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DeVore Fidelity O/Bronze

DeVore's 'Orangutan' loudspeaker range has a new sibling, based on the established O/96 but hosting bronze-chassis drivers and ports inspired by the flagship O/Reference
 Review: **Ken Kessler Lab: Paul Miller**

At the risk of making an inappropriate statement, size really does matter, at least in the realm of the loudspeaker. Being an owner of the smaller DeVore Fidelity O/93 [HFN Mar '23], I learned this again after listening to the manufacturer's larger DeVore O/Bronze (£28,998). It was a similar situation to hearing Quad's newly launched ESL 2912X [HFN Feb '26] right after spending time with its slightly shorter grandfather, the otherwise similar ESL63. But more about this aspect in a moment.

New York-based DeVore named this speaker series after orangutans, but whatever simian aspects they may have elude me. I suspect it's owner John DeVore's sense of humour. The O/Bronze fits in above the O/96 [HFN Apr '21] and below the O/Reference, the latter's drive concepts trickling down to the 'Bronze, which gets its name from the use of that material [see PM's boxout, p75].

DELUXE DEVORE

In keeping with all of DeVore's loudspeakers, the O/Bronze's cabinetry is exemplary, the wood veneers stunning, and the finish rivalling fine furniture. My only complaint about the external elements is the positioning of the multi-way cable binding posts *beneath* the speaker rather than around the back. Stands and grilles are supplied (the latter useful in taming the speaker's top-end performance if your system is bright), but at just under £30k, DeVore should make it easier to access those terminals.

To understand its positioning within the Orangutan hierarchy, John DeVore describes the O/Bronze as 'being a hybrid of the O/96 and the O/Reference'. Specifically, he regards it as approximately 30% of the way to the

flagship as far as the materials, technology and performance are concerned. The aim was to make a speaker with wider appeal than the four-box Reference – it's hard enough for most homes to accommodate two cabinets let alone a quartet – while spreading the build costs of the bronze components developed for the flagship. This includes the cast bronze pipes used for the rear ports, instead of the ABS ports of the O/96. The decoupling of these pipes into the cabinet differs in the O/Bronze too.

It's important to stress that this speaker isn't merely an O/96 on steroids, but more

of an O/Reference 'Lite'. Yes, size-wise, the cabinet is identical in exterior dimensions to the O/96 at 905x458x310mm (hwd), but with some differences. As with the O/96, the enclosures are made from a mix of 25mm birch ply, 25mm and 19mm soft plywood, and 19mm MDF, but added to this are phenolic resin sheets bonded to the inner walls with a 'lossy' flexible adhesive, as per DeVore Fidelity's O/Reference model.

The O/Bronze is fitted with the soft dome O/Reference tweeter (which shares no parts with the O/96 tweeter). Meanwhile, the 250mm woofer is a hybrid of the units found on the O/96 and O/Reference. It employs the same paper cone, four-layer voice coil, ferrite magnet and stamped steel pieces as the O/96, rather than the AlNiCo magnet and machined steel parts from the Reference woofer, but uses the Reference's bronze phase plug in place of the O/96's ABS part. The result, says DeVore, includes a reduction in higher-order harmonic distortion. Finally, the O/Bronze's crossover employs the same level of components as the Reference: foil and paper-in-oil caps, exotic resistors, and foil coils.

MORE IS MORE

But back to the O/Bronze (and for that matter, the O/96) versus the company's smaller O/93 and O/Baby [HFN Aug '23]. Most audiophiles appreciate that – all else being equal – the larger the loudspeaker, the deeper or more pronounced the bass. Among any possible trade-offs is a loss of the usually pinpoint imaging of smaller models, which may be closer in concept to a point source, but DeVore sidesteps this possible issue for the most part because as you go up the model range, the jumps in size are not that drastic. If anything, the main gains of the O/Bronze over its smaller siblings are in the bottom end.

When recently asked by a friend 'how does DeVore do it?', referring to its speakers' ear-opening mix of vintage

'Bronze, in both the main driver basket and tweeter body, is key to this O/96 derivative's sound'



RIGHT: The O/Bronze's lacquered composite cabinets are fronted by a 25mm-thick US-made Baltic birch baffle. The stands are also wood-built and have the same high-gloss finish

BETTER IN BRONZE

For DeVore there's no substitute for the classic German Müller blue paper cone, untreated here except for some reinforcing lacquer at the cone's throat where it's bonded to a multi-layer copper voice-coil and Kapton former. We saw the same in DeVore's O/96 model [*HFN* Apr '21] and the O/Bronze also shares the same rubber surround and ferrite magnet. The bronze phase plug, however, is taken from the flagship O/Ref speaker, replacing the O/96's ABS plug. This bronze bullet not only acts as a heatsink for the driver under load but also secures thick copper shorting rings inside the magnetic gap, linearising impedance and response and reducing distortion.

Bronze, in both the main driver basket and tweeter body, is key to this O/96 derivative's sound. Designer and company CEO, John DeVore, experimented with a number of non-magnetic materials, including aluminium, brass and classic leaded bronze in place of the stock zinc woofer chassis. In practice, subjective differences were most pronounced with the tweeter horns, with bronze sounding best followed by brass. The influence of different woofer chassis metals was more subtle, the differences easily masked by burn-in, etc, but old-school leaded bronze still had the edge. 'I was predisposed to use the bronze chassis, to help with the astronomical costs of developing and casting the units for the Reference', says John, 'but it truly did sound better'. PM

allure and modern attitude, I posited that it's by creating clever hybrid solutions. The O/Bronze marries a few hi-fi traditions, some rather ancient – the most obvious being the use of paper cone woofers – with both current and lateral thinking.

PAPER WEIGHT

Paper cones sound identifiably different from those fashioned from Bextrene, carbon-fibre, polypropylene, aluminium or other materials which have replaced paper in modern times. For some of us, however, especially those who grew up listening to hi-fi in the 1960s, it's almost an exercise in nostalgia, for the tenor of the bass (by this I mean voicing, rather than 'a male vocalist above baritone') is softer, less aggressive but no less impactful.

Further divorcing these speakers from the accusation that they're just aping classics of the 1960s and '70s is the recessing of the dome tweeter enough to allow it to be described as enjoying 'quasi-horn loading', which I assume also adds to the high sensitivity [see PM's Lab Report, p77]. And while it might seem anachronistic to have a large, cubist, ported wooden enclosure with a paper cone woofer in this day and age, the O/Bronze, like all other DeVore speakers, defies accusations of merely being a blast from the past.

'The bass is just as "right" as Baby Bear's porridge'

RIGHT: The 250mm bass/mid unit features a Kurt Müller blue paper cone and is joined here by a 25mm silk dome tweeter – both units feature machined bronze frames

I tested this theorising with one of the most weighty recordings I've heard of late – Syl Johnson's astounding cover of The Beatles' 'Come Together' [*Complete Mythology*; Numero Group NUM032]. The rhythm section here delivers a classic southern funk interpretation of a familiar rock masterpiece, and the sheer mass and extension of bass changes the mood to one that's even more sinister than the dark Fab Four original. The track also features percussion that rivals any purely 'audiophile' drum records, while the organ to stage right just burbles alongside it, adding to the richness. The O/Bronze lapped it up.

While paper cone woofers are only part of the DeVore recipe, and I am trying desperately not to overstate their role, they do set the stage for whatever music is being played. Soul/funk such as Johnson's, as well as hip-hop, rap, much current

dance material and, yes, heavy metal all possess a bottom-biased experience, but even these bass-dominated recordings can be undermined by a small speaker. The O/Bronze not only champions the lower registers, it appears to free them of any constraint or compromise.

NOTHING ADDED

Note that I avoided the word 'augmented'. DeVore's O/Bronze doesn't add anything in the way of enhancement or artifice, unlike some speakers I could name with uncontrollable lower registers. Whatever this showcasing of the bass brings to the listening experience, it is disconcerting only for those unfamiliar with what's available from a massive-sounding if otherwise physically manageable speaker.

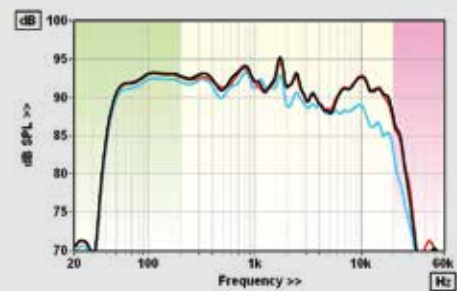
Lest you think the O/Bronze's appeal is only about its bass handling, I have to ➔



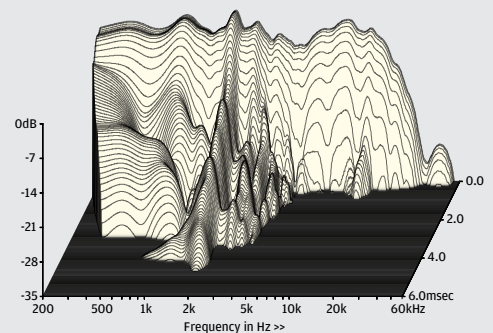
DEVORE ORANGUTAN O/BRONZE

Unsurprisingly there are clear parallels between the O/96 [HFN Apr '21] and the beefed-up O/Bronze. Both are rated at a high 96dB/1W/1m sensitivity, but their 13.4ohm/1kHz impedance suggests a 3.65V input while a standard 2.83V input would bring 94.9dB. In practice the O/Bronze is fractionally less sensitive than the O/96 at 92.2dB/1kHz and 91.5dB/500Hz-8kHz, but this is traded for a more uniform overall response. Again, the likely listening axis will be some 6in/15cm above the tweeter where the O/96's upper mid/presence dip is both better handled in the O/Bronze [see Graph 1]; response errors are reduced to ± 3.7 dB and ± 3.8 dB, respectively; and pair matching remains excellent at ± 0.65 dB (all re. 200Hz-20kHz). Toeing the speakers slightly in or out produces a smoother response still [blue trace] albeit with a loss in vibrancy and treble bite, so subtle tweaks in positioning will clearly have a big impact on the O/Bronze's sound.

As with the O/96, 'blips' in the O/Bronze's impedance/phase spectra are linked to resonances/mistermination in the 250mm pulp bass/mid cone at 800Hz, 1.7kHz and 2.4kHz (crossover) – all are visible on both the forward response and CSD waterfall [Graph 2] although harmonic distortion is both low and more consistent than measured through the O/96 at $<0.5\%$ (re. 100Hz-10kHz, 90dB SPL). Port tuning is 3Hz higher in the O/Bronze at 46Hz but yields a similarly steep bass roll-off extending to a corrected 41Hz (-6 dB re. 200Hz). Otherwise the O/Bronze remains just as 'easy' to drive – its 7.15ohm/186Hz minimum combining with $-62^\circ/+53^\circ$ swings in impedance phase to bring a 3.1ohm/110Hz EPDR to bear on the partnering amplifier. PM



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



ABOVE: Modes linked to bass/mid cone are present at 800Hz, 1.7kHz and 2.4kHz but treble is very clean



LEFT: Two 75mm reflex ports extend bass to around 40Hz. The speaker locates into its matching stand via two struts fitted to the underside of the cabinet – the single set of 4mm cable binding posts are located in between

including the delicious rockabilly of *Dance Album Of Carl Perkins* [Intervention Records LP-1225] – which was conveyed with a rock-solid central image and disarming front-to-back depth. However, the way that the stereo Coltrane track was presented was on a par with panel speakers

which seem to disappear with greater ease than box-type systems.

VANISHING ACT

Perhaps I needn't have been so surprised. For some decades, certainly since the Wilson WATT/Puppy first appeared in 1989 through to today [HFN Sep '24], along with massive and/or radically enclosed systems from Magico, Bowers & Wilkins, Sonus faber, etc, cabinet colouration has become less of an issue. All these latter loudspeakers vanish with the same facility as dipoles. And so, wooden though DeVore Fidelity's O/Bronze's cabinet may be, it's fashioned with such integrity and damped so conclusively that you may have to rethink what you know about dynamic, box-style speakers. ⚡

HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

Anticipating a treat, the DeVore O/Bronze delivered not what I expected but more than I could have imagined. The room-filling, wall-vanquishing presentation of this speaker will worry those producing costlier, harder-to-drive, harder-to-house systems. Within the gigantic performance area are sweet sounds supported by pure, rhythmic mass. And at the price point? I'll not call it a gift, but it is a game-changer.

Sound Quality: 89%



counter that with the sweet yet super-sharp upper frequencies. Just as the bass reproduction is free of the aggression of overly damped, plastics-based drivers, so is the tweeter settled into a happy middle ground between a 'classic dome tweeter sound' and horn loading.

As one who is not predisposed toward pure horns (notable exceptions coming from Lowther and Klipsch), I find that the O/Bronze enjoys all the speed and crispness of horns with none of the brashness. This is what endeared me to the O/93 and O/Baby, and now the O/Bronze proved its mettle with John Coltrane's 'India' from the Coltrane/Ravi Shankar *Jazz Raga* anthology box set [él Records ACME3CD379].

THE RIGHT STUFF

With Coltrane's soprano saxophone duelling with Eric Dolphy's bass clarinet against a warm background of bass, drums and piano, the upper registers were enjoying a real workout. At the same time, the rhythm section benefitted from what we have already established: that the DeVore O/Bronze is an ideal choice for those who want peerless bass reproduction that's just as 'right' as Baby Bear's porridge.

What delighted me even further, given that half my life is spent listening to LS3/5As, was the spectacular scale and three-dimensionality of the soundstage. I even segued into some mono material through the O/Bronzes –

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Sensitivity (SPL/1m/2.83V – 1kHz/Mean/IEC)	92.2dB / 91.5dB / 89.8dB
Impedance modulus: minimum & maximum (20Hz–20kHz)	7.15ohm @ 186Hz 98.7ohm @ 20.9Hz
Impedance phase: minimum & maximum (20Hz–20kHz)	-62° @ 71Hz $+53^\circ$ @ 55Hz
Pair matching/Resp. error (200Hz–20kHz)	0.65dB/ ± 3.7 dB/ ± 3.8 dB
LF/HF extension (-6 dB ref 200Hz/10kHz)	41Hz / 20.6kHz/20.1kHz
THD 100Hz/1kHz/10kHz (for 90dB SPL/1m)	0.25% / 0.25% / 0.3%
Dimensions (HWD inc stand) / Weight (each)	905x458x310mm / 29kg