

SYSTEM AUDIO PANDION 5

Reviewer Jez Ford

LOUDSPEAKERS

▷ THE CURVING CABINETS OF OUR PANDION 5 REVIEW PAIR WERE FINISHED IN AN IMPECCABLE GLOSS BLACK WITH A STYLISH WHITE RACING STRIPE AND SYSTEM AUDIO LOGO ON THE TOP.



There's a saying that's generally attributed to Sir Alec Issigonis, the British-Greek car designer who created the Mini — "A camel is a horse designed by a committee". In alignment with

this axiom, it's commonplace for loudspeaker companies to have at their heart a single central guru of a designer, whose vision drives development, under the watchful eye of the company bean-counters and the marketing department with an eye to 'hitting a price', of course, but allowed a full head of steam when it comes to a prestigious reference design at least, and thereby avoiding any overtly corporate 'camel' creations.

At System Audio that central role is occupied by designer and engineer Ole Witthoft, who brings to the Danish company a strong focus on elegance of design, a turn of phrase which he interprets as meaning not merely the appearance and finish of the loudspeakers, but also their ability to achieve high performance — so design which is more than skin deep.

But Mr Witthoft must have a lower level of ego than some loudspeaker gurus. For the Pandion series, System Audio bravely tried something rather different — crowd-sourced development of the new loudspeaker concept. But not crowd-funding, note; it was not investment capital but intellectual capital that System Audio was aiming to encourage.

"The traditional No Entry sign on the R&D department was replaced by a 'Welcome,'" says the company proudly, and indeed the development of the Pandions was made an open process, using a dedicated blog on the Engineering House website to invite input and opinions on what it called the 'Q113 project'.

Crowd-sourcing is perhaps an overly broad term to describe those who followed the project. Over a two-year period, according to Witthoft, "110 volunteer engineers contributed their knowledge in such diverse areas as acoustics, electronics, mechanics, technical drawing and



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listening tests. The project's considerations, challenges and results have been published on the blog, and Speaker Q113 differs from products developed behind closed doors. It asks questions about how companies create environments that can foster new ideas."

Elsewhere that first Pandion, the standmount Pandion 2 (which was followed by the 120cm-high floorstanding Pandion 30) is noted as "tested and approved by 25 sound engineers and musicians and nearly 100 sound enthusiasts before production was started".

Which is all the more impressive when you realise that the blog appeared in Danish, not in English. Indeed the posts are filled with enthusiasm for the country's loudspeaker art.

"In December 2015, we (Danes) can mark the 100th anniversary of Peter L. Jensen's patent on the dynamic speaker," notes Witthoft in one. "This is not necessarily a important event in itself were it not that Denmark is 'a speaker country', without the majority of people being aware of it... the Danish Audio Network talks about about 20,000 people working with audio (or audio-related) products, services and much more. I repeat: 20,000 people!"

Such expertise has produced a final series of speakers being brought to Australian customers by Indi Imports, with the range currently comprising two standmounters and three floorstanders. The original Pandion 2 standmounters are impressively affordable at \$3499, while the 120cm-high Pandion 30s are

\$14,999, available in high gloss black, satin white or high gloss walnut — this is the model made Speaker of the Year in 2016 by Scandinavian test magazine *L&B*. The newer models are a smaller floorstander, the Pandion 20 at \$9999, a rangetopping Pandion 50 at \$19,999 ("our most ambitious speaker ever"), and the larger standmount Pandion 5 under review here at \$4999 — which System Audio calls "the best compact loudspeaker we have ever made".

FIVE FROM TWO

According to System Audio, the new standmount is the result of continued consultation with the community that was formed during the development of the original Pandions.

After the Pandion 2's technical drawings were publicly shared, "nearly 100 enthusiasts made proposals for changes to the original speaker. The proposals have been collected, tested, refined and further developed by SA's development team, and the result is SA Pandion 5."

From their performance, this appears to have been a virtuous feedback loop. We don't recall a pair of speakers which charmed us so completely from the moment we played music through them. We had been running them in as TV and movie speakers for several weeks as warm up, and their clarity and range had been evident, with dialogue crisp and true, effects slamming and music soundtracks spread wide and rich.

But that didn't prepare us for the day when we sat down for critical music listening, running CD and high-res audio favourites through two levels of amplification into the Pandion 5s. Their scale and accuracy was immediately evident, with the ability to bring a performance to life and to play both dynamic and complex music with complete confidence.

While on larger models System Audio tends to favour an MTM driver configuration, the standmount is a straight two-way, using the same two modified Scan-Speak drivers as in the smallest of the company's three floorstanders, with a crossover around 2kHz between the textile-dome tweeter and the mid-bass 10cm woofer with its characteristic slit-paper uncoated non-resonant cone and dust cap. System Audio emphasises the importance of lightness and speed in its search for clarity and soundstaging, choosing smaller and more lightweight driver membranes than conventionally used. But married with the Pandion 5 cabinet, this is a combination that also achieves impressive bass power and slam within its physical limits.

So while Audio Alchemy's *Marrakesh* was granted terrific edge to its guitar plucks, it was the tight punch to the kick drum and the full



presentation of the bass line that had us staring at these stylish 35cm standmounts in surprise. How tight the timing on Keith Jarrett's percussive piano runs through part three of the Köln Concert, how big and chunky the Hammond organ of *Green Onions*, and when we loaded some rock classics, how thrilling! As to their ability to rock'n'roll, heaven knows we're no huge Eagles fans, but the overly-familiar *Life in the Fast Lane* was a revelation here, its 24-96 FLAC bursting out of the Pandions as if we were listening to playback on the day it was recorded — drums and bass so full and forward, vocal in its recessed pocket as intended, a band performance in the space before us, not a mere rock recording from yesteryear.

We've heard speakers at this price that have been more revealing of a room acoustic (the ridged grilles are all but transparent acoustically, but we kept the off most of the time), but never a pair so positively entertaining, so connected to the music, so outright enjoyable across all manner of musical genres.

Credit also to their interaction with our amplification — they are rated at an average sensitivity of 87dB/W/m, but they never seemed short-changed by either a relatively midrange Cyrus amplifier (also on loan from distributor Indi Imports), or from our more powerful resident Musical Fidelity pre-powers.

CONCLUSION

The curving cabinets of our Pandion 5 review pair were finished in an impeccable gloss black with a stylish white racing stripe and SA logo on the top, with chunky cable connectors in an oval cut-out to the rear below a rear-firing port. No camels these, then! System Audio may have invited ideas and input from the 'crowd', but they've honed the results into a spectacular standmount performer in the Pandion 5.

Musically it soars like the kestrel after which the series is named, combining precision attack with performance power and strength. Crafty loudspeaker folk, those Danes. £

SPECIFICATIONS

SYSTEM AUDIO PANDION 5

CABINET TYPE: bass reflex
DESIGN: Two-way
TWEETER: D2905/990008
WOOFER: 133mm (5¼-inch)
 15W/4531G10
QUOTED FREQUENCY RANGE: 35-25,000Hz (±1.5dB)
IMPEDANCE: 4-8 ohm
SENSITIVITY: 87dB (1W/1m)
CROSSOVER NETWORK: 2000Hz (24dB/oct.)
DIMENSIONS (WHD): 210 × 360 × 340mm
WEIGHT: 10.5kg
FINISHES: High Gloss Black, High Gloss Walnut, Satin White
PRICE: \$4999
CONTACT: Indi Imports on 03 9416 7037
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