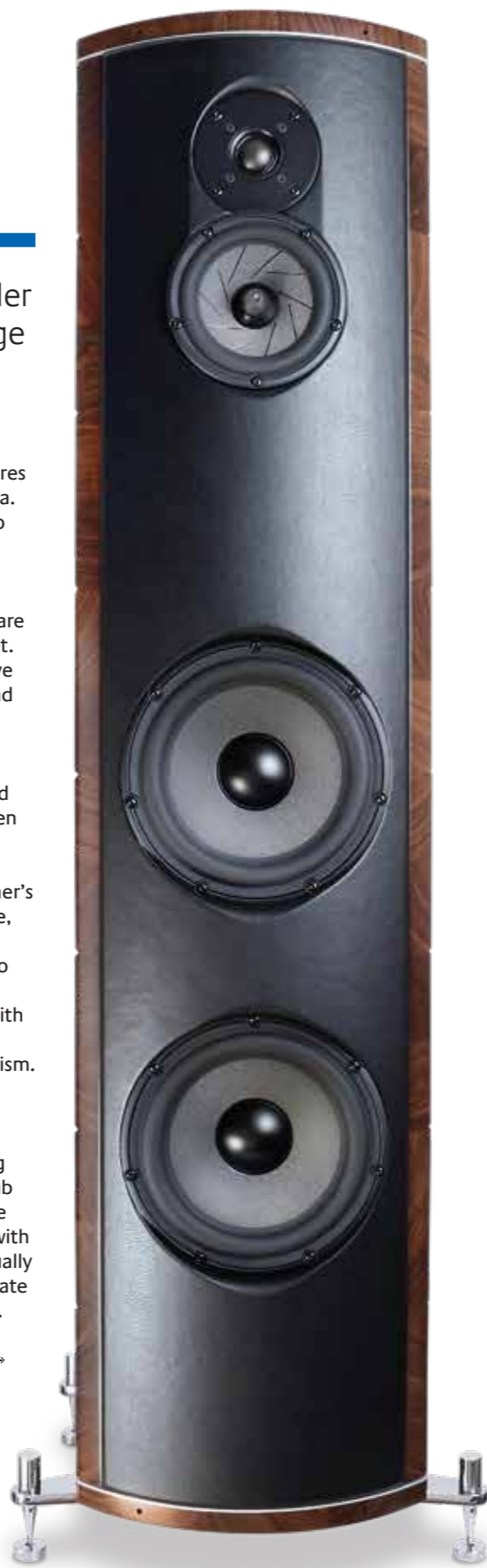
You soon hear just how much toe-in is required. It is dependent on both the listener's distance from the speakers and the distance between the speakers. An overhead view is provided in the owner's manual for guidance, so you can't go far wrong. When you do nail the positioning, you are rewarded with a soundstage that ranks with the best I have heard for sheer scale, size and realism.

MATCH POINT

I should also mention that Favella has followed Serblin's blasé, almost amusing disregard for power demand. As PM's Lab Report indicates [see p55], choosing the best amp for the Unica means dealing with a mix of pessimistic sensitivity – it's actually more sensitive than the factory specs state – while also facing a low-ish impedance.

Connected by single wires, with bi-wiring seeming to fade into disuse, ↪

RIGHT: Cabinet comprises 32 solid walnut pieces braced with aluminium/magnesium alloy sheets. The 29mm Ragnar Lian silk-dome tweeter is joined by a 150mm 'microsphere' midrange cone and two 220mm bass drivers, with alloy dust caps, ported through the raised base



"The timber seasoning – aging, kiln drying, cutting to size and so on – ensures the best wood stability"

SONGS FROM THE WOOD

Inspired by the late Franco Serblin, son-in-law Massimiliano Favella says, 'The *Accordo Unica*, like other projects, required around three years of R&D. This loudspeaker has been developed according to the *Accordo*'s iconic shape while keeping its own personality'. This included adhering to the concept of the soundstage as an atrium. As Serblin once explained, 'The idea came to mind as I needed to create a speaker to reach an end-sound as natural as possible, taking into consideration a wider acoustic result. I always stand by the idea that shape follows function, so I keep this in mind when working on a new project'.

Working in solid wood instead of veneered MDF presents its own challenges. Says Massimiliano, 'Not everyone is aware that producing speakers in solid wood demands complex, meticulous work, as this is a precious and delicate live material, not a synthetic. For this reason, solid wood allows for different tone qualities but I had to go through many different trials to find the right balance between the wood and the size, for the best sound possible. The journey is rocky, definitely not linear, as there's always room for improvement'.

It turned out that my resident Audio Research REF 75SE power amp managed without complaint. As I am not a head-banger (though my wife disagrees), I didn't abuse the amp, but the sound was clearly more relaxed with the 250W/8ohm-rated D'Agostino Momentum S250 MxV. The brochure suggests an amplifier with a 25W minimum, but I wouldn't even consider these without 75W-100W on tap.

HEAVEN, I'M IN HEAVEN...

It took all of ten seconds for me to realise that this speaker is, undoubtedly, joining the ranks of my personal favourites, as the opening notes of The Carpenters' 'Top Of The World' from *The Singles 1969-1973* [A&M 1R1 6140 open-reel tape] heralded something memorable.

Though never a huge fan of the duo, I always recognised Karen Carpenter as possessing one of the finest voices ever to face a mic. As this was on A&M, and founder Herb Alpert is a sound quality fanatic, its suitability as a reference was inescapable. There she was, her three-octave contralto range so seductive as the *Unica* delivered vocal textures with rare realism.

This was an exercise in openness, transparency, and an awareness of tactility which made me glad I owned two copies of the tape. This was gonna be a repeat performance, trying it with other amps and decks. It remained breathtaking, the speaker so revealing that I could easily hear the differences between, say, Revox A77 MK IV and Technics 1500 tape decks.

Other parts forced me to reassess my appreciation of The Carpenters' tape, despite or because of over-familiarity with it. That baritone coming in behind her when she sang the word 'down' in the line

'looking down on creation' plumbed the depths of the midband. The pedal steel had a clarity, a ringing tone that would find me digging out New Riders Of The Purple Sage's eponymous debut on LP [Edsel ED265], alongside the CD version [Columbia CK85388], to savour Jerry Garcia's skills on the same instrument.

NEW ROMANTIC

Each time, I was presented with the kind of treble which reaches the limits of one's hearing, without even a frisson of sibilance or grain. It was consistent whether using valves or transistors, tape, CD or LP. This speaker is so ear-friendly – there's no way to express this other than to say 'romantic' – that I was ready to drop everything and rush out this review.

Maybe that was being lazy but it was tempting because the *Unica* proved both forgiving and commanding at the same

time – a marriage made in heaven. To confound forming a swift opinion, every track I fed it exposed another strength. Sam & Dave via Rhino Reserve's new mono 180g vinyl edition of *Hold On I'm Comin'* [RES1 708] added two more strings to the *Unica*'s grille. The first was 'Duck' Dunn's massive, deep, and rich bass – powerful but unlikely to overwhelm your room. It was enough to make me apologise for ever judging Stax mixes as 'a bit light'.

Comparing the mono LP to an original stereo pressing, I learned something else: ➔

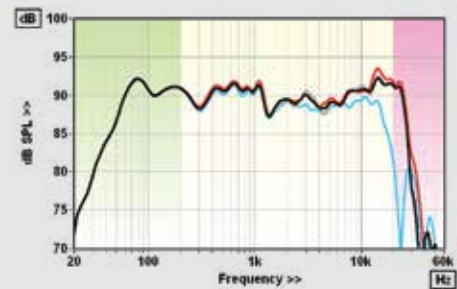
RIGHT: The *Accordo Unica*'s detachable 'grille' is composed of elastic strands stretched between chromed arcs at the top and bottom of the cabinet – these are in tension, so care is needed during removal. The chrome outriggers and spikes follow the asymmetry of the cabinet



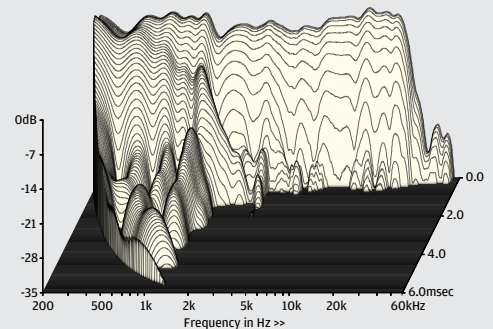
FRANCO SERB. ACCORDO UNICA

The average seated listening height will, typically, place you on the Accordo Unica's mid driver axis where it shows a generally flat response – errors are just $\pm 2.5\text{dB}$ and $\pm 3.0\text{dB}$, respectively – albeit with a likely cone misterrmination at 1.09kHz that results in a step [see Graph 1] and associated resonance that's also visible on the CSD waterfall [see Graph 2]. Heard $\pm 15^\circ$ off-axis [blue trace] the misterrmination is unchanged but the response from 1.3kHz-16kHz is now flat to within $\pm 1.3\text{dB}$, with the HF rolling off thereafter – subtle changes in toe-in will clearly allow for fine-tuning of the speaker's brilliance. The grille, such as it is, is not entirely 'transparent' but brings a maximum $\pm 0.4\text{dB}$ further disruption between 2.5-6kHz [grey trace]. Pair matching is a tight 0.65dB up to 12kHz above which one of our pair was 1.5dB 'brighter' than the other.

The rated 89dB sensitivity underestimates the high 91dB achieved here (all 1kHz/2.83V/1m) but the Accordo Unica is still tough on your amp with its 3.1ohm/83Hz minimum and big $-69^\circ/58\text{Hz}$ swing in impedance phase driving the EPDR down to 1.1ohm/71Hz. Bass is very clean with distortion just 0.05% (re. 90dB SPL/1m), though THD builds through the midband where 2nd/3rd harmonics dominate. The bass drivers peak at 83Hz with steep roll-offs while the ports, by contrast, offer a broad 15Hz-92Hz (-6dB) 'tuning' with only a minor (500Hz/ -14dB) spurious resonance by way of 'colour'. The upshot is a diffraction-corrected bass extension of just 44Hz (-6dB re. 200Hz) though bass 'weight' may be increased by siting near the rear wall. The long spikes are vital in keeping the ports well clear of carpets. PM



ABOVE: Resp. inc. nearfield summed drivers/port [green], freefield corrected to 1m at 2.83V [yellow], ultrasonic [pink]. L, black; R, red; $\pm 15^\circ$, blue; grille, grey



ABOVE: Cabinet is well damped and treble is very clean. Note cone/surround misterrmination at 1.1kHz

LEFT: The rear and side of the Accordo Unica's asymmetric cabinet reveals the vent for the 150mm midrange driver [top] and single set of 4mm terminals

naturally, highlights Bootsy Collins' virtuoso bass playing, while a sassy chorus hovers over it all. Horns accentuate the flow, while the percussion has snap to die for. These loudspeakers may have originated from the land of Stradivari, but they boogied as if made in Memphis.

HEAR ME OUT

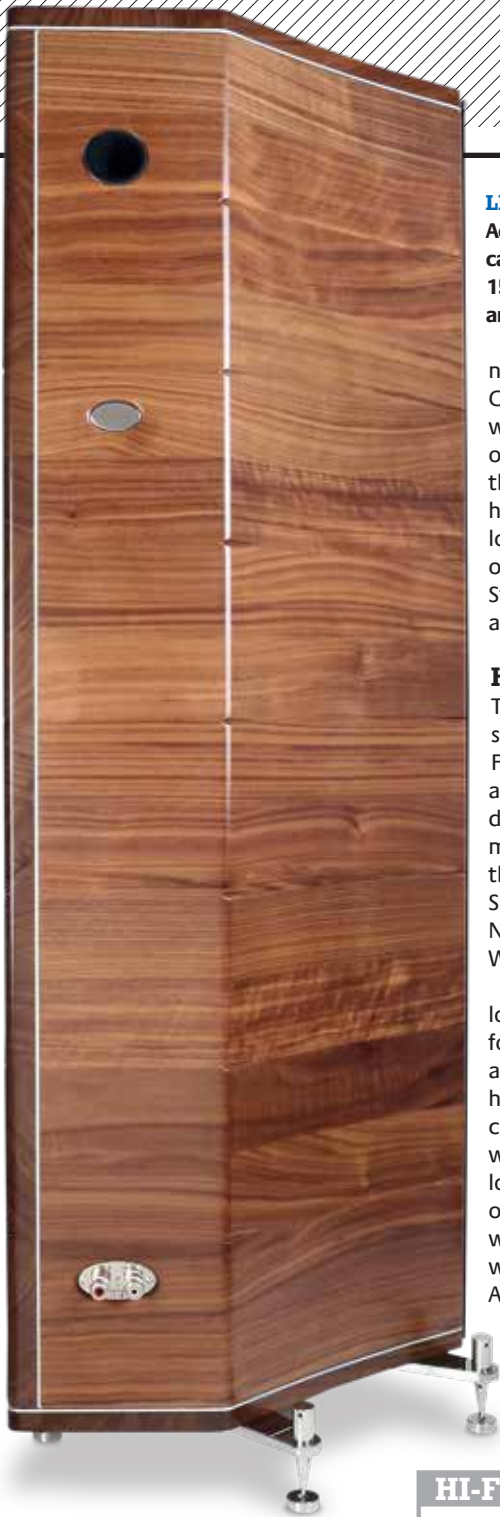
To reiterate, in the wholly solipsistic Kesslerverse, this Franco Serblin speaker joins a motley crew of disparate designs. Solely relative to my biases, it's up there with the Apogee Scintilla [HFN Sep '85], Quad's ESL [HFN Nov '57], and Wilson Audio's Watt/Puppy [HFN Nov '90].

So, for those of you looking to this magazine for guidance, let me offer a caveat. Undoubtedly, the hi-fi marketplace is not just crowded but overburdened with costly and massive loudspeakers. If two-thirds of them disappeared, there would still be too many from which to choose. But if the Accordo Unica is in your price/size range, I implore you to hear a pair. They're that good, and the fact they're also drop-dead gorgeous is pure bonus. ☺

HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

Please forgive the rampant use of arguably irrational superlatives, but I found the Franco Serblin Accordo Unica to be a spectacular loudspeaker. It balances grace with power, transparency with warmth, scale with minutiae. Detail, dynamics, transient attack – it reminded me of how Serblin rewrote the rules for speakers 40 years ago, in sound and looks. I could only find one fault with the Unica: that I don't own a pair.

Sound Quality: 89%



the way the Unicas handle mono recordings makes them less of a point source experience and almost deceptively as wide as two-channel stereo. This recording duo possessed complementary but utterly dissimilar voices, the Unica presenting each with perfect textures, force, and, yes, *emotion*. I could see this was going to be a long session.

Feeling devilish, I wondered how the Unica would fare with harder funk. The Brides Of Funkenstein's *Never Buy Texas From A Cowboy* [BGP HIQLP 168] features a wild cut called 'Smoke Signals' which,

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Sensitivity (SPL/1m/2.83V – 1kHz/Mean/IEC)	91.0dB / 89.8dB / 88.4dB
Impedance modulus: minimum & maximum (20Hz–20kHz)	3.1ohm @ 83Hz 22.5ohm @ 51Hz
Impedance phase: minimum & maximum (20Hz–20kHz)	-69° @ 58Hz $+33^\circ$ @ 1.52kHz
Pair matching/Resp. error (200Hz–20kHz)	1.5dB / $\pm 2.5\text{dB}$ / $\pm 3.0\text{dB}$
LF/HF extension (-6dB ref 200Hz/10kHz)	44Hz / 27.5kHz/28.3kHz
THD 100Hz/1kHz/10kHz (for 90dB SPL/1m)	0.05% / 0.5% / 0.6%
Dimensions (HWD) / Weight (each)	1330x305x540mm / 48kg