

Out of this world

David Vivian wonders if Danish brand OePhi's Transcendence 2 standmount can possibly live up to the promise of its name



DETAILS

PRODUCT
OePhi Transcendence 2

ORIGIN
Denmark

TYPE
2-way standmount loudspeaker

WEIGHT
8kg each

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
185 x 350 x 300mm

FEATURES

- Aluminium dome tweeter with titanium voice coil former
- 165mm Purifi mid/bass driver
- Quoted sensitivity: 87dB/1W/1M (8ohm)

DISTRIBUTOR
VAL HiFi
Airt Audio

WEBSITE
oephi.com
valhifi.co.uk
airtaudio.com

Suggesting that a passive loudspeaker and the cable feeding it should be a synergistic alliance isn't a new idea and numerous speaker makers over the years have also produced their own cables to make it so. Not that tweak-loving audiophiles have necessarily taken much notice, preferring to experiment rather than tow a company line.

Few speaker makers have taken the speaker-cable *entente cordial* quite as seriously as Danish brand OePhi, which doesn't only believe having the two components singing from the same hymn sheet – and especially singing in time – is desirable, but the company reckons it's essential to unlock the full performance potential of both. It isn't that OePhi's founder and head Joakim Juhl has a thing about cables, it also informs OePhi's overarching philosophy and pursuit of true (rather than aspirational) high-end performance at honest, real-world prices.

The Transcendence 2 is OePhi's middle tier standmount, ostensibly a mid-sized, two-way, ported design with a couple of distinguishing aesthetic features. Most eye-catching is a woofer cone with a surround that resembles a burst tyre that's travelled a

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further 100 miles on a gravel track. It's described as being asymmetric. No kidding. Second, the woofer and offset tweeter seem, oddly, to have slid to the lower part of the baffle, leaving a large area of pristine wood veneer up top. We'll get back to the 'why' but, safe to say, OePhi's stated goal of making speakers devoid of a particular 'sound' that seeks to preserve 'signal integrity' end to end is thus served.

The custom-spec 165mm 'wrecked tyre' woofer is sourced from a brand named Purifi, of which heavy hitter Bruno Putzeys – designer of the Hypex Class D amp and Kii Three speaker – is a star backer. Contrary to doubts stemming from its counter intuitive appearance, the driver is rapidly attracting the interest of specialist speaker makers and hi-fi cognoscenti for next-level reductions in harmonic and intermodulation distortion. The surround itself has been designed by Lars Risbo and its advantage is to attack the problem of changes in radiating surface area as the woofer's paper cone moves in and out. With



conventional half-roll surrounds, the surround will increase effective surface area as the cone moves inwards, while it decreases when moving outwards. This, explains Joakim, contributes to second order harmonic distortion. With the surround topology of the Purifi woofer, however, there is virtually no change in the surface area with cone travel and thus almost no contribution to second order harmonic distortion, despite the cone's 10mm potential excursion. There are also notable improvements in damping and the suppression of cone edge resonances. The cone, incidentally, has been divested of its standard polypropylene coating by Purifi for OePhi's application.

The SEAS-sourced metal dome tweeter gets a complete strip down and rebuild from OePhi. "Our experience is that even the most advanced drivers often still have room for improvement," explains Joakim. "For dome tweeters, we find that they tend to suffer from dynamic compression, which causes harmonic distortions and time domain distortion. What we effectively achieve is to take an already state-of-the-art tweeter and significantly lower second order distortion, while also achieving much less power compression so that when the music calls for fast transients, the tweeter can follow the waveform much more accurately."

The low placement of the drivers on the cabinet baffle looks a little strange,

but is done to benefit diffraction while the deep cabinet's relatively lightweight build works against the slow absorption and release of energy that occurs with bulkier designs. Finally, a pair of hardly inconspicuous Transcendence 2 speaker cables (from £1,560) are supplied for review. "We are the only ones who focus on a cable's time domain performance," claims Joakim. "By understanding and tightly controlling our cable's time domain performances, we have found that we can almost completely remove cable's sound or audible influence on the signal they transmit."

Sound quality

Very few compact standmounts I've encountered over the years – even those with pukka recording studio monitor provenance – do the 'moment of clarity' thing quite as arrestingly as this. No slow-burn, get-to-know-you gig, here. No sweetly flavoured sonic proposal devised to accumulate favour with familiarity. Barely 10 seconds into a Tidal Master stream of Bob James' *Angela* and it's an immediate reset that, initially, has me doubting my senses. I think it's because what I'm expecting to hear is merely a better class of compromise management; closer tolerance versions of the approximations that mimic live music reality. And, in essence, that's usually the bare bones of the matter. Executed well, such skilled 'sonic engineering' can sound five-star impressive.

HOW IT COMPARES

If you're happy with a more imposing standmount, Audio Physic's Spark 6 and Fyne Audio's F1-8 (HFC 496 and 473) are hot contenders. Both plough their own path both technically and stylistically, and their ability to blend standmount and floorstander strengths are rare assets. Other contenders that might grace your £5-£7k shortlist could well include KEF's Reference 1 (HFC 414), Audiovector's R1 Arreté and the Wilson Benesch Precision P1.0. All are terrific performers with huge musical insight, but only the KEF and Spark 6 get close to matching the OePhi's immaculate timing and transparency.

But OePhi's stated all-embracing, cable-matched approach appears to resolve to a deeper level, allowing a presentation that feels truly clean, clear, open and pure, bereft of benign hype and manipulation and, indeed, the faintest hint of temporal drag or blur. What stuns is a not dissimilar level of coherence, speed and impulse accuracy to that of a point source single driver design like those made by Eclipse. The difference that fills out the sonic landscape so rewardingly is a broader bandwidth with greater dynamic potential, and the presence of a crossover designed to impose an essentially flat frequency response that has convincing low-end weight, extension and agility yet, in the treble, goes fearlessly all the way, demurring from the often-preferred top end roll-off to massage 'warmth' artificially.

Time domain precision certainly takes centre stage. Caravan Palace's *Supersonics* sounds as crisp as a freshly dispensed ATM tenner. I've rarely felt my right foot zone into the tempo so enthusiastically. But it isn't just about foot-tapping compunction. The tighter the timing, the better the musical flow and fluency but it also nets gains in soundstage air, imaging solidity, dimensionality and tonal texture. In other words, in sheer realism. A perfect playground for Caravan Palace and just about everything else.

Conclusion

There are standmounts that are more charismatic. Some might even give you a cosy cuddle if teamed with sympathetic amplification. Others appear to be hyper detailed if, ultimately, rather contrived and tiring. And, yes, it's all a matter of taste. But, for stone-cold realism and musical fluency, in my experience the Transcendence 2 has no peer in its price class or several above. In short, it's left me questioning if it's the most engrossing and irresistibly addictive small speaker I've ever reviewed ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY
★★★★★

VALUE FOR MONEY
★★★★★

BUILD QUALITY
★★★★★

EASE OF DRIVE
★★★★★

LIKE: Sublime, if unforgettingly honest, sound; build quality; matching cable

DISLIKE: Nothing at this price point

WE SAY: Speakers like this don't come along very often. A must hear if you're in the market

OVERALL

★★★★★