



REL STRATA III powered subwoofer £700

MISTER SMOOTH

REL's subs have often been showered with praise in these pages. Let's hope its Strata III is equally loveable



REL's Strata III is another sit-up-and-beg sub with a downwards-facing drive unit. Superficially it's much like the Monitor Audio FB212, but in reality it's a whole different animal. This is a sealed-box design, in which the naturally falling output of the subwoofer at the lowest frequencies is countered by its internal electronics. The result, an essentially non-resonant bass with a gentle eventual rolloff. Assuming all the sums have been done right, this should translate into an even, natural sound,

The REL's input and control system is extremely flexible. The system will accept audio at low (line) and high (speaker) levels simultaneously, and provides separate level controls for each. This can be useful, especially with some Harman Kardon and Yamaha amplifiers that have the option of different loudspeaker/subwoofer settings for each input.

For example, the Stereo Music setting can use the high-level input, with the amplifier set to use full-range speakers, and the high-level subwoofer input connected to the main speaker terminals. In this mode, the sub sees exactly the same signal as the main speakers, and sound quality should be at its most natural.

With multichannel Dolby and DTS sources, the main speakers would be set to Small, with the subwoofer receiving its input from the subwoofer output on the amplifier. In this mode the system should be capable of high volume levels, as the load on the main amplifier is reduced. It all

takes a bit of fine tuning, but the results can be very worthwhile.

PERFORMANCE

This is an unusually fine subwoofer, and its flexible input handling helps it blend in perfectly with the host system. As explained above, it is a particularly strong candidate for systems designed for both music and films, where independent speaker settings are possible for the two applications. With music the effect can be utterly seamless.

As long as you're sitting a reasonable distance from the sub, the bass is very much part of the main speaker output. The REL unobtrusively adds weight and authority. Very good filtering of higher frequencies helps keep its individual contribution discreet.

In multichannel mode, it can be set to deliver a more punchy effect without compromising the music settings. This could otherwise only be achieved by tweaking the settings by hand each time the source is changed.

But the Strata III is a fine subwoofer in many other ways, too. It doesn't go down quite as deep as some of the others, even compact models like the MartinLogan Depth. And there is a slight suggestion of untidiness if it is pushed really hard at the lowest frequencies (around 20Hz). But this untidiness is only caused by test signals, and doesn't affect any real-life applications.

The REL's even-tempered quality always shines through, free of any obvious peaks and troughs. This sub seamlessly extends the bass reach of whatever system it is plumbed into, superbly augmenting floorstanding speakers.

It doesn't boom, or rather won't do unless the settings are bodged. Perhaps for this reason it may not appeal to those who are seeking a dramatic, thumping bass. But that kind of bass quickly becomes tiring and unnatural, which has given subwoofers a bad name in some quarters. The Strata III is made of better stuff.

SPECIFICATIONS

FEATURES

Active sealed box subwoofer; 25cm pulp cone driver; 100W MOSFET amplifier with Set Safe protection circuit; frequency response: 18Hz-120Hz -6dB; separate high- and low-level volume controls, adjustable low-pass filter; four-way mode switch gives 0° and 180° phase shift, and either routes the signal through the low-pass filter or bypasses it entirely

SOCKETS

Balanced high-level input, standard high-level input; Neutrik Speak-On connectors (long lead supplied with bare wire at amplifier end); low-level input L+R single phono; +12dB high-level phono input

DIMENSIONS

416(h) x 310(w) x 518(d)mm

WEIGHT

23kg

CONTACT

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VERDICT

WHAT'S GOOD

Excellent mid-price subwoofer; reasonable bass depth; even-tempered quality; superb with movies and music

WHAT'S BAD

Black grittex finish is utilitarian at best; setup can be complicated and slightly confusing

OVERALL

Stunning performer with either music or multichannel movie tracks

SOUND	☆☆☆☆
FEATURES	☆☆☆☆
VALUE	☆☆☆☆
OVERALL	☆☆☆☆



Highly flexible control system