

Subjective Sounds

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Martin Colloms, Publisher

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A couple of weeks after a large Schenker lorry had pulled up outside to deliver the G9 Audio valve amplifier set that I reviewed in the last issue (*HIFICRITIC Vol9 No4*), I was staring out of the window when the same thing happened again. No déjà vu, this was the real thing: another enormous Schenker lorry was pulling up, and this time I'd no idea why.

It turned out to be another delivery, again from Estonia, but this time consisting of two very hefty Audes *Excellence 5 AMT* loudspeakers. Unlike the Russian amplifier from G9 Audio, the Audes brand enthusiastically proclaims its Estonian ancestry, and since the loudspeakers weigh some 55kg+plinth each, it's safe to assume that they're floorstanders.

They're not even currently available in the UK, but the reason for reviewing them here is simply that their combination of wood veneers and black lacquer paintwork makes them among the most beautiful speakers I've ever seen. Although I normally try to avoid making aesthetic judgements about review products, there's no denying that these tall, slim, unusually deep and cunningly asymmetric speakers do look exceptionally good, especially their real wood veneered sides.

A pair costs 14,000 Euros in Germany, which translates as a little less than £11,000 in the UK, so they're not exactly cheap, but that's still far below today's 'high end' speaker prices. The bottom line must be to figure out whether they sound anywhere near as good as they look, though some further description must be dealt with first.

In order to keep the front view super-slim, the bass drivers – two paper-cone 8-inches (200mm) in each speaker – are both mounted on the sides, which are mirror-imaged. The front view is just wide enough to accommodate two 5in (125mm) midrange drivers that are mounted above and below an AMT-type tweeter. The latter has a level control mounted on the rear; this adjusts the output by $\pm 3\text{dB}$, with the impedance here comfortably high.

Although I'd like to have checked my far-field in-room measurements again, the speakers have actually already gone back to Estonia at the time of writing, so that isn't possible. I can report that the claimed 92dB sensitivity is correct, and the midrange and treble responses are very smooth and well ordered. While I cannot carry out further checks on the bass behaviour, the impedance is a real problem, as it drops significantly below 3.3ohms across the two sub-80Hz octaves.

The sound quality of the *Excellence 5 AMT* is smooth, well balanced and essentially free from colorations. I might criticise it for sounding a little too restrained, but this essential tidiness might also be regarded as a strength. One might wish for dynamics that are a little more vivid and expressive, but in other respects the speaker is impressively evenhanded, and its slim front view helps promote fine stereo imaging, with fine focus and good depth.

The bottom line is that this Audes speaker remains among the most beautiful around. Its sound quality is always well behaved, with a superbly even tonal balance, low coloration, and fine stereo imaging. But there is also a problem, as the impedance at low frequencies is very demanding indeed. This will make life very tough for the partnering amplifier, and clearly prevents any formal Recommendation.