

HI-FI WORLD

JUNE 2015

UK £4.30

www.hi-fiworld.co.uk

FREE READER CLASSIFIED ADS IN THIS ISSUE!



EXCLUSIVE!
BLUE AURA X40
bluetooth loudspeakers



LEEMA ELEMENTS
cd player



EXCLUSIVE!
INSPIRE ROKSAN XERXES
turntable

ROHDE & SCHWARZ
MEASUREMENT



EXCLUSIVE!

PRIMALUNA DIALOGUE HP integrated amplifier



NEAT SX3 LOUDSPEAKERS
TEAC AI-301DA AMPLIFIER
SCHIIT MANI PHONO STAGE
REDISCOVER YOUR MUSIC FEATURE

COMPETITION



**WIN A GREEK EVOLUTION
100A WORTH £1499!
(UK ONLY)**

JUNE 2015



9 770961 766192

**7 PAGES OF LETTERS - THE BEST WINS A PAIR OF
KEF Q100 LOUDSPEAKERS! (UK ONLY)**





Blue For You

Blue Aura's slim X40 loudspeakers not only feature active operation – they also boast Bluetooth connectivity. Jon Myles listens in.

If there's one technology which is making ever greater in-roads into the mass hi-fi market then it has to be Bluetooth. Once seen as prone to glitches and inherently shaky, improvements in stability and sound quality mean it is now a fully-fledged and legitimate music-carrying medium.

No surprise then, that we are seeing an increasing number of Bluetooth-equipped headphones, amplifiers, network players, streamers and all-in-one systems. And now you can add floorstanding loudspeakers to that list in the shape of the X40s from Cambridgeshire-based company Blue Aura.

It makes a sensible proposition: after all, what's not to like about a pair of speakers you can stream your music to from a mobile, tablet or computer?

If you haven't heard the name before, Blue Aura was founded in 2010 to specialise in wireless and Bluetooth 'speaker systems and now boasts an impressive range of products, the X40s being one of its top models coming in at £699.

For that you get a pair of slim but attractively-styled loudspeakers standing 865mm tall but just 112mm wide and 145mm deep. The cabinet is made from MDF clad in a faux leather covering which adds an undeniable air of class to the package.

Behind the metal fascia grilles are a pair of 87mm paper cone mid/bass drivers coupled with a 20mm soft dome tweeter all powered by a Class D 35 Watts per channel amplifier.

The right 'speaker acts as the master and is connected to its partner by a supplied cable. Apart from Bluetooth with aptX, the X40s also feature a pair of standard RCA analogue inputs, a single optical digital input and also a sub(woofer) out for those wishing to add more bass. A simple but effective multi-function remote control completes the package.

SET-UP AND USE

Set-up is simplicity itself. Merely plug the attached wall wart-type power supply into the right 'speaker, connect it to the left loudspeaker via the supplied cable and then pair your Bluetooth device – be it mobile 'phone, tablet or laptop/desktop computer. I used the X40s with a variety of different devices - including both Apple and Android mobiles – and it found them all within seconds;

I never once experienced any drop-outs during the review period.

SOUND QUALITY

There's no denying that Blue Aura has designed the X40s with the lifestyle market in mind – with an obvious emphasis on looks and ease of use. But, thankfully, that doesn't mean sound quality has taken a back seat.

There's also no denying the fact that well-designed active 'speakers have some obvious advantages over their passive counterparts. Coupling

"bass was firm and solid while that slight warmth gives the 'speakers a sophisticated sound"

the amplifier directly to the drive units means the designer can better integrate the parts to achieve the required sound – plus there are cost benefits in not having to house the amplifier in a separate metal box. The best of the bunch often have a power and punch not heard elsewhere.

And while the Blue Auras may be relatively slim, they are more than capable of throwing out a prodigious and convincing soundstage.

Playing ESG's 'A South Bronx Tale' via an iPhone 6 Plus, I found the bass was surprisingly firm with a nice bounce and definition to it. Higher registers were also pleasingly presented – with just the right amount of sparkle, without ever straying into edginess. In fact the Blue Auras sound gratifyingly clean and accurate.

If anything there's a slight warmth to the overall sound – which certainly helps on lower bit rate files by masking their deficiencies.

But with better quality material the X40s are good enough to show up the difference – especially if your device can take advantage of the aptX facility that adds extra air and definition to the sound. Listening to 'Spiritual' from John Coltrane's classic 'Live From the Village Vanguard' via an HTC Android device, the saxophone was sharp and detailed, the X40s

bringing out the leading edge of the notes.

Again, bass was firm and solid

while that slight warmth gives the speakers an overall creamy, sophisticated sound.

Push them really hard and you will start to hear their limitations. Big orchestral crescendoes are a little short of the power really needed while at really high volumes the sound does start to harden and collapse.

And, obviously for a 'speaker this size, you are not going to get seismic bass. But anyone looking for that could easily take advantage of the subwoofer output to beef up the

Which is why I can see the X40s gaining a lot of converts – and I wouldn't be surprised if a fair few other manufacturers don't follow suit with their own, similar products.



The rear of the master speaker (left) features a pair of RCA analogue inputs, an optical digital connection and a subwoofer output for those wanting more bass.

low-end.

What the X40s are, though, is immense fun. Sitting on the sofa and streaming the punk/jazz hybrid of Acoustic Ladyland's 'Last Chance Disco' collection they really grabbed hold of Sebastian Rochford's pounding rhythms, driving the tracks along with a sure-footed assurance.

Yes, some £600 loudspeakers will offer deeper bass or a more exciting top end, but they won't have the Bluetooth versatility of the X40s and you'll still need an amplifier to drive them.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Frequency response of this little loudspeaker was impressively flat and even, showing effort has been put into the acoustic engineering, as well as all else. There is only the smallest dip in output at crossover around 3kHz so detail should be strong. At the same time the tweeter has not been peaked up to add bite or artificial enhancement of detail, so the X40 will sound tonally even in its presentation and balanced. Our result is off-axis, with the speaker pointed straight down a room and directly at listeners. On-axis there's just a small lift above 10kHz.

Bass extends down to 60Hz and then rolls down fast – there's little deep bass. The port peaks around 80Hz and does little to extended response downward. Although the X40 will not do subsonics it still goes quite low and bass will be sprightly. Placement against a wall will help lift low bass a little.

The S/PDIF digital input gave an

identical response to the analogue input.

Sensitivity was high, just 150mV giving 90dB sound pressure level (loud) at 1 metre. Since most portable players can deliver double this (i.e. +6dB) the X40s can give 96dB with just about any player on the market, and this is very loud.

The X40s are well engineered to give an accurate sound, and they are sensitive. They will work best close to a rear wall. **NK**

FREQUENCY RESPONSE

Green - driver output

Red - port output



BLUE AURA X40
£599



OUTSTANDING - amongst the best

VALUE - keenly priced

VERDICT

A fine loudspeaker that mixes innovation with great sound and low price. Will appeal to many.

FOR

- Bluetooth
- slim design
- rich, warm sound

AGAINST

- not the deepest bass

Blue Aura
+44 (0)1480 477738
www.blueaura.co.uk