

Blue Cheer

Blue Aura's first passive loudspeaker is a budget bargain at just £169, says Jon Myles.

Cambridgeshire-based Blue Aura first attracted the attention of Hi-Fi World with its impressive active, Bluetooth-equipped floorstanding X40 loudspeakers. They were innovative and undeniably good sounding at their £599 price point.

Then came the outstanding Blackline V40 hybrid valve/transistor amplifier – priced at £449 and featuring an in-built DAC, Bluetooth connectivity plus USB and analogue RCA inputs. Again, this was an impressive performer for the money having a bouncy, infectious sound.

Now the company has moved into new territory with its first passive loudspeaker in the shape of the compact ps40. Available in gloss black or white finishes it is

a standmount/bookshelf 'speaker measuring 245mm x 145mm x 205mm (H/W/D) and weighing in at 3.5kg. So yes, it is small but it is also rather nicely finished with a gently curved fascia and grilles that attach magnetically, so there are no ugly fixing points on the front.

This 'speaker is a two-way bass reflex design with the drive units consisting of a 4.5" aluminium mid/bass allied to a 1" soft dome tweeter with a claimed frequency range of 45Hz to 20kHz (see Measured Performance for full details).

On the back there is a single pair of gold-plated 'speaker connections above which sits the port.

Priced at just £169 it's impossible to find fault with the fit and finish of the package – an area where the X40s and V40 amplifier also excelled.

Blue Aura clearly have design and quality control firmly at the forefront of their thinking.

SOUND QUALITY

Small in stature but rather potent in performance would be the ideal way to describe the Blue Aura ps40s. They are one of a select group of loudspeakers this size that have the happy knack of punching out a bigger soundstage than you would imagine.

Position them carefully – ideally on a solid pair of stands and a good six inches away from the rear wall – and they are extremely musical and enjoyable.

Much of this is down to the well-engineered mid/bass unit which sounds even and natural, with a good sense of presence.

Initially connected to Icon Audio's

new ST30se valve integrated amplifier (see review elsewhere this issue) the bass on Led Zeppelin's 'Kashmir' was more muscular and well-defined than I expected. More impressive, though, was the way the music floated free from the 'speakers to convey the scale of this dense, atmospheric track.

There was good separation between the instruments, allowing the volume control to be pushed upward without too much hardening of the sound.

In common with other loudspeakers equipped with aluminium-coned drive units the Blue Auras also time well with a fast, pacy nature. Listening to New Order's 'Age Of Consent' it was evident the ps40s are happy to take hold of a rhythm and drive it along.

Up top the tweeter has a forward presentation which works well in delivering detail. However, it doesn't flatter poor recordings and can sound a little edgy with compressed or badly produced tracks. An ageing CD of Led Zeppelin II sounded particularly thin with 'Whole Lotta Love' devoid of much depth. But this is how this silver disc sounds even on loudspeakers costing ten times more than the Blue Auras, which demonstrates they are giving an insightful representation of the source material.

Fed with something of good quality such as a 24bit/96kHz recording of 'The Bride' by Bat For Lashes, Natasha Khan's vocals had an intimacy and depth of focus that was

entirely realistic. The tympani on the album's 'Widow's Peak' also came into the room with surprising power.

As you might expect, due to the small size of the Blue Auras there is no seismic bass on offer and fans of bass-heavy dance music may find them a little lacking in this respect. Also, big orchestral crescendoes could sound congested when the volume was turned up, an element of boxiness creeping in.

But that's really being rather harsh on a loudspeaker that costs just £169 and does most things impressively well.

Ideally, you should pair them with a warm sounding amplifier to tame the treble response a little. In this respect I'd say Blue Aura's aforementioned V40 might be the ideal candidate – giving a cracking little system for just shy of £620.

In hi-fi terms that's good value for money and makes the ps40s a bit of a bargain.

CONCLUSION

Blue Aura's first passive loudspeaker is an impressive performer. It



The Blue Aura ps40s use a 4.5" aluminium mid/bass driver allied to a 1" soft dome tweeter. It's a simple but effective arrangement for a small loudspeaker.

has a big sound for its size and is not short on detail nor musicality. A slight forwardness in the treble is offset by good bass response to give a nice balance. Pair it with a decent, mid-priced amplifier and it won't fail to provide an enjoyable listen.



A single pair of 'speaker binding posts sit on the rear beneath the port which extends output down to 40Hz.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Frequency response of the ps40 shows a smooth characteristic with no peaks or dips, but the overall trend above 2kHz is strongly upward toward high frequencies, acoustic output being +5dB at 20kHz. A rise of this magnitude will give obviously strong treble and a bright balance, making this loudspeaker sound forward, detailed but challenging with bright sounding recordings.

Bass output is very well controlled down to 60Hz, before rolling down sharply, a fine result from a small

speaker. Clean smooth bass without boom will be delivered and near-wall placement ideal.

The port extends output down to 40Hz, the red trace in our analysis shows, low enough to give solid sounding low bass. Port output measured +14dB up at 80Hz, so the port makes a strong contribution at low bass frequencies. Bass damping is reasonable, but this is not a wide-band tuned port so the speaker will have bouncy low bass – common with small speakers where the cabinet is too small to accommodate a high acoustic resistance port.

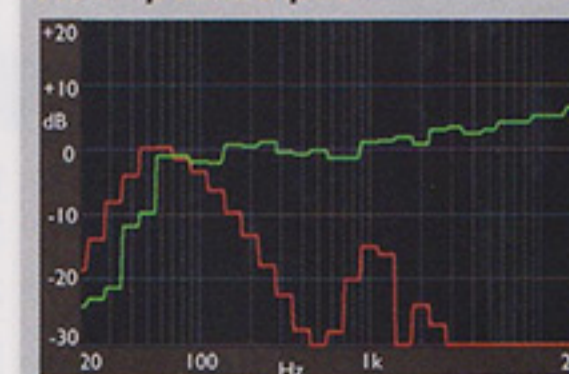
Sensitivity was good as small speakers go, measuring 85dB – quite loud – from one nominal Watt of input (2.8V).

Overall impedance measured a high 9.6 Ohms with pink noise and our impedance trace shows this, not dropping below the DCR of 6 Ohms. The Ps40 draws little current as a result and is a light amplifier load, but this holds back sensitivity. Small loudspeakers commonly draw more current and go a little louder at any amplifier volume setting.

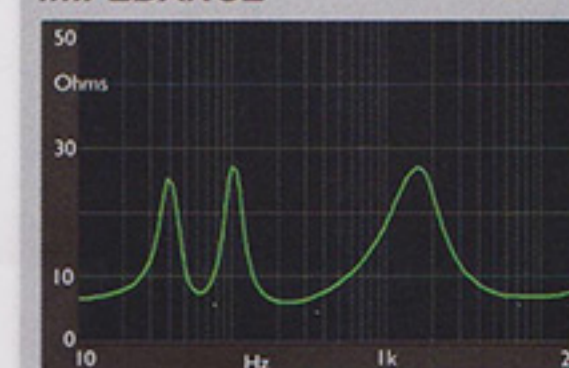
The ps40 will sound bright and will not flatter bad recordings or coarse MP3s. But it will sound detailed and well controlled, and have clean tuneful bass. NK

FREQUENCY RESPONSE

Green - driver output
Red - port output



IMPEDANCE



BLUE AURA ps40
£169



OUTSTANDING - amongst the best.

VALUE - keenly priced.

VERDICT

A budget loudspeaker that punches well above its weight. Capable of forming the basis of a great-sounding system.

FOR

- weighty bass for its size
- clean design
- smooth mid-band

AGAINST

- prominent treble

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