

Cutting the cost of cinematic bass

Richard Stevenson is surprised to see subwoofer specialist REL branching out in a new movie-focused direction. But he isn't complaining



AV INFO

PRODUCT:
10in, 300W
entry-level sub

POSITION:
First in a new Serie
HT range from REL

PEERS:
SVS SB-1000;
KEF Kube8b;
Velodyne Impact 12

**HOME
CINEMA
Choice**
RECOMMENDED

IT MIGHT COME as a surprise that REL has never created a subwoofer purely for movies. Music or 'music and movies', yes, but not LFE alone. The £500 HT/1003 is REL's first foray into pure-bred home cinema heroics.

The story goes like this. When the late Richard Edward Lord wheeled out his first sub-bass systems to an audiophile audience in 1990, they were designed to extend the low-frequency response of stereo music setups. Key to this was a high-level connection, where the sub derives its input from the speaker terminals of the stereo amp.

Every REL woofer since has had these connections and the commensurately complex filter network. Until, that is, the HT/1003, which has an LFE line-level input only. The reason behind this move is also hinted at by the plain vinyl-wrapped finish and single colour option. It's to keep the cost down.

Still, despite a relatively affordable £500 price tag, the HT/1003 aims to hit REL's usually impressive standard. The power plant is a hopefully potent 300W amplifier, the sealed cabinet is heavily built, and its front graced by a gorgeous, REL-designed, glass-fibre 10in driver.

Bass bargain

The specification is similar to REL's own T9i, for example. That model has a slightly beefier cabinet, multi-layer gloss paint in black or white, chunky aluminium feet, metal trim detailing and those high-level connections. Yet it is also twice the price of the HT/1003. If you only want a sub for AV use and are going to use it in a darkened room, then this new REL is starting to look like a specification bargain.

And it's not a complete visual calamity either. The vinyl wrap is textured and innocuous, and there's a heavy wooden-framed grille you can affix to add to the stealth look. As a rather cool design nod to some of REL's earliest subwoofers, the cabinet is topped with a black glass panel. Don't be tempted to use that glass top as a coffee table though – you might end up spilling something.

In fact, the HT/1003's cabinet can get quite lively when being driven hard. With its bare logo-printed wooden-block feet parked on a laminate floor, I experienced the sub going for an LFE-fuelled walk. Thankfully, these feet can be removed, revealing a threaded socket for traditional spikes or REL's supplied chunky rubber feet. These were my footwear of choice for hard floors, but carpeted rooms will likely need spikes.

Setup controls are basic and are fully manual as there is no remote control. The idea here is that key parameters, like gain, delay, crossover and EQ, will be handled by your AVR or processor. You do, however, get a level control, 0 or 180-degree phase switch and a crossover frequency adjustment. These will be handy if you were to bolt the HT/1003 onto a soundbar, for example.

There is a line-level LFE input and unfiltered loop-through output, along with an on/off/auto standby switch. As a little flourish, all of the legends are written both upright and upside down, so you can see them while leaning over the back of the sub.

A bit of setup tweaking, and the bass-infused *Mad Max: Fury Road* Blu-ray soundmix, got the HT/1003 performing at its best. Fed an LFE signal it sounded tight and lean; switching my AVR's output to LFE+Main, the volume rose and there was notable driver excursion but not absolute bass thunder. Leaning over to flick the REL's phase switch mid engine-roar created what can only be

SPECIFICATIONS

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 10in CarbonGlas long-throw woofer **ENCLOSURE:** Sealed cabinet
FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED): Down to 24Hz (-6dB) **ONBOARD POWER (CLAIMED):** 300W **REMOTE CONTROL:** No **DIMENSIONS:** 319(w) x 347(h) x 351(d)mm
WEIGHT: 12.6kg

FEATURES: LFE input; stereo phono input; stereo phono output; on/off/auto standby; phase, crossover and volume controls; optional HT Air Wireless connection

PARTNER WITH



Q ACOUSTICS 7000LRI:
Add the REL HT/1003 to these high-performance yet discreet satellite speakers (£225 per pair) for a premium 2.1 setup. 2.5-way designs, they hide their binding posts within their rotatable (and mountable) feet.

described as an homage to Marty McFly's guitar-amp scene. The HT/1003 suddenly locked in-phase with my main speakers and the system's bass output seemed to quadruple. I leapt back in some aural shock, and then searched frantically for my receiver's remote. There's no shortage of grunt here.

In fact, the REL's prodigious power inspired some measurement. Using only the sub (all other speakers disconnected), I measured the HT/1003's in-room output – from a distance of one metre – up to a whopping 112dB with no audible distortion. This blows any soundbar-supplied subwoofer clean out of the room.

Back in pure LFE mode, the little HT/1003 gives an exceptionally good account of itself all round. It's taut in delivery and slams home effects with lightning-fast transients. There is no wallow or bass overhang, and the use of a sealed cabinet means there is no port noise to identify the location of the woofer.

There is a definite limit to its lowest of low frequencies, though. This can't plumb the depths like a larger or dual-driver design, and I noted a slight 'thumpiness' to its sound when using it purely for music. Yet for LFE use, where a surprising amount of output is between 50Hz-100Hz, this is simply brilliant. REL has clearly tailored the amp/driver combination so that the HT/1003 delivers large LFE impact and cinema-scale SPLs. It's a stunner for £500.

Movie mayhem

Although the HT/1003 is a departure from purist REL philosophy, the result is an outstanding-value home cinema subwoofer. For AVR owners after a compact, affordable bass box that delivers movie mayhem in spades, look no further. If your budget runs higher, a pair of HT/1003s could be a consideration. And for soundbar users looking for a sonic upgrade, you won't get more bang per buck than this ■

HCC VERDICT



REL HT/1003
→ £500 → www.rel.net

WE SAY: Some of the trademark REL features have gone, but this bijou bass-maker still makes an impact courtesy of its power, speed, simplicity and price tag.

1. The HT/1003 uses a custom-designed 'CarbonGlas' 10in bass driver