



Budget Wharfedales sparkle

Wharfedale Diamond 8.1

Loudspeakers £120



For Excellent midrange performance; refined high frequencies; great value

Against The competition is tough; apart from that, nothing much

Verdict This is a cutthroat area of the market, but the Diamond 8.1s are good enough to get the competition very worried indeed

Wharfedale's Diamonds made a massive impact on the speaker market back in 1982, and rightly so: they were small, affordable, and they sounded great.

Since then, the Diamond family has been a permanent fixture in the best-seller lists, even though the last couple of generations haven't quite lived up to the reputation of the originals. The Diamond name has lost its sparkle – and the newly revitalised Wharfedale knows it.

Its answer is the 8.1s, which are light years removed from their direct predecessors, the 7.1s. The quality of materials and the technology used shows that Wharfedale is out to claim back the sector that it dominated all those years ago. And, having heard the product, we wouldn't bet against it.

The combination of 13cm Kevlar mid/bass driver and the highly refined 25mm silk dome tweeter used in the £500 Pacific Pi-40s means that the 8.1s have the technical hardware to battle it out with the likes of Mission's superb m71s.

The designers have done a fine job of integrating the drive units to produce a midband performance well above the standard expected at the price. Kate Bush's 'Cloudbusting' is a complex, dynamically challenging track, but these speakers have no trouble delivering her distinctive vocals with definition and finesse. The musical back-drop comes through with punch and drive, allowing the listener to get to the heart of the piece.

Positioned against a back wall – something made possible by a front-firing port – the 30cm-tall 8.1s produce a sound of scale and authority, communicating Prokofiev's *Romeo & Juliet* with great power. Impressive stereo imaging spreads effortlessly around the speakers and firmly places the orchestra in position.

An able treble performance means that subtle high-frequency details, often hazed over by speakers at this price, are delivered with unusual refinement.

You can biwire the 8.1s, and you should for the increase in dynamics and openness it offers. If this is impractical for any



reason, single-wire using the low frequency terminals – the sound hangs together better.

A sensitivity of 86dB/W/m and nominal impedance of 6 ohms suggests that the Diamond 8.1s may be a little tougher on the partnering amplifier than

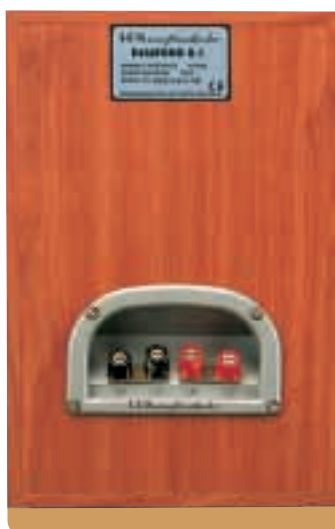
some, but quality designs such as Denon's PMA-255UK and Marantz's PM-4000 will have no trouble driving such a load.

These latest generation Diamonds are real star performers – certainly good enough to scare the established competition. Whether the Diamond 8.1s beat the best of the rest is a matter for a group test, but they'll certainly be in with a chance.

MULTIFACETED RANGE OF SPEAKERS

The 8.1s are the latest entry into Wharfedale's Diamond range, which comprises two standmounters, one floorstander and a centre speaker. All models use the same tweeter – the talented 25mm soft dome used in the Pacific series – and similar Kevlar mid/bass drivers. The colour of the Kevlar brings to mind B&W

drive units but Wharfedale points out that unpainted raw Kevlar is naturally yellow. While the company went to the expense of painting the material black for the drive units of its pricier Pacific series, the budget didn't allow for it in the case of the Diamonds. When they sound as good as this, who cares?



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