

DB Dynamics Polaris 366F

The Australian All Blacks

By Michael Jones

DB Dynamics Polaris 366F. \$899

Who'd give an Aussie a chance in this Rugby World Cup year? Not me in the rugby, but in loudspeakers my ears tell me that DB Dynamics are on to something.

There's a rule of thumb that I work by with floorstanding speakers, which is to ignore most of them under around \$1500. Under that price I normally recommend stand-mounted (so-called "bookshelf" speakers) for the best sound. Here's why.

One of the biggest costs in producing a loudspeaker is also one of the prime determinates of sound quality: the loudspeaker cabinet. The cabinet of a bookshelf speaker is relatively easy to keep rigid, to preclude the cabinet interfering too much with the sound.

Make the cabinet go down to the floor and the speaker cabinet is likely to sing along with the music, making the sound thick, muddy and boomy. Manufacturers as a whole cannot afford to make their cabinets as braced and heavy as needs be with floor-standing speakers.

History lesson

If you're not familiar with DB Dynamics then here's a little history lesson. One hi-fi importer in Oz decided to roll his own, under the name of DB Dynamics. The aim was value: create

a lot of speaker for very little money. The first range sold well, but looked pretty rough and ready to these eyes. The second range (of which I reviewed the Polaris

AC688F in January 2002) were much improved visually, plus the model I tried sounded great.

The mark three range look even better: professionally designed and expensive. Based on appearance alone, I would have guessed this model would have been retailing for double its asking price.

The Polaris 366F is the least

expensive of the two floor-standing models in the mk3 Polaris range. Standing some 1032mm high and 202mm deep, the speakers weigh in at a massive 21kg each!

Up top is a fabric dome tweeter in a wave guide. The tweeter has a metal grill over it to protect it from the most common form of tweeter destruction – the fingers of two year old kids.

Underneath the tweeter are two 165mm mid-woofers, made from some plastic formulation.

Below the woofers is a reflex port for loading the bass. Shaped like the tweeter's wave guide, the plastic moulded port has another "kid-friendly" feature. Down the middle of the port is a bar, which greatly reduces the chances of any two year old depositing items inside the speaker.

On the rear are bi-wirable binding posts. These look like the expensive WBT binding posts, but are undoubtedly much cheaper Chinese copies.

The Polaris 366F is rated at 89dB sensitivity and a 6 ohm nominal impedance. Power handling is rated at 120 watts.

Sounding off

There's a sense of scale to the sound that you simply don't get from smaller speakers. A big speaker can move more air with more authority and lack of effort than any small speaker. While I suspect that most Polaris speakers will be reproducing home theatre and Led Zep, this scale, authority and weight works as well with Mahler as it does with Motorhead.

Bass weight is also a good point with these speakers. An example was the opening track of the Emmylou Harris album *Wrecking Ball*. Amid the textured sonic landscape put together by producer Daniel Lanois is a potent kick drum. After hearing this through a speaker like the Polaris it's hard to go back to a bookshelf speaker.

The speaker is well behaved. Higher frequencies are well balanced (the tweeters in some cheaper speakers can almost take your ears off) and the speaker doesn't boom away in the bass



– they do like a little space around them though.

The Polaris 366F doesn't have it all its own way though. There's a lack of clarity in the midrange, compared to many equivalently priced bookshelf speakers. I suspect that this is due to the large side panels of the speaker vibrating along in sympathy with the music. In this regard the more expensive Polaris AC688F from last year was better.

Conclusion

The 366F's are a large and powerful sounding speaker at a very low price. The scale of sound and bass weight of the Polaris will win the speaker many friends. Add in the low price and we have a winner.

There's no doubt about it – the Australians don't have a chance in the rugby. But in the speaker marketplace, I reckon that these Australian All Blacks have a ticket to the finals.

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