



Hitting the Swede spot

XTZ aims to put the cat among high-end pigeons with its affordably-priced standmount. **David Vivian** is in for a shock

Olle Eliasson, the boss and founder of Swedish would-be high-end applegart worrier XTZ, makes no bones about claiming to “offer the best relation between price, performance and quality on the market” and, with his latest standmount speaker, it’s clear he means to press home the point.

The job sheet’s first line is straightforward enough: high-quality, rear reflex-ported, two-way standmount speaker. And, up to a point, so is the execution. But from

With the right material the M2 can muster stunning dynamic clout

the wine-gum shape of the baffle to the curvy, super-dense construction of the enclosure to the sourcing, development and implementation of the top-drawer drive units, this speaker’s ambition bears little relation to its real-world price.

Departures from the ordinary start with the enclosure, which is made from a weighty composite comprising epoxy, polyurethane, potassium carbonate and ‘organic bubbles’, resulting in a material that, according to XTZ, is 40 percent more dense than MDF. Internal bracing is added to further reduce cabinet resonance. The slim, tapered baffle is intended to improve dispersion characteristics while the enclosure’s curved, non-parallel walls are claimed to minimise internal reflections and standing waves.

Round the back there are two pairs of gold-plated terminals mounted on a glass fibre reinforced plate to reduce contact resistance and improve reliability. The black piano gloss finish is excellent rather than exquisite (fine

by me) and, overall, the M2’s aesthetic statement is one that I suspect won’t be to everyone’s taste.

The 165mm-diameter bass/midrange driver is a SEAS unit further developed by XTZ and SEAS and employs a new woven polypropylene ‘Curv’ cone. The material claims to be the world’s first self-reinforced 100 percent polypropylene composite and to provide “extraordinary levels of impact resistance, light weight and high stiffness”. The Curv cone is combined with a special, natural rubber surround to reduce suspension and edge resonances to a minimum.

The substantial magnet assembly includes heavy copper rings and there’s a solid copper phase plug in the middle to reduce flux modulation and eddy current distortion, the desired upshot being a smoother, more extended frequency response that crosses over seamlessly to the tweeter. This is a generously sized 30mm soft dome unit with dual neodymium magnets to boost efficiency and power handling. It’s deep set in a waveguide to further increase perceived efficiency, reduced distortion and provide more uniform high-frequency dispersion.

Handling the handover between the drivers is an advanced Linkwitz/Riley type crossover, with 12 and 18dB/octave slope for midrange and tweeter to minimise phase shift and promote good transient response. The filter uses MOX resistors, air-wound inductors and Mundorf capacitors. The rear-firing port comes with a sleeve-style neoprene sock that reduces the size of the aperture (but improves bass extension) and a foam bung for quasi-infinite baffle operation.

Sound quality

I eventually settle on a Roksan Caspian M2 CD/integrated amp front end for the XTZ with the ‘max bass extension’ port socks in situ and the

speakers’ deep, tapered bases secured as firmly as possible to my Slate Audio stands. I say eventually, because I spend several days snared by the M2’s almost spooky ability to lay bare with unerring consistency and clarity the differences in sonic character of any kit I place upstream from it. Not just electronics and wires, either, but support platforms, mains blocks and even the brand of CD-R used to make duplicate rips.

This kind of forensic transparency isn’t always a good thing, of course, but it is an essential part of the high-end remit that generates degrees of separation from brighter, blunter mainstream boxes. It’s also where things can start to go wrong. Well-designed budget speakers often impress because they concentrate on the musical fundamentals and can carry a tune. High-end sensibilities require rather more. In addition to marrying musical communication with the kind of resolution and bandwidth that can precisely recreate any recording acoustic in three dimensions – whether live or contrived – there has to be the dynamic compass allied to a lightness of touch that engages and involves the listener. Connection is the thing. And beneath all the separate elements that contribute to a speaker’s sonic signature, there is a deal to be struck ▶

DETAILS

PRODUCT
XTZ Master M2

ORIGIN
Sweden

TYPE
2-way standmount
loudspeaker

WEIGHT
18.6kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
231 x 424 x 374mm

FEATURES
● 30mm dome
tweeter with
waveguide loading
● 165mm mid/
bass driver
● Quoted sensitivity:
88dB/1W/1m
● Frequency range:
37Hz-29kHz (in
room) +/- 3dB

DISTRIBUTOR
Epic Home Cinema

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07429 370015

WEBSITE
epichomecinema.
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**The distinctive
‘Curv’ done
brings a touch of
class to the M2**



Q&A

Olle Eliasson

Owner and founder of XTZ



DV: Why did you opt for a loaded dome tweeter instead of a ribbon?

OE: This wasn't a choice based on cost. In general there are advantages and compromises in utilising both dome and ribbon tweeters.

Initially the ribbon tweeter utilised in the XTZ 99 series was considered as a viable candidate for the Master M2 series. We wanted, however, a tweeter with a response that would disperse without limitation. Also we needed one with a lower crossover point, but this would present a greater challenge to the smaller ribbon tweeter. To incorporate a ribbon tweeter to provide the desired response it would need to be larger, and in turn a larger speaker. Consequently the dispersion would be narrower vertically. Aesthetics also had to be given due consideration.

Taking account of the need to create a compact speaker with high SPLs, low distortion, high efficiency and a wider dispersion both horizontally and vertically, the chosen 30mm dome tweeter was selected. It fulfilled all parameters perfectly to create the sound envisioned. We wanted a speaker that was adaptable in its placement in a typical listening room and uncompromised in its performance.

How were the cabinet shape and construction arrived at?

First and foremost, the cabinet design options were fairly infinite given its makeup. It could be moulded as required. We wanted a shape that did not compromise the sound and at same time reflects the pinnacle of classic timeless and sophisticated Swedish design for which we are now well known.

The cabinet has a narrower front end. This has an advantage from an acoustic point since the non parallel walls keep resonances to a minimum.

IN SIGHT



- 1 30mm soft dome tweeter
- 2 Tuneable bass reflex port
- 3 Bi-wireable speaker terminals
- 4 165mm SEAS 'Curv' woven polypropylene mid/bass driver

between excitement and refinement that has the potential to deliver more enduring listenability and satisfaction.

The M2 doesn't quite nail the high-end ideal, but comes amazingly close – astoundingly so considering its price, if with at least one caveat. Despite XTZ's 'room friendly' claims and port tuning possibilities, the speaker can actually be quite fussy and needs heavy-duty stands (XTZ's can be filled with sand) and a good deal of experimentation with positioning and the port bungs to give of its best. In my room, it's a little dry and lifeless with the ports blocked off, a tad loose and boomy fully open. The aperture-narrowing sock works a treat, though. Pulled about a foot away from the rear walls and toed-in a few degrees, everything suddenly gels and serious listening begins.

The visceral thwack of Steve Gadd's drumkit on Steely Dan's re-mastered *Aja* CD immediately hints at the speaker's startling bass power and reach, perfectly parlaying the Caspian M2 amp's penchant for delivering music in a tangible, coherent way with fine drive and rhythmic integrity. In fact, the speaker seems to love its Roksan namesake, sharing nose for subtlety alongside an obvious talent for scale and impact. It seems to be a deal brokered in heaven: power with a sense of poise and control I never find wanting.

Time and again, from Boz Scaggs to Bob Dylan, the speaker's output proves finely revealing, harmonically rich and rhythmically coherent. Treble has air and harmonic definition devoid of synthetic sparkle, the midrange a luminous, holographic presence, bass proper foundational weight and depth coupled to supple agility and control. The longer I listen,

the easier it is to appreciate the sheer range of tonal colours in the standmount's palette. It seems to help average quality recordings but, with the right material, it can muster quite stunning dynamic clout combined with delicious detail, clarity and finesse. There's something of the proverbial iron fist wrapped in a velvet glove about this approach, and it draws you in.

Conclusion

A tantalising glimpse of high end? No. The Master M2 is a true, slightly imperfect, slightly fussy high-end speaker at a bargain price. If you want a standmount speaker to live with – pretty much forever – you'll want to give it some very serious consideration. It casts its spell within the first few bars, but the more you listen the more you'll grow to love it. Not just for the way it makes the bones of the music seem fresh and urgent, but it also captures and scales the entirety of the performance with rare precision and grace. It encourages you to listen for hours on end with zero fatigue. A revelation ●



HOW IT COMPARES

Not everyone will like the way the M2 looks or will want to indulge that fussy nature to chase down their best game. But there are some attractive alternatives. Dali's Rubicon 2 is a smart-looking box that sounds faster and more agile, but without the XTZ's sumptuous, extended bass, almost holographic midrange and sheer resolving power. ATC's SCM 11 is a drier, less glamorous sounding speaker that delivers great insight with zero fatigue. Push the budget a bit harder and PMC's twenty.22 can certainly rival the Master M2 for scale, bass performance and detail retrieval, but like the ATC will sound a little dry next to the more relaxed and tonally richer XTZ.

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY



VALUE FOR MONEY



BUILD QUALITY



EASE OF DRIVE



OVERALL



LIKE: Goes for the full nine yards and mostly succeeds

DISLIKE: Needs care and patience to get the most from it

WE SAY: Not perfect, but as close as you'll get to high-end for the money