

# Spendor A4

Top of the 'A-Line', this compact and unassuming-looking floorstander boasts a deal of hidden refinements

Review: **David Price** Lab: **Keith Howard**

A generation or so ago, the British prided themselves on having subtle, understated good taste. But now, like the rest of the world it seems, many of us have developed a taste for all that is big, bright and shiny. Indeed, we have even adopted a new slang word for it – 'bling'. Hi-fi has not been immune to this new aesthetic, and loudspeakers – always a weathervane for the nation's cultural leanings – have played their part. The breed has become ever glossier and shinier, drawing our attention rather than blending harmoniously with domestic surroundings...

## BRITISH RESERVE

However, for those wishing to stop the world and get off, there is Spendor. This company does not produce loudspeakers in exotic, heavily radiused shapes, with gallons of gloss lacquer sprayed all over, and festooned with sparkly silvery trim rings.

The £2195 A4 floorstander under

review here is the epitome of traditional British reserve and its box-like cabinet comes in a choice of black ash, dark walnut and natural oak real wood finishes, while its plinth is finished in contrasting black satin.

Unobtrusively compact, and built in the UK, the A4 is a conventional reflex-ported two-way floorstander with Spendor's tried-and-trusted 'EP77' polymer used for the cone of its mid/bass unit. Alongside this, the 22mm polyamide dome tweeter is said to combine the extended frequency response of a small diaphragm, while its wide surround promises the low frequency characteristics of a larger diaphragm.

It sports a protective mesh grille to stop little fingers wreaking havoc, making it child – or grandchild – friendly. Both units are firmly bolted on to the speaker's baffle – again, no rebate, no rounded edges and all very reminiscent of designs from the UK speaker industry's golden years. Standing just over 83cm tall and weighing a mere

16kg, the speaker presents itself as short but sturdy. The asymmetrically braced cabinet is obviously well made, with dense sidewalls that sport Spendor's so-called Dynamic Damping inside. These are small, low mass constrained polymer dampers located at key 'energy points' within the cabinet while bonded viscoelastic damping panels are also used to dissipate vibration.

The base of the A4's cabinet accommodates four machined steel spikes that screw and secure directly into the main structure of the enclosure, keeping it very stable while also raising it another inch or so from the floor.

The company claims an 86dB sensitivity for the A4 [but see KH's Lab Report, p65] and while this isn't a stellar figure even for a smallish floorstander this loudspeaker

certainly took a fair amount of power for it to get really going. So it's not an ideal partner for a low-powered valve amp (to put it kindly), and hence you really need a sturdy solid-state design with

a ready 100W per side here. Spendor also says that the speaker can be used quite close to a rear wall, although we found that it was at its best at least 30cm away. Set much closer, and you're opening the door to room-boom!

## NATURAL CHARM

We used Devialet Expert 800s in editor PM's listening room, which was not the overkill you might imagine. Moreover – and considering the A4's limited cabinet volume – the loudspeaker sounds more than reasonably extended at the low end. There's no mistaking Spendor's new A4 for an equivalently priced KEF, Focal or B&W. It has its own distinct family sound

**RIGHT:** Spendor's A4 cabinet employs small 'constrained polymer dampers' at key points to control panel resonances. The 180mm mid/bass unit has an EP77 polymer cone and is matched to a 22mm polyamide dome tweeter

'In a world of glitzy and showy speakers, the A4 remains desirable'





## HOME ON THE RANGE

Sussex-based Spendor has three loudspeaker ranges, all of which are designed and manufactured in the United Kingdom. These are the 'A-Line', 'D-Line' and 'Classic-Line'. The latter comprises the company's traditional range, apparently very popular in Far Eastern export markets, and although ostensibly '1970s' in appearance, this Classic-Line still employs the company's latest technology and manufacturing practices [HFN Aug '16]. The D-line is the flagship range of modern Spendor loudspeakers, while the A-line is the affordable, contemporary-styled range. The A4 reviewed here is the larger floorstander in a three-strong lineup that also includes the two-way A1 standmount at £1095 and £1595 'mini two-way floorstanding' A2. The £2195 A4 is still reasonably diminutive by contemporary standards but its compact dimensions are aimed to provide a good fit with modestly-sized UK listening rooms.

and one which is really rather nice, in an unerringly pleasing way. This loudspeaker never seeks to impress you, to flirt with you or bowl you over.

Instead it has a natural, understated charm that makes pretty much any type of music agreeable and enjoyable. Rather like a well-made pair of walking boots, it falls into the role of being a utilitarian object that performs an important task without attracting attention. In today's world of glitzy, glamorous, showy or even overblown loudspeakers, that makes the Spendor A4 quite unusual, but no less desirable for many prospective purchasers.

### SEAMLESS AND BALANCED

It is easy to detail the A4's various limitations – the lack of very deep bass, the limited maximum loudness and also the slight lack of brilliance to the treble. Neither is its imaging exceptional or its soundstage especially deep or ambient. There's also a degree of boxy coloration to the sound – just a little – and the speaker has a tendency to sound compressed at high volumes.

Yet one gets the sense that these were all compromises the designer was prepared to make, to achieve the immensely enjoyable midband that the A4 delivers, and its pleasing sense of seamlessness and balance.

As with most things in life, every loudspeaker is a compromise – but the trick is knowing when and how to rob Peter to pay Paul. Here, it's very clear that Spendor has got the balance right – considering the sort of audiophile it is selling to. So while my first few minutes with the A4 proved a tad underwhelming, this was most certainly not my long-term impression.

The A4, you see, is a real grower. For example, Peter Gabriel's 'Slowburn'

[from *Peter Gabriel*; Virgin PGCDP 1], which is a very dry sounding rock recording from the mid-1970s, initially seemed a little dull and unremarkable through the A4s, but as the track progressed I found myself settling down and enjoying it rather more than I had previously thought I would.

There was a lot of midband detail and a pleasant, liltingly musical gait to the way the rhythms were handled. The upper bass was a little warm and there was a subtle sense of coloration to the sound – it was slightly boxy, as I've said, but in a pleasant sort of way.

Peter Gabriel's voice was delivered in a surprisingly intimate manner, the speaker giving a real feel for his phrasing and intonation, gliding engagingly through the song. Yet when I tried to steal my attention back to the 'hi-fi' aspects of the sound, things took a turn for the worse. The tambourine sounded rather generic and cymbals lacked sheen. The triangle playing was enjoyably rhythmic but didn't sparkle. Again though, I was drawn back to the song's *emotional* power, the singer's voice and the melodic and expressive electric guitar sound.

Better recordings – and I listened, for example, to the jazzy strains of Fourplay's 'Turnabout' [from X; Bluebird 82876 86399-2] – tell us more about the A4. Bear in mind that Spendor's A4 is a fairly open and detailed sounding speaker, but is no more incisively transparent than many other designs at this price point. It has that pleasant, gentle, warm coloration – almost as if you've turned the heating up a touch and things suddenly feel rather warm and sumptuous.

So while Fourplay's recording is very smooth, the A4 added a dash more colour in the upper bass, helping the

