

## Wharfedale Diamond 9.6

**Wharfedale Diamond 9.6. \$1399**

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The Wharfedale Diamond has had a longevity envied by many hi-fi manufacturers. First released in the 1980s, it was a small two-way design using treble and midrange drivers from a more expensive model, repackaged in a cheap chipboard box with a simple crossover. Although it had the typical failings of low cost speakers; no bass, not much treble, a murkiness to the overall sound, it got to the heart of music, being fast and agile, with the precise imaging that comes from a good small monitor.

Later Diamonds gained in aural and aesthetic refinement with optional real wood veneers, upgraded drivers and even an active version.

Over the years the Diamond became an automatic choice for buyers wanting good quality sound in a small package and with a small price tag.

Fast forward to the Wharfedale of the 21st century. Wharfedale is now in the capable hands of International Audio Group, merging quality British design with low cost Chinese manufacturing facilities.

The Diamond name now appears on two broad ranges (the budget 8 series and the more advanced but still very affordable 9 series) of speakers. Each range encompassing small two-way bookshelves like the original, to three way floorstanders and home theatre orientated centre speakers and subwoofery.

Like it's Quad stable mate, the entire speaker and it's componentry are designed and built in-house, enabling cutting edge technology to be incorporated into affordable product.

The model supplied for review was the top-of-the-line model 9.6, a four-way floorstanding speaker that stands almost 1.1m tall.

Unique in this price range is the full four-way driver complement; a 25mm dome tweeter, 50mm dome midrange and two 200mm Kevlar drivers. The uppermost kevlar driver is in a sealed enclosure, limiting extension and covering the crucial mid/bass crossover from 150Hz to 1kHz. The lower bass driver takes over from 150Hz down and is rear ported to improve extension and control.

Where most speakers use a single driver to cover the midrange and bass, the Diamond uses a dedicated midrange driver reproducing the important 1kHz to 6kHz range with an ease that matches the fast tweeter, enhancing the speaker's coherency and naturalness.

The rest of the speaker is standard budget fare.

A fashionably slim, curvy sided cabinet of reasonable solidity, covered in a wood grained vinyl, sitting on a thin, spiked plinth. The rear of the speaker has a large flared port and a bi-wireable set of gold plated multi-way speaker connectors. Like any CE approved audio product, the connectors have those silly little plastic bungs to prevent insertion of banana style plugs.

This is a speaker that won't have you blanching with the grill removed. Uncovered it is refreshingly bling free! All the drivers and mounting frames are in Henry Ford's favourite colour, flat black. This is a pleasing aesthetic approach that makers of more expensive speakers would do well to emulate.

With a highish 90dB sensitivity and an easy 6 ohm impedance, these speakers should not present any problems for any competent amplifier.

### Shine on you crazy diamond

Playing a variety of music (from classical to film soundtracks, pop/rock/jazz to solo speech) showed the Diamond to be a very good performer, and exceptional in two areas where most low cost multi-way speakers fall flat: tonal coherence and spatial reproduction.

The bespoke drivers and simple crossover match perfectly. This speaker really sounds like it was cut from one cloth.

Tuneful, well extended bass flows smoothly into the clear, detailed midrange, which in turn makes a seamless transition to the fast, smooth treble. Wide bandwidth is the preserve of expensive speakers and the Diamond is



no exception with gentle roll-off at both ends of the spectrum. The overall result is a well-balanced, coherent sound that makes listening a pleasurable experience.

The soundstage extends well beyond the physical positioning of the speakers

when used with quality ancillaries. Images are well presented with realistic width and height, a slight lack of depth is the only shortfall. Transparency is very good over the front half of the stage, diminishing as you look

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further back which is par for course. Dynamics are well reproduced, initial transients possessing good snap without overhang. Detail is good enough to let you hear most of the recording.

The overall result is a well balanced, coherent sounding speaker that makes listening a pleasurable experience.

### Diamond life

The Diamonds are the kind of product expected from a long time manufacturer dedicated to making music accessible. With it's canny balance of abilities the Diamonds do a very good job of disappearing and do not get between the listener and the music. With no major flaws, they are a steal, solid proof that the art of building good value stereo equipment survives—*Michael Wong*

