

The Duevel Enterprise loudspeaker

by Jimmy Hughes

Now, here's something you don't see too often; an omni-directional loudspeaker. The Duevel Enterprise features two drive units that point upwards, with the high frequency unit having a cone-like device immediately above it to help disperse the sound over 360 degrees. The aim is to produce a more even distribution of energy in all directions, and create a more homogenous integrated sound.

Loudspeaker design was (and is) hugely influenced (restricted?) by the perceived 'needs' of stereo. But how might things have developed had twin channel Stereophonic sound not made such a big impact in the late 1950s? For starters, stereo made it necessary for speakers to be made smaller. But there was another more important consideration...

In the Mono era, loudspeakers were often of the direct/reflecting Omni type; designed to create a degree of 'spread' in order to disguise the lack of width inherent with single channel reproduction. With single channel mono, the last thing you wanted was a highly directional loudspeaker, because this created a cramped 'narrow' sort of sound that lacked breadth.

As stereo gained acceptance and popularity, more and more speakers were designed to be directional in order to maximise the impression of left/right separation, and the positional accuracy of voices or instruments in the soundstage. Having invested heavily in expensive twin channel equipment, listeners wanted the stereo effect to be clear and obvious.

Equally, having initially cut their audio teeth on single channel/single speaker mono, early stereo listeners would have demanded that their stereo system be able to deliver a solid narrow central image on (say) a solo piano or centrally-placed voice. Directional loudspeakers did this splendidly, but (alas) in the process tended to make mono recordings sound cramped and undernourished.

By the end of the '60s, stereo had totally superseded mono, and direct/reflecting loudspeakers had virtually died out. However, in the early '70s, a Swedish company called Sonab tried to buck this trend by introducing a range of Omni-directional loudspeakers. They made their case with some amusing eye-catching adverts that ridiculed the limitations of conventional loudspeakers.

One advert showed a violin being played with a bucket behind it – to simulate the false directionality that conventional loudspeakers imposed on this instrument. Another showed a group of four or five people all trying to occupy the same listening chair – a reference to the so-called 'hot seat', where you could only enjoy proper stereo from one spot in the room...

Sonab enjoyed considerable success with the public, but were roundly criticised by reviewers of the period because they didn't produce a tightly defined stereo soundstage, and a nice 'thin' central phantom image. Fast-forward a couple of decades, and Canon faced the same hostile reviews when they launched their interesting (and underrated) S-50 omni-directional speaker...

The new Deuvel Enterprise is very much a 'Sonab' for the 21st century; a modern two-way Omni-directional loudspeaker that deserves to be taken seriously. Hopefully, the prejudices of the past will not prevent a fair hearing. The enclosure looks very slim, with an attractive stylish appearance. It's a design that 'disappears' both visually and sonically.

Efficiency is fairly high for a two-way design, and the sound has lots of presence and immediacy. Tonal balance is fairly bright, giving the music a crisp detailed sort of presentation. They created a good sense of projection, while allowing one to sense the air and space around voices and instruments.

Although the tonal balance was fairly bright, the sound proved surprisingly integrated and cohesive. The treble sounded airy and immediate, with good attack on transients. Yet the presentation wasn't harsh or edgy – leastways not in my room. Bass was surprisingly deep and full-sounding, with very good pitch definition.

Often, a forward-firing loudspeaker with a fairly bright tonal balance may seem to lack deep bass; subjectively, the high frequencies will seem to dominate to the detriment of the lows. But, while the Enterprise sounded bright and immediate, the high frequencies were always very well integrated. This created an airy spacious sound that was lively yet homogenous.

Sonically, I definitely felt the Enterprise delivered results that were greater than the sum of the parts. Timing was very good, and the music had excellent pace and drive. The results were very cohesive, drawing you into the music in a manner that was very satisfying. Indeed, after a few hours, I'd all but 'forgotten' about my own loudspeakers!

Once acclimatised to what the Enterprise had to offer, the results were extremely seductive. So much so, I felt no burning desire to get back to my own loudspeakers. Given their compact size and reasonable cost, this is quite a compliment. Indeed, I felt the effervescent brilliance of the Enterprise demonstrated certain qualities my own loudspeakers lacked.

While my Horns gave a more solidly focused presentation, with deeper bass and a firmer mid-band, the overall presentation seemed less brilliant – less incisive. Of course, the Enterprises were ‘flattering to deceive’. But, don’t all loudspeakers do that to a greater or lesser degree? The point is, the Enterprise made the music sound interesting, informative, and enjoyable. That’s what counts.

Being a direct/reflecting design, the sound had a spaciousness that was very captivating. Maybe the stereo presentation lacked that razor-sharp pin-point precision one gets from a forward-firing design, but I couldn’t say the sound was diffuse or mushy. Instead, the soundstage had the sort of holographic breadth and spread one hears live.

Only those listeners intending to sit close-up in a smallish room might object to the way the Enterprise images. For near-field listening, you probably won’t experience the positional accuracy and solid central imaging possible with good forward-firing designs. But move back a bit – say 6ft or more – and the Enterprise immediately hits its stride...

The Enterprise proved surprisingly holographic in the way it imaged. It created a palpable sense of instruments and

voices occupying the space between, around, and above the two enclosures – rather than emanating from the boxes themselves. That’s something I really like. It sounds more akin to the way real music sounds when played by acoustic (rather than amplified) instruments.

But why ‘Enterprise’ I hear you ask? Well, the top section of the speaker looks a little like a docking station for the famous TV Starship. Thus far I’ve manfully resisted any ‘It’s Hi-Fi Jim, but not as we know it’ jokes, but actually the Enterprise does take hi-fi into a different dimension compared to most of its peers. It really does have a certain magic. And fortunately, the red-shirted Duevels didn’t die before the ad break!

Duevel suggest positioning the Enterprise sideways-on to the listener, but users should experiment. I preferred to listen with ▶



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Omnidirectional 2-way loudspeaker

Woofer: Diameter: 170mm. Ferromagnet: 100mm. Paper cone. Rubber suspension. Die cast chassis

Horn tweeter: Titanium diaphragm: 25mm. Ferromagnet: 80mm

Impedance: 4 Ohms

Sensitivity: 87dB

Power handling: 60W

Dimensions: Width 300mm; Depth 200mm; Height 830mm

Weight: 15kg

Guarantee: 2 years

The Enterprise can be had in Silver-grey (RRP £1900), White matt, Anthracite-black matt (RRP £2000), Ferrari red, White gloss, Black gloss and Anthracite metallic (RRP £2100).

Manufacturer: Duevel

URL: www.duevel.com

UK distributor: Real Hi-Fi

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▶ the narrow end of the enclosure facing me. You can choose to have the bass unit up-front, or the tweeter. I chose the former arrangement because it gave the tweeter more scope to bounce sound off the rear wall, and helped enhance the sense of width.

With conventional forward-firing loudspeakers, positioning close to walls and/or corners mainly affects bass performance – the low frequencies being boosted by close placement. But, with a direct/reflecting speaker like the Enterprise, the proximity of a rear wall or corner will profoundly affect the spread and width of the middle upper frequencies.

So be prepared to experiment with placement. The optimum position is likely to be neither very close nor very far from walls and corners. If the speakers are placed too close, the sound will lose spaciousness; if too far, you'll start to lose focus. Imagine the speakers as sources of light, and the rear walls and corners as light-reflecting surfaces... Get the idea?

Because the bass is quite clean and nimble, there shouldn't be a problem if the speaker is used fairly close to walls or in a corner. Sometimes, a medium-sized speaker with a fairly lively extended top end can sound a bit bass-shy. But, here, the upper frequencies are less exposed due to the direct/reflecting design, so the bass/treble sounds very integrated.

Something that endeared the old Sonab speakers to users was its stylish appearance and sheer unobtrusiveness. The Enterprise offers similar qualities. While not exactly tiny, it does not dominate the room. It's reasonably tall, but the total footprint is small. It 'disappears' visually as well as sonically, looking svelte and stylish, and the finish options are interesting.

The Enterprise is a loudspeaker that should find favour with serious music lovers for its superb sound, as well as appealing to those wanting something that looks good while remaining unobtrusive. It's reasonably efficient, and doesn't take too much driving. Delivering a crisp lively sound, it 'projects' very impressively, sounding detailed and dynamic.

The Enterprise is a loudspeaker I could happily live with. My own regular speakers look pig-ugly and take up a huge amount of space, which would not be practical for many households. So it's nice to know there's something relatively small, good looking, and keenly priced out there that's able to give them a surprisingly good run. Just don't tell my wife... +

