


GROUP TEST

Update available

Beneath the wood veneer and lacquer finishes, speaker technology has evolved. Here, three offerings from Dynaudio, Dali and Wharfedale battle it out for the right to assault your ears

On paper, evolution isn't always as apparent in hi-fi speakers as it is in other products that regularly pass through our test-room doors. TVs and streamers, for example, rely on quantifiable one-upmanship with, say, resolution or streaming service count.

But behind closed doors in a laboratory somewhere, there is a diehard speaker engineer buried away, constantly tweaking and fine-tuning crossover components and fashioning new cone materials with the goal of getting punters more performance for their pound than ever before.

Consequently, the standard of sound quality continues to rise. You need only look at the Dynaudio Emit M10 standmounts, which in the July edition of *What Hi-Fi?* outclassed the B&W 685 S2s that had dominated the £500 competition for the past two years.

Now, for an extra £100, we have their big brothers, the Emit M20s, pitted against 'larger standmounts' from Dali and Wharfedale, the latter the company that brought us the best desktop speakers of 2015.

Bigger standmounters typically make gains in bass and scale over smaller entry-level ones, so if that's where your (or your living room's) ambitions lie, your next pair of speakers could well feature in the next few pages.



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WHAT'S ON TEST?

Dynaudio Emit M20 "Meticulous"

Dali Opticon 2 "Fun is their no.1 priority"

Wharfedale Reva-2 "Precision and detail"



THEY JUST WANNA HAVE FUN

Dali Opticon 2 £650

FOR Fast, articulate midrange; strong dynamics; lovely design | **AGAINST** Need careful system-matching; bass isn't punchiest | ★★☆☆☆

"Having the Dali name on a pair of speakers is usually a guarantee of good times. Thankfully, these Opticon 2 standmounts are no exception"



KEY FEATURES



single wiring



Three finishes



You'd expect muscle from the Opticon 2s, but they are also 'true' Dali speakers

Unlike the jobsworth accountant, Dali speakers tend to make having fun their number one priority, as many an hour spent tapping our feet to 1970s disco tracks through a pair of the Danish company's speakers will attest.

From the entry-level Zensor 1s, right up to the high-ranging Epicon 8s and the Opticon 1s and 6s, the company's name on a pair of speakers is often a guarantee of good times. Thankfully, these Opticon 2s - the larger of the two standmounts in the company's mid-sitting range - are no exception.

With a name like 'Opticon', you may expect them to be all muscle and authority - but, while these are indeed attributes, Dali makes a point of wanting the range to be a 'true' Dali speaker series. And aren't they just.

IN DETAIL...



Single-wire terminals recessed to allow speakers to be put close to a wall

Skipping past our 1970s playlist, we opt to play the *Silent Shout* album by Swedish electro-pop duo The Knife instead. The Opticon 2s deliver the headrush supernatural-esque electro melodies in the title track superbly - their fast, timely and dynamic midrange coming into its own, and making the handling of the track's energetic polyrhythms and swerving of any mis-steps sound remarkably easy.

Couple that with sweeping dynamics and impressive scale and it becomes apparent that roof-raising volume isn't necessary for you to be manipulated into a sit-down rave in your own armchair.

The Knife edge

That midrange articulation does wonders for vocals, first from The Knife and later the hauntingly reverbed voices of Timber Timbre. Expressive and open, the Dalis serve up clarity and insight, proving more than happy to carry any emotional weight required.

While there's a distinct boldness to them, it's tamed with a calming degree of

subtlety and precision. Everything from track-dominating drums to slight cymbal taps has a finality and purpose in the mix. And despite our best efforts, they are hard to wrong-foot too.

The seismic bassline of The Knife's track is agile, and with the help of the Dali's bass port sinks deep as a thumping beat breaks above it. However, it's never quite as hard-hitting or penetrating as it is through the Dynaudio Emit M20s. Bringing the Dalis closer to a wall helps with bass solidity and punch, but there is a balance to be struck - adding low-end substance can reduce the nimbleness that makes them so likeable. Just be prepared to experiment a little with speaker positioning.

Matches the decor

The treble runs a little enthusiastically, especially at higher volumes - but, although the presentation is on the bright side, only poor system-matching could cause it to be a problem. For this reason, it's important to partner the Dalis with smooth, richer-sounding kit: the Arcam A19 stereo amplifier, for example.

You needn't worry about your Opticon 2s matching the decor though. They come in a black, white or walnut vinyl, which is smart and well applied - even if we prefer the glossier, more modern and expensive-looking paint finish of the Wharfedale Reva-2s.

The 16.5cm mid/bass driver cone is made of paper with wood fibres added to improve stiffness, and its mahogany tint adds to the aesthetic interest. High frequencies are delivered by a 28mm soft dome tweeter, rather than the dual ribbon/dome arrangement of the larger speakers in the Opticon range.

Talented entertainers

The Opticon 2s aren't the most versatile standmounts on the market, nor the most sonically complete (as a comparison with the Dynaudio Emit M20s demonstrates), but that doesn't take away from the fact they are talented, entertaining speakers. If care is taken to partner these Dalis with the right kit, then these are a great option.

WHAT HI-FI? says

Rating ★★★★★

SOUND



BUILD



COMPATIBILITY



VERDICT Partnered with the right kit, these precise, insightful and above all fun-loving speakers are highly entertaining

BANG ON THE MONEY

Dynaudio Emit M20 **£600**

FOR Sweeping dynamics;
refined; well-built cabinets

AGAINST Not quite so adept
with poorer recordings



"Dynamically, the Dynaudios are always on the move within their generous range, proving as capable with explosive changes as subtle ones"



KEY FEATURES



single wiring



Max power: 150W

If you read July's issue of *What Hi-Fi?*, you'll have seen the Dynaudio M10 standmounts (£500) made a huge impression, knocking the B&W 685 S2s - two-time Product of the Year winners, no less - off their pedestal. That takes some doing.

Now it's the turn of the Emit M20s - larger versions of their impressive siblings - to try to make their mark. Place them side by side and the M10s and M20s are akin to those Russian dolls: different dimensions but made to the same proportions.

They both sport a satin lacquer (available in either white or black) and driver-dominated baffle which, thanks to a symmetrical smattering of screwheads bordering the drivers, looks as though it has been used as target practice.

IN DETAIL...



Single-wire connections keep things simple on the Dynaudio Emit M20s

But it's not just the M20's 36cm height and 27cm depth that qualify them as the senior standmount model in the Danish company's entry-level speaker range. As is the Dynaudio way, new drivers have been designed specifically for each Emit model, with the M20 featuring a 28mm soft-dome tweeter and 17cm magnesium silicate polymer mid/bass driver - up from the M10's 14cm.

Piano lessons

That bigger driver goes a long way to explaining the M20's greater ability when it comes to authority, scale, dynamics and bass depth. That is, after all, what you should expect from a larger standmount. More importantly, it hasn't all come at the expense of musicality and agility along the way.

In Ludovico Einaudi's *Ancora*, piano sequences bask in nuance and texture, to the point where it sounds not so much as though he's striking keys but giving you a personal lesson in advanced piano playing. While the M20s don't play their sibling's compact card, the

scale and openness they deliver is nonetheless very impressive.

Dynamically, the Dynaudios are always on the move within their generous range, proving as capable with explosive changes as subtle ones. Each piano note is solid, exact and punctual - even in absolute terms they sometimes trade outright control for fun.

Unlike some speakers that favour certain music genres, the Emit 20s are game for everything - including the glitchy synths and intensely heady electrobeats in 65daysofstatic's *Prisms*. They whisk through the song with plenty of attack, and even in the most complex moments find the discipline and rigour to pick out the multiple trails of thought - rhythmic drums, ambient guitar lines, cutting cymbals - without sidelining any element.

They exhibit the audacity of the Dali Opticon 2s, but stabilise it with a pleasant smoothness and refinement, and that winning algorithm makes them versatile and listenable.

Sonic landscape

Though they aren't quite as flexible with poorer recordings, the M20s aren't afraid to lift the lid on the slightly bright and edgy quality of The Cure's *Kiss Me, Kiss Me, Kiss Me* album, revealing the recording's constrained nature. That's further proof of their transparency, but also a warning that you won't get the best from them playing below-par recordings.

Nor will you by shoving them up against a back wall, for when it comes to placement they require a bit of space to hit the right tonal balance. Toeing them in slightly helps with stereo imaging too, so that when we finish our testing with Traffic's *John Barleycorn Must Die*, tambourines, flutes and guitar pluckings are all precisely mapped on the sonic landscape.

With both the M10 and M20 standmounts receiving five-star reviews and Group Test-winning status, it's a thoroughly impressive two from two for the Emit series. If you, or rather your room, determine that more scale, dynamic range and bass is better, the M20s are bang on the money.

WHAT HI-FI? says

Rating ★★★★★

SOUND	★★★★★
BUILD	★★★★★
COMPATIBILITY	★★★★★

VERDICT Dynaudio has produced another entertaining speaker - the M20s are as meticulous as they are merry

The screws on the drive units can be covered by the speakers' grilles, for a neater look



STEREO SPEAKERS

MASTERS OF PRECISION

Wharfedale Reva-2 £600

FOR Precisely organised sound; beautiful finish

AGAINST Strait-laced attitude; rivals have more authority



"This isn't some half-hearted effort involving minor tweaks and a new paint job. Almost everything from drivers to cabinets has been revisited"



KEY FEATURES



Biwiring



Four colour finishes



Max power handling: 80W

You could say Wharfedale designed the midrange Reva speaker series not from the ground up, but rather from the inside out. Instead of building the range from scratch or using downgraded elements from its top-ranging speakers, Wharfedale has made a refined and upgraded version of its entry-level, budget Diamond 200 Series, with the aim being to deliver much better performance for a little more cash.

Wharfedale is hoping to build not just on the design principles of the Diamonds but on their success, too. After all, we're talking about a range that's garnered a collection of favourable reviews, not to mention an Award in 2014 for the Diamond 220 standmounts.

IN DETAIL...



The only one of our trio of standmounts that allows biwiring

But this isn't some half-hearted effort involving no more than minor tweaks and a new paint job. In fact, almost everything from driver design to cabinet construction has been revisited.

Lacquer finish

As we take our first look at the Reva-2s, the larger of the two standmounts in the range, the cabinet is the most obvious change. Not only has the sandwich construction, as seen on the Diamond series, been thickened with extra layers, the cabinets are also curved and finished in piano white, piano black, deep rosewood or walnut lacquer. They are very appealing, which can't be said for many other speakers at their price.

Also improved are the drivers, designed and manufactured by Wharfedale in tandem with the cabinets to ensure good conformity. There's a new glass-fibre weave for the 12.5cm mid/bass driver, and a 25mm tweeter that sports a new fine-weave textile dome and is mounted on a dish waveguide for better dispersion.

Wharfedale has refined the slot-loaded port design first seen on the Diamond 100 Series for enhanced efficiency, siting it between the cabinet's base and the plinth - so they can sit close to a wall without bass dominating the tonal balance.

Playing it safe

Although bass is pleasing - not only solid and taut, but fairly deep and agile too - it's not the star of the show. That's the midrange, which is one of the most focused we've heard at this level. With that in mind, it's not surprising that vocals sound as expressive as you'll hear through a £600 pair of speakers.

With Mercury Rev's *Tonite It Shows*, Jonathan Donahue's nostalgia-inflected crooning is intimate and delicate. Through the Reva-2s, the waltz-like orchestration is a joy to listen to. The ambience is densely textured and cross-stitched together with a sense of natural cohesion. While they don't match the dynamic reach of the Dynaudio Emit M20s or Dali Opticons 2s, the xylophone notes still take flight to pleasing effect.

There's a thoroughness to the Reva-2s but, despite their insightful nature, you can't help feel that something is missing. It takes Broken Bells' *Holding on for Life* to figure out exactly what.

The Wharfedales struggle to deliver the boppy synth hooks and, as a result, they are also left grappling to hold onto the track's disco groove. It feels a bit reined in and strait-laced, and fails to move with the energy required. Essentially, the shortage of fun-loving attitude stands in the way of them being as engaging with as wide a range of music genres as their rivals.

When faced with an upbeat track, the Reva-2s drive more like a cautious pensioner than a daredevil boy-racer. There's a lot to be said for playing it safe, but in doing so these Wharfedales can't supply all the thrills you are seeking.

They aren't the most versatile speakers out there, but they are masters of precision and detail. If those keywords top your list of sonic must-haves, there are plenty of reasons for them to win you over.

WHAT HI-FI? says

Rating ★★★★★

SOUND



BUILD



COMPATIBILITY



VERDICT These Wharfedales are brilliantly precise and detailed speakers, but they aren't quite all-rounders

The cabinets on the Reva-2s have been given an appealing new lacquer finish



DOUBLE VISION

Your next phone should take photography as seriously as you do: here's why the LG X Cam fits the bill

The LG X Cam is the smartphone built with mobile photographers in mind. Flip the 6.9mm-thin device on its front and you'll find not one but two cameras: the first a powerful 13-megapixel snapper, the second an ultra wide-angle five-megapixel camera with a massive 120-degree field of view – which opens up a whole world of creative possibilities.

That wide-angle lens gives photographers a camera that sees almost exactly the same scene they do. It enables you to capture the whole of the group, scene or vista you're surveying with the absolute minimum of post-processing fuss – and without having to walk miles to get everything in shot.

If post-processing fuss is your idea of a good time, the X Cam will make light work of it thanks to its 5.2in, full HD Arc Glass display and eight-core, 1.14GHz processor, while the Android Marshmallow operating system gives you a royal flush of photo-editing apps to choose from.

Around the front of the X Cam is an eight-megapixel camera for hi-res selfies, complete with face-detection abilities that can fire the shutter automatically – so you won't spoil careful compositions when you tap the on-screen shutter release.

If you're a dedicated photographer, creating spellbinding new images will be the centre of your world – and it's the centre of the LG X Cam's, too.

THE X CAM'S TECH TRICKS



PANORAMA

The wide-angle camera is also put to use in Panorama mode. It produces wider, taller panoramic shots than other phones, letting you make the most of the scenery.



POP-OUT PICTURE

Shoot with both cameras simultaneously to produce images with real depth: the 13MP shot in the middle, the wide-angle one adding effects to the borders.



SLEEK DESIGN

The X Cam packs plenty of power, but its minimalist, thin design means it tips the scales at just 118g – around 30g less than many flagship phones.



DUAL CAMERA

The back of the LG X Cam houses one 13-megapixel camera and one ultra wide-angle five-megapixel one, allowing you to take your photography further.



Dynaudio Emit M20 £600 ★★★★★

Versatile and sonically complete, the M20s are our clear winner



The Danish: masters not only in the art of pastries but, as Dali and Dynaudio have shown over the decades, hi-fi speakers, too. Once again, for the second speaker *Group Test* running, it's the day of the Danes.

However, in this particular three-way test it is very much Dynaudio's win. As the star ratings show, it's a clear victory - the Emit 20s are the only five-star review. But in reality this was a high-calibre competition, with each pair proving themselves worthy of a place atop your speaker stands.

The promising start for Wharfedale's new mid-ranging Reva series was hinted at by our first sight of the Reva-2s, then confirmed by their impressive execution: wonderfully focused, clear and precise -

all familiar attributes of the Diamond 200 Series speakers from which they originate. An authority boost and more fun-loving attitude would make them more accomplished all-rounders - but, with certain music and in smaller rooms, they're a hard proposition to ignore.

Good night out

Dali is like the larger-than-life friend you can rely on to guarantee a good night out, delivering speakers that are, among other things, entertainingly lively and enthusiastic. So it hardly comes as a

It looks like a timely return to form for Dynaudio. Could the M20s scoop an Award this year?

SYSTEM BUILDER

These will complement the Dynaudio Emit M20



CD PLAYER

Naim CD5si ★★★★★ £1080

A full-bodied, enthusiastic approach to music



AMPLIFIER

Rega Elex-R ★★★★★ £900

Arguably the best-value amp Rega makes

Total build £2580

shock that the Opticon 2s, like their smaller siblings, stick to the script. Spending your money here is even more beneficial if starting a hi-fi system from scratch: partner carefully with refined, full-bodied rather than bright or lean-sounding kit and there's no reason to warn you off these talented standmounts.

Wait and see...

The most versatile and sonically complete of the trio, though, are the Dynaudios, which combine the Dalis' scale and energy with the precision and poise of the Wharfedales. It seems that Dynaudio has cemented a return to form, and looks to have a great chance of scooping a *What Hi-Fi?* Award this October. We'll have to wait and see...

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HOW THEY MEASURE UP

	Dali Opticon 2	Dynaudio Emit M20	Wharfedale Reva-2
Sensitivity (dB/W/m)	87	86	86
Impedance (ohms)	4	4	8
Max power (watts)	150	150	80
Biwireable	No	No	Yes
Finishes	3	2	4
Dimensions (hwd)	35 x 20 x 30cm	36 x 22 x 27cm	36 x 20 x 28cm