

High-end sophisticate

Velodyne's advanced SPL-1200R wants you to come and play with it



At the polar opposite to the Crystal THX-12SUB reviewed elsewhere you'll find the Velodyne SPL series. These come with moulded front baffles that horn-load the woofers' output and a little window in the front. The Velodyne's neat grille (removed for our photoshoot) has a corresponding hole for infra red light to shine through, as this woofer comes complete with a test microphone and an infrared remote control system.

The unit itself just has up/down volume buttons on the back and a knob to set crossover point. The blue LED light on the front has a clumsy way of flashing at you, Morse-Code style, so you can read the volume level out of one hundred. This is silly – but the EQ curves you can preset are not.

The Jazz-Classical setting is Velodyne's reference and has a subsonic filter set at 15Hz and adds no EQ at all. The Movies setting has a 25Hz subsonic filter and adds 5dB of 35Hz as well as cranking the relative volume a tad. The R&B/Rock setting

has 28Hz subsonic filter frequency and adds only 1dB of EQ and an extra decibel of relative level, but does it up at 55Hz. The Games setting is pure mizzly thump and adds a 4dB lift and volume hike at 62Hz for frag bass thumpage. I tried them all and, obviously to anyone who knows me, went with the reference deepest subsonic filter and no EQ lift.

The self-EQ system is a hoot. I set up the microphone in the listening position, pressed the EQ button for three seconds and the sub went Bwooooouuupppp! twelve times to equalise itself to my room before I overlaid any of the presets. It works a treat as the sound is tight, rich and fat. And its controlled character is as melodic as any sub I've heard. Velodyne is another specialist manufacturer which, like REL, concentrates on making products to harness low frequencies and it shows. The remote control is simple to use and the sub is undeniably gorgeous.

We say...

The Velodyne SPL-1200R doesn't

Good-looking:

Velodyne's SPL-1200R comes with a self-calibration microphone

quite have the authority of the bigger-boxed REL (see opposite) elsewhere, but **it has no problem with huge bass extensions, even happily handling the 15Hz test tone** that I so adore using – which, incidentally, the wee BK did okay at, too. It has phono inputs and outputs, as well as speaker lead jacks, but you can only use one or other. Plus there are sockets for a 12V trigger, and a remote 'eye' for an extra custom remote control system – additional tech that's very welcome. This is a 21st century bombastic bass-making beast.

Subwoofer sophistication:

The SPL-1200R is one of the most advanced subs on the market



The bottom line

At the conclusion of a typical group test, we normally weigh up the pros and cons of each product, and reveal which is most-deserving of your money. But this isn't a tight apples-with-apples test. More of a 'What-if-you-had-this-much?' type of a group. Four price points, two big ones, two smaller.

What we do have here are some cracking examples of four totally different approaches. They all score well. Some are 'prettier' than others, but I'm not sure whether aesthetics are so important when choosing a woofer that will probably sit out of view.

The cheapest sub, the entry-level BK Electronics XLS200MkII, is tested here in its down-firing version; it can also be bought with a front-firing woofer behind a grille, although I would suggest that this DF model will deliver the best results. Overall, the BK XLS200 can be considered incredible value. It's a truly handsome and brutally deep subwoofer that is unlikely to disappoint buyers looking for depth on a limited budget.

The mid-range Crystal Audio THX-12SUB is a doddle to install: connect, turn up, and off you go. And while I'm not totally convinced of the value of the THX-Select certification when it comes to a model such as this (a THX Ultra sub would be a different kettle of chaos), it's still a great value product. It offers huge, roomshaking lows, even better than the BK, but in a bigger package. It'd be great for action movies, and when bought as part of Crystal Audio's highly-rated THX package it works a treat.

By way of contrast, the Velodyne's high-end SPL-1200R is a good deal more sophisticated. It's not cheap but I suspect that any tweak-freak will love it to death. I utterly guarantee that owners will regularly re-EQ their subwoofer just so they can hear the 'Bwoooooooupppp!' noise it makes. It's also the sleekest of this bunch, and head, shoulders and hairy chest above the others in clever control.

Finally, for the combined cost of the BK, Crystal Audio and Velodyne subs, you could plump for the insane REL Britannia B1. It has all the controls of the Reference series, adds some SPL and loses very little indeed. It is, hardly surprisingly, the best of the four in pure performance terms. A delight, but applications will be limited ●



HCC VERDICT

BK Electronics XLS200MkII DF
£290 Approx

Highs: Deep and extended output; disproportionately powerful; compact

Lows: Given its price, any complaints would be churlish

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

→ Specifications

Drive Unit: 8in with extra

Enclosure: Sealed cubic

Frequency Response: 22Hz to 100Hz

On-Board Power: 275W RMS

Dimensions: 254(w) x 254(h) x 254(d)mm cube

Weight: 12.7Kg

Features: Twin sets of binding posts for speaker level in and out



HCC VERDICT

Crystal THX-12SUB
£340 Approx

Highs: Simple to use and ideal for pairing with THX-certified AVRs

Lows: The gain of the input could be far wider for poorer level signals

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

→ Specifications

Drive Unit: 12in

Enclosure: Rear-ported, front-firing

Frequency Response: 20Hz to 350Hz

On-Board Power: 200W RMS

Dimensions: 350(w) x 470(h) x 470(d)mm

Weight: 28Kg

Features: Paired RCA connectors



HCC VERDICT

Velodyne SPL-1200R
£1,100 Approx

Highs: Quality in both profundity and control are backed up by a self-EQ system and a remote control

Lows: Techno-refuseniks may recoil from actually having EQ in the LF

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

→ Specifications

Drive Unit: 12in (9.7in piston diameter, 3 in voice coil) high excursion

Enclosure: Sealed floor-loaded cubic

Frequency Response: 22Hz to 120Hz

On-Board Power: 1000W RMS Class D

Dimensions: 360(w) x 370(h) x 410(d)mm

Weight: 26Kg

Features: Phono inputs and outputs (post 80Hz crossover) and speaker level inputs



HCC VERDICT

REL Britannia B1
£1,900 Approx

Highs: Thunderous, truly extended bass; accurate control; class-leading connectivity

Lows: Not as resistant to overloading as the Reference series

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

→ Specifications

Drive Unit: 12in long-throw heavy duty cast chassis

Enclosure: Acoustic Resistive Matrix with loaded porting

Frequency Response: 22Hz to 96Hz

On-Board Power: 500W RMS

Dimensions: 387(w) x 660(h) x 470(d)mm

Weight: 43Kg

Features: Two gas tight Neutrik Speakon speaker level connectors, paired phonos and XLR socket