

# Hear the Hype

**Can this sub-£4000 loudspeaker really blow the £20,000 Wilson WATT/Puppy system out of the park? David Allcock investigates**



Since CES 2005 I had been hearing a steady stream of information about Hyperion Sound Design, and specifically its HPS-938 loudspeaker, with rumours of its status as a 'WATT/Puppy beater'. Whilst this intrigued me, it wasn't until Real Hi-Fi was appointed as UK distributor that I was able to secure the HPS-938 for review, to find out if all the hype was justified.

The speaker does look like a slightly downsized Wilson WATT/Puppy, with each channel being made up of a head unit containing a midrange driver and tweeter, and a bass pedestal using a pair of 8in drivers.

## SUBSTANTIAL SPIKES

The cabinets are finished in high-gloss piano black, and on the bottom of the cabinet are four substantial brass spikes. It is at this point that the likeness between the two systems stops, as the HPS-938 is made entirely by Hyperion in-house, including the drivers. The head unit is fully sealed, whilst the bass unit is ported via a wide slot, like a Focal Grand Utopia, the slot extending back three-quarters the depth of the cabinet. Around the back of the cabinet are terminals for tri-wiring, with wires running from the bass pedestal to the head unit and brass straps between the midrange and tweeter connection posts.

The head unit holds a 1in silk dome tweeter which has a shaped horn to enhance efficiency and dispersion, complemented by a radical 6½in midrange driver. The bass pedestal is home to a pair of equally unusual 8in bass drivers (see 'Technology and Construction' box).

My spacious listening room (7.5 x 4 x 2.5m) proved a challenge with these speakers, with careful positioning and set-up being crucial to achieving the best sound. The biggest problem was integrating the powerful bass of these speakers with the midrange and treble from the head unit. My room has a poured concrete floor and solid walls all

## DETAILS

 Hyperion HPS-938

 £3750

 [www.realhi-fi.com](http://www.realhi-fi.com)

 0870 909 6777

 Transient response, effortless, musical

 May need careful set-up

**DETAILS**



Back, side and front – the Hyperion HPS-938 is finished as standard in high-gloss black lacquer with gold-coloured details of tweeter plate and spikes

around, and it's possible to get into a situation with too much bass energy, as was the case with this system, where I initially found excessive bass in the room – these speakers were able to excite a 60Hz node with ease.

After a couple of evenings of dancing with these speakers (not easy with a combined weight of 46kg per channel) I eventually found an optimal location 1.7m from side wall to centre of the tweeter and 2m from front baffle to rear wall. Any attempt to get these speakers closer to the room boundaries would

**'After a couple of evenings dancing with these speakers I got an optimal location'**

immediately excite bass nodes within the room. I found toeing the speaker in so I could just see the inside face of each cabinet optimized the stereo image.

One critical point of set-up

**BELOW:** Mid and bass driver design differs from normal practice: mid [right, bottom] is unusual in omitting the 'spider' behind the cone that normally centres the voice-coil, while both drivers' 'SVF' [see over] refers to the direct bonding of voice-coil to dustcap



was cable choice. The supplied jumpers between the bass pedestal and head unit should be discarded, and using the straps on the head unit resulted in a harshness and emphasis in the high frequencies, giving the whole system undue emphasis on 'S' and 'T' consonants. This sensitivity to cabling may be due to the extraordinary transparency of these speakers, and as a result any changes made to the upstream system, be it a change to a single mains filter, interconnect cable or component; even a subtle change to VTA or tracking weight on a turntable was very audible with these speakers.

The extra power of the 14B-SST was beneficial, whilst the analogue front-end worked best when using the Ayre PX-5e phono stage in balanced mode, hence the system was run fully balanced with both analogue and digital front-ends. Ultimately I used a bi-wire set of Chord Signature speaker cable with Vertex AQ Mini Moncayo links (£585) between midrange and treble; in the context of this speaker system, these links are recommended.

**STATIC SOUNDSTAGE**

From the first track it was clear these speakers were capable of presenting music on a soundstage scale which has until now been off-limits to any non-electrostatic speaker below £10k. The stage was one of those 'walk around the musicians' arenas where the images were not only life-sized, but their spatial relationships were also on a realistic scale, allowing air to develop between and around the performers.

The bass register of the HPS-938 was more extended, more powerful and more dynamic than a MartinLogan SL-3, and was even superior to the astonishing PMC MB-2.

Extension of the bass was such that deep, individual notes took on new authority, with the notes being felt through the floor, furniture and chest cavity as much as heard. Bass dynamics were staggering, in fact the only speaker to better

**REVIEW SYSTEM**

**Sources:** Basis Gold Debut turntable, Graham 2.0 arm, Lyra Argo  
**Amplifiers:** Klyne System 7 PX 3.5 phono stage, Krell KRC-3 pre-amp, Bryston 14B-SST power amp  
**Speakers:** Martin Logan SL-3, Leema Acoustics Xavier  
**Cables:** Atlas Elektra & Chord Signature interconnects; Chord Company Signature bi-wire speaker cables; Isotek Elite mains cables

**WE LISTENED TO**

Jennifer Warnes  
*Famous Blue Raincoat*  
 BMG PL90048

Kate Bush  
*The Whole Story*  
 EMI 746414

Dave Brubeck Quartet  
*Time Out*  
 Classic Records CS8192

Destiny's Child  
*Survivor (SACD)*  
 Columbia COL 501783 0

Sharpe and Numan  
*Automatic*  
 Polydor 839520-1

these speakers in the same listening room was the £70k Emotive Excellence Honeyman Scott System One. On tracks such as Kate Bush's 'Running up That Hill', the individual drum notes were exquisitely detailed and textured while each note energized the entire listening room in a manner comparable to that of being in the presence of a real instrument. Moving up into the midrange area, the news got even better.

I am highly critical of any loss of speed or transparency in this range, a problem made acute by time spent with my reference speaker; but for me the MartinLogan SL-3 has finally met its match. With every other speaker I've heard which can challenge the SL-3, there has always been some inevitable compromise in some other area of the midrange performance; with the HPS-938 I couldn't find that compromise. ▶▶

