

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
Floorstanding 5.1
speaker system

POSITION:
Entry-level for Revel,
below Performa and
Ultima series

PEERS:
DALI Opticon 5.1;
KEF R100 5.1

Mark Craven trawls his action movie back-catalogue with these second-generation Concerta speakers

Revel offers a warm welcome

The Harman group of audio brands has some big-hitting names, including Mark Levinson and JBL Synthesis, the latter creating ultra high-end home cinema systems that would be right near the top of my list if I were to win the lottery. The Revel speaker name is, I'm sure, less well known. But it's also likely to get the attention of those on more down-to-earth budgets.

Established in California in 1996 with a 'no off-the-shelf parts' ethos, Revel started out with its Ultima series of speakers and has grown its offering since. It's always been a home cinema audio company (as opposed to a hi-fi brand showing an occasional interest in AV), releasing a subwoofer and a centre channel in its first year.

Reviewed here is an array gathered together from its new Concerta2 line. The preceding Concerta range (featured in *HCC* back in 2007) also included slim-ish on-wall speakers, but Concerta2 hasn't got to that stage yet – these are full-size speakers with hefty drivers, designed for a system where audio performance is paramount and speakers are allowed to be seen as well as heard. The total cost of this 5.1 array is £4,350. Here's how that figure breaks down.

F is for floorstanders

The floorstanding speakers are the F35s that stand a shade over a metre high and sell for £1,500 a pair. Two-and-a-half-way designs, they feature a single 1in aluminium tweeter topping a trio of 5.25in cone woofers handling mid and low-frequencies.

Wrapped around the tweeter is the fourth-generation design of Revel's Acoustic Lens waveguide, which aims to improve integration with the midband driver below it by controlling directivity, and giving a light gain to frequencies around the crossover point. Similar attention has been paid to the woofer complement. Revel's product creation process involves computer-modelled design of the whole driver assembly, and the use of a patented Micro-Ceramic Composite (MCC) cone material, which it says ensures an 'ideal piston-like performance' and eliminates resonances.

The company also says that a primary aim of the floorstander design was high sensitivity – 'useful for the expected match to lower-powered multichannel receivers

and amplifiers.' This results in the choice of a third 5.25in woofer as opposed to a separate midrange, and a new crossover design to divide the two lower woofers with the upper unit. Sensitivity is rated at a high 90dB.

Note that the F35 isn't the Big Daddy of the Concerta2 range: there is also an F36 floorstander, more expensive at £1,900-per-pair, that utilises larger midbass/woofers and a bigger enclosure.

The S16 surround speakers (£450 each) are unusual as, when you first see them, you'll be convinced they're dipole speakers. They sport the same familiar half-hexagonal cabinet shape as the likes of Monitor Audio's FX models. Then you realise there are only front-firing drivers (a 6.5in midbass and a 1in tweeter). The shape is a design choice, allowing them to have a shallower body suited to wall-mounting (a neat cable-groove on the back keeps installation tidy) but maintaining cabinet volume. Our photo set arrived in white, as this is a colour option that Revel says is a popular choice for these wall-mounters. You can, of course, get them in black.

The centre channel, the C25, is fairly sizable but not a monster – it's just under 50cm wide and 27cm deep. Here, the midbass units are 5.25in, and they flank a centrally mounted tweeter. Frequency response is listed as 80Hz at -3dB. Little screw-in rubbery feet allow its curved body to sit on a flat surface without rocking. Alternatively, a dedicated stand (£175) is an option. Unlike the rear-ported F35 tower speakers, the C25 is sealed, meaning it can be placed close to your screen wall.

And then there's the subwoofer, the B10. This is a true member of the Concerta2 family, and therefore shares the same large but not offensive aesthetic. It uses a proprietary front-firing anodized aluminium 10in driver and an 800W RMS/1,600W peak amplifier. It's rear-ported, and below the port is a packed control panel, with phono inputs, crossover and gain dials, and a 0/180 >

1. Finishing choices are gloss black or gloss white – our system features both



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phase switch, joined by a row of controls (frequency, Q and level) for its onboard EQ. The latter is a feature of Revel subs, although unlike the higher-end Performa range, a direct USB input (for use with a laptop running Revel's LFO software) isn't an option here. Instead, you can get involved with a calibrated mic and analysis software (Revel's UK dealer Karma AV recommends Audio Tools) to massage the performance to your room. Not that you have to: flick the EQ switch to its 'off' position and it's withdrawn from the equation. For this audition, the sub's EQ feature went unused.

As with other speaker packages featured recently, such as DALI's Opticon line and Dynaudio's Emit series, these appear supremely well made. This is as it obviously should be when speakers cost more than a couple of hundred quid. Yet better than the solid construction is the styling and effort put into making these speakers pretty. Certainly, they feel a little imposing, especially in their black guise, and keeping the grille on does them no favours, but take a closer look and you'll see an absence of viewable driver fixings, gently curved cabinets and smooth edges.

Bass in your face

Often there's one sonic trait that's immediately apparent with speakers, before your brain starts analysing other facets. With the Revels, for me, it was the bass response. The two floorstanding F35 front speakers, and the B10 subwoofer, put in a tremendous shift between them, resulting in a sound that is robust, full-bodied and exciting in the lower registers.

Low-frequency integration is sublime, with smooth, warm, inviting bass and hard-hitting lower slams delivered in unison. All this was in evidence with the climatic standoff/shootout/bullrun sequence in *2 Guns*. When a car is destroyed by an RPG, a brief but boisterous explosion thuds through the soundstage. Then, when

'The Revels pin you to your seat with controlled, rich bass, and crank the tension with finely-etched effects'

Denzel Washington's Agent Trench quips 'Make it rain,' and blows up another car (it's that kind of movie), the soundmix repeats the trick, before mining even lower frequencies during the eventual cattle stampede. Throw in the chest-thumping impacts of various firearms, and there's a lot of bass notes on show. What was noteworthy is that everything sounded believable and nothing felt out of place or over-egged. And it was impossible to locate where the subwoofer was coming in to pick up the slack from the F35s. There was control all the way down the frequency range.

This sequence isn't all about bass, of course. In the moments preceding the commotion, the soundmix delights in quiet FX as it captures the ambience of the outdoor location, and the Revel system delivers this well. The gentle creak of Trench's car boot being opened, and distant birdsong, tease out of the speakers and wrap you in the moment.

With *Bad Boys II*'s first big action set-piece (the Miami car chase), the Revels also prove their ability to handle a



full-scale sonic assault. Surround sound effects are insistent and impactful, with the full-range S16 speakers having poise and punch in their own right. A clunking door, a roaring car engine, Trevor Rabin's tense score, shattering glass... there's a lot going on in the mix during this sequence and the overall clarity is excellent. The Revels present it not as a mush, but as a clearly detailed whole. The roadside shootout, where hero cops Will Smith and Martin Lawrence shelter behind a police car as machine-gun fire surrounds them, benefits from this clarity and staging. Individual bullets riddle the LCR, and whip into the rear channels as the camera shifts. The S16s do feel pretty directional in their output, as opposed to the more diffuse effect of other speakers (particularly dipole designs), but that suits my taste.

A good illusion

Slowing down the pace, I dug up *Total Recall* (the remake) on Blu-ray and the scene where Quaid (Colin Farrell) goes to Recall to have his memory implantation. This begins with a lengthy – for a Hollywood blockbuster, anyway – two-handed dialogue. As Farrell and John Cho head back and forth in their discussion of potential fake memories ('an illusion no matter how real is still an illusion'), the subtle cadences and stresses that inhabit human speech are readily apparent. By and large, it sounds like two people having a conversation in the room (though still an illusion, natch), the C25 centre speaker sharing the same revealing nature of its stablemates. My only criticism, and something that I noticed with other material, is a slight lack of depth to male voices.

While I'm looking for negatives, I also felt with both *Bad Boys II* and *Total Recall* higher frequencies missing a bit of bite, that last slice of real attack that home cinema enthusiasts crave. Yet actually *San Andreas'* core TrueHD mix assuaged my concerns; here those distinctive 1in tweeters latched on to the high-in-the-mix cracking glass and tumbling rocks during the film's opening road-side car-crash sequence and thrust them right between my ears. As the Valley Girl hangs above certain death in her beaten-up car, every falling boulder and twist of metal had me wincing in fear, the speakers showing a snappy aggression, while the whirring blades of the rescue helicopter chugged through the room.

In fact, this full-pelt movie mix found the Revel array at its most exciting, including the B10 subwoofer. The earthquake-borne destruction of downtown Los Angeles had the viewing room floor seemingly rolling under the weight of seismic bass waves. Even though the B10 claims a relatively modest low-frequency extension of 32Hz (-6dB), and uses only a single 10in woofer, I didn't really feel shortchanged, especially considering the less-than-insane price tag. And, again, the meshing of the sub with the rest of the enclosures impressed.

With music playback, the F35s, working in a stereo pair without subwoofer, show remarkable low-end poise and therefore prove a great match for bass-rich tunes. The slow percussive funk of Guns N' Roses' *If The World* (*Chinese Democracy* CD) slithers from these tower speakers, providing a rich undercurrent on which the varied instrumentation (including flamenco guitars and piano) can ride along. The speakers' confident timing brings clarity and rhythmic drive to the track.

Elsewhere on the same album, *Better* finds the F35s building a defined stereo soundfield, with guitars intro-ing

SPECIFICATIONS

Concerta2 F35

DRIVE UNITS: 3 x 5.25in cone midbass drivers; 1 x 1in aluminium tweeter with Acoustic Lens Waveguide **ENCLOSURE:** Bass reflex, rear-ported **FREQUENCY RESPONSE:** From 55Hz (-3dB) **SENSITIVITY:** 90dB **POWER HANDLING:** 180W **DIMENSIONS:** 1,020(h) x 210(w) x 310(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 18.5kg

Concerta2 C25

DRIVE UNITS: 2 x 5.25in cone midbass drivers; 1 x 1in aluminium tweeter with Acoustic Lens Waveguide **ENCLOSURE:** Sealed **FREQUENCY RESPONSE:** From 80Hz (-3dB) **SENSITIVITY:** 89dB **POWER HANDLING:** 120W **DIMENSIONS:** 180(h) x 490(w) x 270(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 9kg

Concerta2 S16

DRIVE UNITS: 2 x 6.5in cone midbass drivers; 1 x 1in aluminium tweeter with Acoustic Lens Waveguide **ENCLOSURE:** Sealed **FREQUENCY RESPONSE:** From 70Hz (-3dB) **SENSITIVITY:** 90dB **POWER HANDLING:** 120W **DIMENSIONS:** 375(h) x 338(w) x 140(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 6.35kg

Concerta2 B10 (subwoofer)

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 10in coated fibre-composite cone woofer **ENCLOSURE:** Bass reflex, rear-ported **FREQUENCY RESPONSE:** 35Hz (-3dB); 32Hz (-6dB); 29Hz (-10dB) **ON BOARD POWER:** 800W Class D amplifier **REMOTE CONTROL:** No **DIMENSIONS:** 417(h) x 377(w) x 392(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 24kg **CONNECTIONS:** LFE input; stereo line-level input

PARTNER WITH



PRIMARE SP23: Revel distributor Karma AV also handles high-end marque Primare. Its SP23 five-channel amp may lack 4K passthrough but makes up for it with a supremely assured performance. Bag one for £3,500.

stage right and Axl Rose's vocals nailed centrally. Yet epic prog-rocker *There Was A Time*, with its crescendoic, overdriven guitar solos, perhaps finds the limits of these speakers when it comes to expressiveness. When axemen Robin Finck and Buckethead let rip, it felt as if the drivers had lost some of their authority.

Switching out of stereo and into multichannel mode, you get extra punch from the B10 and the full-range bombast of the S16s. For uncritical high-volume partying, this is a fun package.

Stylish return

I'd happily sit down to movie night with this Revel set. It has the ability to pin you to your seat with controlled, rich bass, ratchet up the tension with finely-etched effects, and unearth soundtrack details you might miss with lesser systems. The design and build get a thumbs-up too, with these speakers managing to ride a wave between stately and slick. There's a warm feeling to its output that I really like, and the B10 sub – while not the most brutal of woofers – ties the system together with assured control. Revel has returned in style ■

HCC VERDICT



Revel Concerta2 5.1

→ £4,350 → www.karma-av.co.uk

WE SAY: A delectable mix of tidy design and potent, full-bodied surround sound. Not the cheapest speakers around, but certainly worthy of your consideration.

2. Revel ports the B10 sub to tune the output of its 10in driver

3. The F35s use a trio of woofers – the bottom two LF units crossover at 575Hz

4. All the Concerta speakers feature a 1in tweeter with Acoustic Lens Waveguide