

Russell K Red 150

TO AVOID ANY BIAS FROM THE EDITOR, WE ASKED KEVIN FISKE TO REVIEW THE FIRST FLOORSTANDER FROM RUSSELL K



British designer Russell Kauffman's Russell K *Red 50* and *Red 100* speakers have already been favourably reviewed in *HIFICRITIC* by the editor, but because RK was a long term member of his listening panels, the possibility of favouritism could not be discounted. We therefore asked Kevin Fiske to try the (currently) largest model produced under the Russell K brand, the £4,000 floor standing *Red 150*.

Kauffman's designs embody some unrepentantly singular thinking that swim against the tide. For example, he favours undamped and relatively thin-walled cabinets while much of the industry is going in the opposite direction. Kauffman asserts that the damping and inert construction of most designs doesn't magic away the energy radiated from the rear of the drivers; it merely causes it to dissipate more slowly, which in itself imposes a characteristic 'sat-on' (some might say unnatural) voicing. In contrast, well-designed thin-walled speakers with a lack of

damping release the rear-radiated energy much faster, and thereby sound dynamically truer to life.

Note the use of the words 'well-designed.' Kauffman is not advocating a resonant free-for all. Rather, he is encouraging us to understand why so many modern speakers sound the way they do, and to ask ourselves whether we find their sound convincingly natural or not.

As listeners, our ability to make such subjective judgments will vary widely. Those who are regularly exposed to unamplified live acoustic music will probably rapidly 'get' the *Red 150s*. Those who don't have such a frame of reference, and who live on a diet of electronically derived and highly processed recorded material might not appreciate them as much. I wouldn't label them a Marmite speaker — they do electronic music equally well — but truly to appreciate the *Red 150s* listeners will need the self confidence to believe their own ears, and to ignore what they are told to think by many vendors.

The *Red 150s* stand a metre high on their spikes, and look narrower than their 240mm width, thanks to glossy black front baffles being framed by whatever choice of veneer the cabinets are finished in. Sensitivity is specified at an average 87dB, with a nominal 8ohms load that dips to just above 4ohms. They use the same 25mm soft dome tweeter and 165mm doped paper cone bass/mid driver as the stand-mount *Red 100s*, but add a second identical 165mm driver to extend the bass reach and power. This, alongside the 35litre volume of the 1m tall cabinet (roughly twice the *Red 100's* 18 litres), plus four internal bracing baffles (three of them perforated) and three tuned ports, enable the *Red 150* to reach into the lowest octaves.

The bracing perforations put a brake on air movement at around 100Hz, so bass seems almost as controlled as an infinite baffle cabinet. Below 100Hz the *Red 150s* combine the tightness and control of a sealed box with the extension and sensitivity of a ported enclosure: an internal port fires downwards into a smaller chamber; from there two further ports of different lengths exit side-by-side at the front of the cabinet.

Kauffman specifies his own drivers, making the initial evaluation of prototypes by holding them in his hand and connecting them to a music signal. He says this reveals a lot about the potential of each