



Photo Finnish

A speaker that's immune to the room it is placed in sounds like a tempting idea. **Ed Selley** discovers if the Argon1 delivers

Celebrating its 20th year, Finnish loudspeaker company Amphon maintains a presence in both domestic and professional market places. It's been a good six years since we've seen anything from the brand and while the original Argon1 was the winner of our standmount *Group Test* in *HFC 353*, it has recently undergone something of a refresh and is with a new UK distributor – Auden Distribution. As the middle model of three standmounts in the five-strong Argon

Speed and agility make themselves felt in almost everything the Amphon does

range, it retains its remarkably neat and compact design. The 25mm titanium dome tweeter is mounted in the centre of a large waveguide that matches the diameter of the mid/bass drive unit, which means it is set back a considerable distance from the leading edge of the cabinet. This is not an accidental or aesthetic choice and the waveguide – now in its fifth iteration – helps the integration between the two drivers as well as control the directivity of the tweeter and aid with time alignment.

The tweeter hands over to a 133mm aluminium mid/bass driver at a relatively low crossover point of 1.6kHz. The relationship between the two drivers is dictated by what Amphon describes as Uniformly Directive Diffusion, which aims to make the output from the speaker as even as possible to help minimise room anomalies and create a cabinet that's unfussy about placement.

As part of the refresh, the mid/bass driver is augmented by a rear-mounted bass port that now sits

directly behind it with the terminal panel placed above, which depending on your choice of speaker cable can result in the wire being visible from the top of the speaker. There's no bi-wiring facility. While a 316mm-tall speaker with a 133mm mid/bass driver doesn't sound like a recipe for large amounts of low end, Amphon quotes a surprising low frequency response of 45Hz at +/-3dB, which is impressive for a speaker of this size. This is combined with a relatively benign impedance of 8ohm and a sensitivity of 86dB/1W/1m, which should ensure it's a relatively easy load to drive for many amplifiers.

It's a cliché to talk about clean Scandinavian design, but predictable trope or not, the Amphon is both from this part of the world and unquestionably elegant. The decision to finish the cabinet in a sheen rather than a high gloss works extremely well and this can be combined with a choice of different colours for the tweeter and mid/bass protective

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Amphon Argon1

ORIGIN
Finland

TYPE
2-way standmount loudspeaker

WEIGHT
8kg

DIMENSIONS (WxHxD)
160 x 316 x 265mm

FEATURES
• 1x 25mm titanium dome tweeter
• 1x 133mm aluminium mid/bass driver
• Quoted sensitivity: 86dB/1W/1m (8ohm)

DISTRIBUTOR
Auden Distribution Ltd.

TELEPHONE
0791 7685759

WEBSITE
amphon.fi

grilles at the time of purchase or £40 per pair if retrofitted. The white review pair looks business like, but has enough of a nod to lifestyle sensibilities to ensure it will sit happily in most living spaces. A walnut veneer cabinet finish is also available costing £1,120 per pair.

Sound quality

Connecting the Argon1 to the NAD M32 integrated amp and M50.2 streamer that form part of this month's *Beautiful System* (see p88), the Amphon does a good job of delivering on the promise of being unaffected by its surroundings. My listening room is a fairly benign space and its major foible happens at a frequency rather lower than the Argon1 will generate, but even so there is a sense that provided that it isn't jammed up against a rear wall, the cabinet is impressively decoupled from the space it is in.

This sense of separation allows me to focus on the performance of the speaker itself and here the Argon1 delivers handsomely. With a very slight toe-in, there is a large and very even sweet spot that works happily both nearfield and listening further back. Within this flexible listening position, it demonstrates an extremely spacious and three dimensional performance. The midrange in particular is exceptional. It allows A Fine Frenzy's *Almost Lover* to be reproduced without any perceived congestion or compression. Alison Sudol's lovely vocal turn has the scale and texture that's required to make her sound real. Above everything, there is a real sense of emotion to the way that the Argon1

The grilles can be customised to any colour you choose



Q&A

Anssi Hyvönen

Founder and MD, Amphion



ES: Does the Argon1's claim of being "insensitive to the problems of room acoustics" represent the starting point for the design?

AH: Understanding acoustics along with knowledge of how human hearing works is the starting point of any speaker design. "Amphion seems to treat acoustics as a friend and not as an enemy" is one of the nicest, most insightful comments I have come across. For us a loudspeaker is primarily an acoustic device. What we get right acoustically means we do not have to fix things electrically. A speaker with a controlled, wide, even dispersion that works well also off-axis will be more acoustically stable and will sound more like it is intended in acoustically different environments.

How is the Argon1 voiced in relation to similar models from the pro audio side of the company?

A good loudspeaker should open a large, clean window into whatever you're listening to. Our role as a speaker maker is not to recreate, but to reproduce what is in the recording as faithfully as possible. We are very fortunate to be working with some of the best mastering engineers in the world. Having access to hearing a master in the room where it has been made gives us a clear goal on what we need to be striving for. The biggest difference stems from the fact that Argon1 relies on reflex loading, where the One15 uses a passive radiator. While the pro variant is intended for nearfield listening, Argon1 is very flexible in its use and is equally at home in high-quality two-channel or multichannel systems as well as part of a reference quality desktop system.

Do you have any preferences for partnering electronics that work particularly well with the Argon1?

Due to being electrically very simple and acoustically 'pure' our products are very transparent. They naturally show the true character of the electronics in a very clear fashion. This gives the customer a chance to fine tune the system's sound to their exact liking.

IN SIGHT



- 1 25mm titanium dome tweeter
- 2 Binding posts
- 3 Rear-facing bass reflex port
- 4 133mm aluminium mid/bass driver

reproduces music that engages the listener beyond accuracy alone.

The biggest surprise is the bass response. Jan Garbarek's saxophone performances in *In Praise Of Dreams* are underpinned by some deep percussion and the Amphion does a better job than you might expect at relaying this with a force you feel as much as hear. What is notable is that the impact doesn't come at the cost of forcing a vast amount of air from the bass port. There is no sense of sluggishness or the distinctive 'whoomp' sound to low notes and everything starts and stops with alacrity. To be clear, this is not the sort of output that will embarrass a large floorstander, but the Amphion always does enough to leave you satisfied with what you are hearing rather than thinking about how to augment it.

In fact, this speed and sense of agility makes itself felt in almost everything that the Amphion does. The hysterically fast guitar work of Bjørne Berge's *Live In Europe* is delivered with nothing missing or subsumed in the relentless barrage of notes. This ability to pick recordings apart and reveal their inner workings doesn't mean the Argon1 will take poor recordings to pieces, though. Compression is dealt with acceptably and all but the most low bit-rate internet radio remains listenable. Poorer-quality material can aggravate the high treble response to the point where it comes across as fractionally forward, but this generally only becomes an issue at higher volumes.

What has more of a consistent effect on the Amphion is that some care should be taken into account when thinking about partnering equipment.

While it isn't especially hard to drive, it has no trouble in showing the limitations of any equipment further up the chain. Connected to over £3,000 of NAD amplifier the performance is excellent, but a test run with the supremely talented Rega Brio (*HFC 422*) isn't quite the knock out combination that I expect. Some of that excellent bass response is lost and the effortless sense of space becomes slightly constrained. This may be as simple as the difference in output – the NAD claims three times more power output than the Rega – but the Amphion definitely sounds superior with the more upmarket and capable amplifier.

Conclusion

A slight fussiness to what it partners nicely with is the limit of any criticism for this remarkably entertaining little speaker. Its ability to drop into even fairly confined spaces and show off its strengths of speed, clarity and musical joy in any environment is sure to win it many friends ●



The Amphion makes for a rather interesting counterpoint to the Russell K Red 50 that triumphed in the *Group Test in HFC 422*. The Red 50 effectively integrates the cabinet into the performance of the speaker as a whole while the Amphion takes a more traditional approach and attempts to keep it out of proceedings where possible. The result in both cases is a fun and communicative speaker. Choosing between them would be one for an extended demo session, but provided your electronics are up to the job, the sensational low end and speed of the Amphion might be enough to swing the decision.

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY



LIKE: Fast, engaging transparent sound; unfussy placement

VALUE FOR MONEY



DISLIKE: Needs some care with choice of partnering electronics

BUILD QUALITY



WE SAY: A compact standmount capable of delivering excellent performance in many different settings

EASE OF DRIVE



OVERALL

