

REL Stampede

REL Stampede subwoofer.
\$1999/\$2199 depending on finish
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REL sub-bass speakers ('subwoofers' to the rest of us) are justifiably famous. The Welsh company, named after the initials of its founder, Richard E Lord, manufactures boxes big and small to add rumble and menace, and space and body to systems of all sizes. While many subwoofers tend to fart unceremoniously in a corner, muddying and unbalancing music generated by the main speakers, REL subs can be relied upon to integrate properly, going deep with speed and precision.

Here they come!

The Stampede is one of REL's smaller creations, and belongs to the company's 'St' range of subs. This range is positioned above the more affordable Q series, the smallest member of which, the Quake, I reviewed not so long ago.

The St range caters to audiophile requirements, and is characterized by a luxury finish and lounge-friendly styling, and now greater user-friendliness in the addition of remote control.

The review model came in a

handsome maple veneer, and was surprisingly small – only a little larger than the miniscule Quake, and whereas the Quake is a little cube, the Stampede is taller than it is wide and deep. I've learned to not to judge these babies by their size, and the Stampede reinforced that lesson in spades. Not much bigger than a breadbox, this squirt is rated down to 16Hz, and while the maximum volume levels generated might not match larger rivals in its price range, the Stampede is scarily good in terms of sound quality.

The kick inside

Powering the Stampede is a 100W amplifier built to the sort of standards you'd expect in a high quality power amp. This drives an eight inch speaker,

which you'd be forgiven for thinking is a bit on the small side for packing any serious punch. Even more remarkably, the Stampede is a closed-box – that is, it has no reflex port to aid and abet the reproduction of the lowest frequencies, the cone is on its own. This doesn't appear to have compromised the abilities of the Stampede at all – instead, the little sub shines with the speed and quick damping characteristics of a good infinite-baffle design.

The sound

By now, you've already got the impression that the Stampede is a serious performer. I can't really say enough good things about it – it's a little blinder. And yet, there's not much more to say.

The true test of a sub has to be how it helps recreate the sense of space in which a performance occurs, whether or not any bass-heavy instruments are at work. The Stampede was immediately effective in this regard, and while well-recorded acoustic material benefited most, everything was given a lift, from Led Zep on vinyl to *Fellowship of the Ring* via DVD.

Furthermore, not only does it run properly deep, but it's quick like a whipper, and virtually undetectable in the system. This last virtue is the result not only of very low distortion, rapid response, and adjustability – and this last point is one I'd like to expand upon.

Not remotely unpleasant

The thing about subs, if you're auditioning one, or you decide to move your existing system around in your room, is they're really a pain to set up. Playing with positioning, phase, volume, and cross-over frequency combinations until you've found a tolerable set of compromises can be a wearying business, if you're intent on getting the most out of your thumper. Up and down from the couch, back and forth to the sub, replaying the same passage over and over. Exasperating. No wonder so many subs are stuffed behind the couch to honk atonally and rattle the cutlery during DVD-sourced explosions.

But not this time. Joy of joys, the Stampede comes with an infra-red remote control. The back panel, normally populated by dials and levers, is com-



pletely bare. On the front of the little sub is a blue LED display, and one simply sits back with a familiar piece playing, and with a few thumb exercises, phase, crossover and volume are set. It's too simple. Of course, you have to figure out where to put the thing first, for which the boffins at REL have yet to develop a remote control system.

Run for it!

A good subwoofer is a thing to cherish, and many are of the opinion that a hi-fi set up isn't complete without one. For high-performance systems playing in a small to mid-sized room, the Stampede is pretty much mandatory. Just don't get trampled in the rush—*Brent Burmester*

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