

String theory

SONUS FABER AMATI
ANNIVERSARIO HOMAGE
(£13,000) (PAIR)



LEFT: Cabinet is built of individual staves, bonded with an adhesive that damps resonances

With the Amati Anniversario, Sonus faber commemorates the birth 500 years ago of Italian string instrument maker Andrea Amati. The aim? To better the performance over the old model without a great increase in price

Tested by Martin Colloms

Sonus faber's first Amati, the Homage, joined the first SF model in this audiophile series, the musically expressive Guarneri. The later was a delightful standmounter that became the benchmark for speakers of this type. The Amati was a distinctively different speaker. A floorstander model, it was slim, but of high power and fine bass extension and boasted a musical 'singing' midrange.

Priced at about £13,000 a pair in 'red' violin lacquer and £14,000 in mirror-gloss, graphite-tinted walnut, the new Amati is radically different to the old model in all but essential form and size. It promises rather greater performance, but not at a greatly increased price.

STRADIVARI SPIN-OFF

So much original research went into the Stradivari that a spin-off was inevitable. That model had pioneered the use of the ring radiator tweeter, the high-definition Audio Technology mid driver and a new standard of bass obtainable from the new pure-piston aluminium alloy woofers from SEAS. These technologies were matched by advances in crossover design and build, components, internal wiring and cabinet resonance control.

As far as I can see the whole lot has turned up in the Anniversario, at much less cost and seemingly achieved by downsizing the woofer pairs from 260mm to 220mm diameter while tuning the enclosure for a little less bass extension. A claimed high sensitivity of 92dB/W has been maintained. Noting the nominal 6ohm impedance, and fairly tough amplifier and cable loading, the high sensitivity could represent powerful mitigation for the lower impedance loading, the latter now rather typical of modern designs.

Structurally the complex enclosure is built of individual web sections or staves, bonded and locked together with a selected, resonance-damping polymeric adhesive. Reminiscent of a lute shape the curved walls endow this speaker's cabinet with great rigidity, pushing panel resonance beyond the working range of the tightly coupled bass drivers. Possible vibration coupling effects from the mid driver are mitigated by the use of a weighty, decoupled sub-enclosure for the mid-treble section. This constitutes a speaker within a speaker.

The upper section of the driver baffle is leather composition covered and employs ingenious yet stylish contouring to help control diffraction. Smoother on- and off-axis frequency responses are the result, providing purer and more stable focus, as well as a more consistent sound quality.

Built specifically for Sonus faber by ScanSpeak, this version of the established ring radiator tweeter has a double contour face plate in rigid cast alloy conferring improved phase and frequency characteristics.

Seen in the Stradivari the 150mm Audiotechnology mid

RIGHT: Top-to-bottom grille hides all four drivers; steel-plate stabilising base allows speaker to be levelled via adjustable spikes



'I heard an airy extended treble, a crisp, clean, somewhat laidback upper midrange, a full but not quite bloated lower midrange, and an extended, powerful bass'

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driver has a critically angled cone of pp Copolymer, carefully terminated and provided with a high dynamic range and very low distortion. This costly driver is undoubtedly the foundation of this design.

As for the crossover, of Stradivari quality, this is distinguished by a moderate degree of impedance correction in a bid to help the individual sections of the network attain the desired acoustic target transitions. Single wired, the designer does not wish the inner balance of this loudspeaker to be disturbed by the potential eccentricities of bi-wire practice that can occur in the real world.

The superb cabinet is complemented by a stabilising base cut from heavy steel plate, threaded for the heroic, thumbwheel-locked spiked floor couplers – simple but effective, and in keeping with the overall effect.

Maximum sound level is estimated at a substantial 110dBA for a stereo pair fed 350W 8 ohm rated peak programme, man enough for larger rooms as required. With a sufficiently powerful amp, genuinely high, uncompressed peak levels proved possible, just like the bigger Stradivari – though the latter has significantly more headroom when it comes to the bass.

SOUND QUALITY

That wide curved front, characteristic of the larger Stradivari, endowed that mellifluous loudspeaker with a particular sound, a powerful and naturally rich midrange with an even timbre.

It was thus distinguished from the general herd, which has tended to sound thinner and more forward in respect of midrange tonality. The extant Amati undoubtedly has its merits, but has not shown the beguiling power and richness evident in the Stradivari.

By contrast, the new Amati Anniversario demonstrated that it had achieved a substantial measure of the balance, power and scale of that excellent Stradivari midrange.

I heard an airy extended treble, a crisp, clean, somewhat laidback upper midrange, a full but not quite bloated lower midrange, and an extended, powerful bass. The low frequencies had a percussive, punchy quality reminiscent of the more powerful active studio monitor loudspeakers. There was also a mild metallic sheen to the lower treble, sharpening transients and mildly

exaggerating both sibilance and the leading edge impact of small percussion sounds. The upper treble was also placed slightly forward in the soundstage. There was also some mild coloration, its delivery tending to the musical than the clinical side of accuracy.

Experiment with location indicated the bass was even and well tuned and not too critical of room location – a good sign – but if located too near the wall tends to sound too heavy in the

almost as satisfyingly excellent with this speaker as they were with the Stradivari.

Switching programme and 'The White Room' by KLF belted along appropriately with clean, incisive bass percussion and vocals that were crisp and articulate.

Comparison with the precursor Amati Homage is revealing since at the time of its emergence dynamics and expression were considered to be one of its stronger points. The Anniversario manifestly reaches way

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upper bass. Regarding upper range tonality, quite powerful subjective adjustment was available via a degree of toe-out, in my case about 12° relative to the classic triangle set-up where the speakers would be directed at the listening seat.

Fine adjustment of vertical azimuth using the levelling spikes helped bring optimal focus and timbre for the chosen seat and listener height.

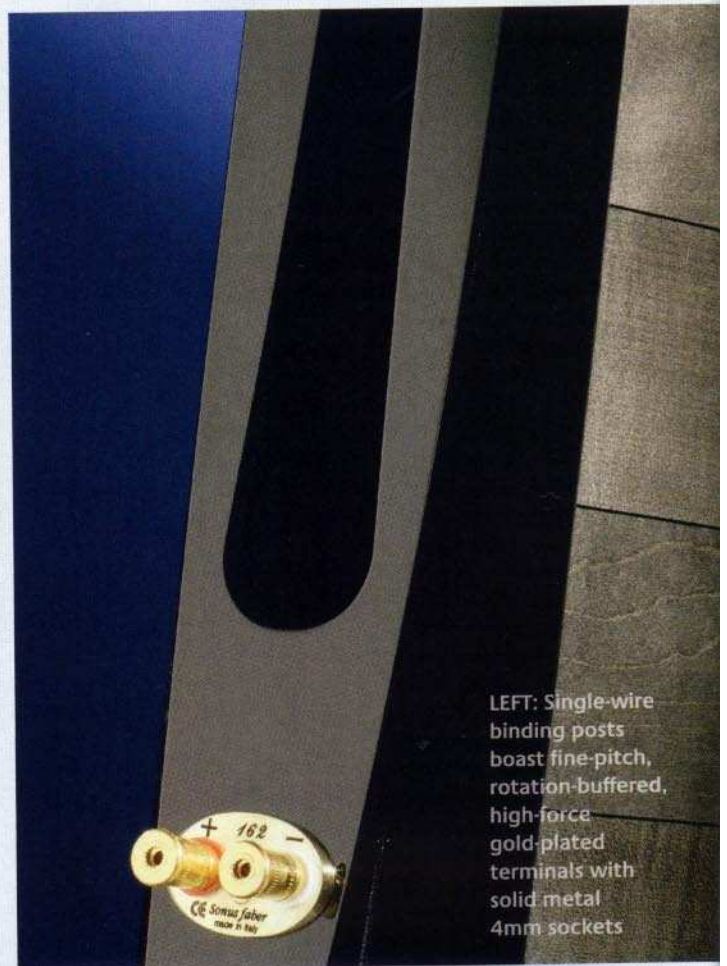
Now the new Amati began to show its many virtues, with its constituent sound components blended into a notably coherent whole. Cognisant of this speaker's classical pedigree I began with an explosive First Suite in E Flat by Holst and was immediately impressed by the dynamics. The quieter sections were beautifully expressive and finely resolved, revealing more of the subtleties of composition and playing than usual.

As the work accelerated towards the climaxes you felt the Amati sweep you up in the drive and excitement of the piece and the peak dynamics were open, alive, powerful and well balanced. This quality of musical performance largely overcomes any possible reservations one might have about absolute accuracy. Both micro and macro-dynamics are

beyond that standard, and it does so over the entire frequency range.

COMPETING KRELL

In this respect the competing Krell Resolution One, at £9990 a pair, showed a slightly more restrained dynamic quality, while the outstandingly even, clean and extended bass of the Krell was



LEFT: Single-wire binding posts boast fine-pitch, rotation-buffered, high-force gold-plated terminals with solid metal 4mm sockets

'It was exceptional on cathedral organ. Piping trebles contrasted with awesomely thunderous bass flutes'

RIGHT: Anniversario's tweeter is a version of ScanSpeak's ring-radiator design and features a silk diaphragm

FOR:
Focused,
dynamic,
exciting

AGAINST: Nothing, a class leader

almost mirrored here by the Anniversario, if on a smaller scale.

Concerning its outstandingly smooth mid-treble balance the Krell wins by a small margin over the Anniversario, but the latter edges significantly ahead on transparency, stage width and image focus.

Conversely the Krell began to gather pace and impact when driven to higher sound levels yet I was gratified by this smaller Sonus faber design, considering its ability to sound musically interesting, pacey and involving, even at moderate sound levels, just like the bigger Stradivari. I was also surprised by how well this speaker took power, remaining in control and well balanced right up to a 350W/peak programme input level. With its genuinely high sensitivity and powerful low-frequency punch it could play really loud, sufficient even for larger open-plan environments. It felt turbocharged.

Trying solo piano with Evgeny Kissin playing *Mussorgsky Pictures at an Exhibition*, I was aware that the upper register of the piano sound was a little sharper and crisper than usual, but that feeling rapidly faded, and I was transported by the expression revealed.

In trying to explain this result, memorable features included the sense of natural dynamic, the overall balance, and the unusually good separation of the individual piano

notes, not omitting the fine recovery of the local recorded acoustic.

It was also exceptional on cathedral organ. Piping trebles contrasted with awesomely thunderous bass flutes while atmosphere on recordings was beautifully illuminated.

COMPETING KRELL

During the evaluation Sonus faber agent Ricardo Franassovici suggested I try the matching Serblin-designed Yter cables, simply because they are of the same design and materials as within this loudspeaker. Not only did I find them very good performers at the price but as predicted there was an additional degree of synergy found with the Anniversario. Its innate clarity and sense of staging was nicely brought out, while the treble now sounded sweeter and better integrated, the whole image now more softly and sympathetically illuminated. Taken overall they are a fine match. Much greater investment in speaker cable was found necessary to provide a comprehensive gain in performance.

This loudspeaker seems nearly as sensitive as claimed and could play very loudly without distortion. It is quite a difficult load as the power amplifier clearly warmed up a bit when driving hard, but it did not otherwise appear to disturb the quality level of the driving amps. ☺

Hi-fi news
Verdict

**SONUS FABER AMATI
ANNIVERSARIO
HOMAGE £13,000**

Spacious, focused, dynamic, exciting, powerful and revealing, the Amati hits many important targets spot on. It turns musical reproduction into an event and such commitment to convincing sound quality is rare. Build quality and finish are excellent while the overall technical performance is very good. This outstanding speaker carries my enthusiastic recommendation.

SPEC/FEATURES



SOUND QUALITY



BUILD QUALITY



VALUE FOR MONEY



Hi-fi news
OVERALL RATING **20/20**



Lab report

I measured an above average 90dB voltage sensitivity, about 2dB less than the 92dB claimed. However the big deal here concerns the adverse load factor, placing it with the other current hungry examples such as the B&W 800D, the Peak Consult Zoltan and the Krell Resolution One. This Amati is certainly a 4ohm speaker which grazes the 2.8 ohm marker line at 80Hz and 700Hz and holds below 4 ohms over much of the power band. From 60Hz to 20kHz, the peak variation is fairly small, not exceeding 6 ohms.

Given that it will handle up to 400W 8 ohms rated, it will actually draw power peaks over 900W from this rated size of amplifier, if it's man for the job.

I would advise selection from amplifiers which offer over 40A peak current and can double their 8 ohm rating into a least four ohms. Overall this speaker met a good amplitude tolerance, +/-3dB 30Hz to 25kHz, and reached 36kHz and 25Hz at the -6dB extremes of output, a very wide range. Deep bass for this size is one payoff for the adverse load impedance.

An optimum output was attained at 10-15 degrees lateral off-axis through the slight prominence seen at 4kHz is characteristic and relates to the mid-treble crossover.

Hi-Fi News lab specifications

POWER HANDLING	400 wats 8ohms rated
SENSITIVITY	90dB/W/m
IMPEDANCE	4 ohm 2.8 ohm at 80Hz Not > 6 ohm 60Hz to 20kHz
AMPLITUDE TOLERANCE	+/-3dB 30Hz to 25kHz 36kHz and 25Hz at the -6dB extremes of output
WEIGHT	354 lbs
DIMENSIONS	1.17 x 0.265 x 0.56m (hwd)

Contact numbers

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Review system breakdown

SOURCES Naim cds3, Marantz CD-7, Linn LP12/ARO/Koetsu RS-11
AMPS Krell FPB 400cx; cj 350SA; cj CT-5, XTC PRE-2
CABLES Transparent, Cardas, Kimber and Yter
SPEAKERS Avalon Eidolon, B&W 800d, Peak Consult Zoltan, 15 ohm BBC LS3/5a

We listened to

**EVGENY KISSIN
PLAYING
MUSSORGSKY
PICTURES AT AN
EXHIBITION**

RCA 090266 3884 2

FIRST SUITE IN E FLAT
Holst
Telarc CD80038

THE WHITE ROOM
KLF
JAMSCD006

