



Slim towers

Bluetooth speakers come in all shapes and sizes, and **Lee Dunkley** reckons these Blue Aura floorstanders deserve your attention

Streaming music from a tablet or smartphone has revolutionised the way many music fans listen to their favourite tunes, and we've seen plenty of aptX Bluetooth-enabled products come to market recently including integrated amplifiers and loudspeakers incorporating the ubiquitous wireless connectivity tech. Up until now, though, Bluetooth speakers have mostly been one-box speaker units, with only a smattering of stereo pair models being added to the mix offering traditional proportioned standmount speakers to keep stereo soundstage fans happy – including Blue Aura's own x30, reviewed *HFC* 385.

The x40 is the latest model from Cambridge-based Blue Aura and among the first floorstanding aptX Bluetooth loudspeakers that we've seen. The slim 'tower' design is very easy on the eye once installed in my listening room. The graphite faux leather-wrapped cabinets with white stitching along the top edges are a

The x40 creates a room-filling sound that goes louder than expected

neat touch, and stand just 865mm tall with the wooden plinth attached at the base to add extra stability to the slender tower. Behind the removable black mesh speaker grilles there sits a 20mm soft dome tweeter and twin 87mm paper cone drivers in a two-way configuration. A bass reflex port is located around the back and the x40 claims a frequency range of 55Hz to 20kHz.

The right speaker in the x40 pair is the 'active' model containing Class D amplification that claims 2x 45W power output, and needs placing within easy reach of a mains power source. The left 'passive' speaker is connected via a 3m Quick Connector cable that looks very much like an Ethernet wire, but enables the

speakers to be placed far enough apart in a medium-sized room to give a decent stereo soundstage. Optical digital inputs and analogue RCA connection leads are provided, as well as a subwoofer output for the addition of a sub, and for users who want to 'daisy chain' speaker systems together around the house there's a USB socket to facilitate connection of Blue Aura's WAS1 wireless audio solution add on, costing £129.

But the x40's key appeal is likely to be its Bluetooth (4.0) with aptX and NFC (Near Field Communication) connectivity, which enables easy music streaming from a smart device. Wireless connectivity is very easy and I get connected in seconds, but even if you don't already own an NFC-equipped device, pairing simply requires users to select the Bluetooth input on the x40 and then to select it

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Blue Aura x40
ORIGIN
UK/China
TYPE
Two-way active floorstander with aptX Bluetooth
WEIGHT
6.3kg
DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
112 x 865 x 145mm
FEATURES
• 20mm soft dome tweeter; 2x 87mm mid/bass drivers
• Quoted amplifier power output: 2x 45W Class D
• Optical, RCA and USB inputs
• AptX Bluetooth with NFC
DISTRIBUTOR
Blue Aura
TELEPHONE
01480 477738
WEBSITE
blueaura.co.uk

as the output device from the Bluetooth settings menu on your tablet or smartphone.

Sound quality

Pairing completed and with the speakers positioned around 30cm from the rear wall with just a slight bit of toe-in to focus the stereo image, I am impressed by the big sound that these slender speakers are capable of producing. Stereo separation is particularly notable and the x40 creates a spacious, room-filling sound that's greater in scale and goes louder than these slender standmount speakers have a right to. Playing the *Tron: Legacy* soundtrack from Tidal's streaming service demonstrates that the Blue Aura is able to handle the Daft Punk score in an extremely engaging manner, and achieves a dynamic and rousing performance that only hints at the suggestion that the x40 might benefit from the addition of a subwoofer to provide additional bass depth.

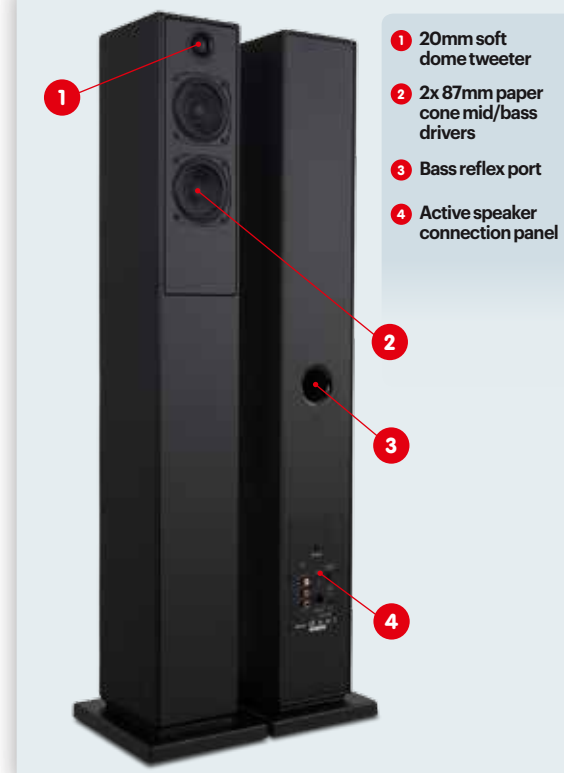
Treble details are never harsh and have good clarity and smoothness even at higher volumes. There is some midband forwardness that comes across on Tom Odell's vocal and piano playing on *Grow Old With Me*, but this up front nature helps to project the main elements of the recording into the room and is a characteristic many will enjoy.

Listening to the same track via a CD player connected to the optical input demonstrates slightly smoother mid frequencies and a more solid sense of stereo, and highlights the x40's true capabilities without a sense of Bluetooth graininess.

Conclusion

The x40 is a beautifully slim pair of speakers that will appeal to anyone looking to unleash music from a smart device. The dynamic sound and ease of connectivity means there's plenty here to like ●

IN SIGHT



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Superb build and styling; engaging performance
VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Audible click during source selection and power on; price
BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★ **WE SAY:** Impressive Bluetooth sound from towers with a pretty small footprint
FEATURES ★★★★★

OVERALL

