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REL Strata III Subwoofer [back to Reviews](#)

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This started as a response to a review posted on [Audioreview](#). I think there is some value here in including the link and putting this review in some additional context. At least it may indicate a possible case where subwoofer integration into a system can be problematic.

First a comment about [Dennis' review](#) of 3/19/00 on Audioreview. It is not a surprise that a system that integrates well with the Bag End might not work quite as well with a REL. The design philosophies of the two products are very different. Where the Bag End is designed to supply the bass in a system, the REL is meant to augment the lowest frequencies of the main speakers. His dealer should have recommended the REL Q100, which is a closer match to the Bag End, and is really more of a home theater-compatible product in that it works very well with crossover points even up to 120 Hz. The Bag End is a good product, but since its controller has a fixed crossover point of 90 Hz, integration can be more difficult unless matched with a main speaker that works perfectly with that 90 Hz crossover point.



Second, a few words about my subwoofer bias.

- . Servos - **BAD!**
- . Fixed crossover frequencies - **BAD!**
- . Gentle low-pass crossover slopes - **BAD!**
- . Low, adjustable crossover frequencies - **GOOD!**
- . Multiple input options - **GOOD!**
- . No need for a high-pass filter to the "satellites".

Now, about the Strata III. Let me preface these comments with a system description:

Merlin VSM-SE Speakers, used without the BAM

Atmasphere M60 mk. II mono tube amps, 60 wpc
CAT SL-1 Ultimate preamp with phono
Well Tempered Reference Turntable and arm
Van den Hul Black Beauty Cartridge
Cables are JPS Superconductor biwire speaker cables; Harmonic Technology interconnects

Logically, I am thinking that a 4" port right next to a 10" driver, as on the Stadium II, may be the cause of this "halo effect". Visually, it would be like looking at the moon with a halo around it. The moon is very clear, but there is also the added light signature which adds to the moon's image.

The sealed Strata is significantly cleaner sounding, completely eliminating the halo, and perfectly matching the superior articulation and definition of the Merlins. I ended up replacing the Stadium with another Strata III.

The next experiment was to bring the Strata III from the HT system in to the music system. So now there's two Strata IIIs augmenting the low end of the Merlins. Result? BLISS! (Okay, maybe it's not *orgasmic* bliss, but I'm trying to be clear about just how good this really sounds.) While a single sub provides all the bass notes, using two subs provides the power and dynamics that makes having great bass reproduction in the room very satisfying. So here's a suggestion: try using two Strata IIIs instead of one Stadium (or larger) sub. Most sub makers recommend using two, anyway. And this one is inexpensive enough to do so relatively economically.

To sum up, the Strata III is the best sub I have heard in my system, and by a surprisingly large margin. It may be the best sub REL currently makes. Maybe in another room and/or in another system, the results would have been different. But now I suggest that with proper adjustment and room placement (not necessarily a trivial task), the REL Strata III subwoofer is one of the very best subwoofers you can buy, and a terrific bargain, too.

Overall Rating: 9 LPs