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Issue No. 522

January 2025

MINI MARVEL

Tiny SVS Ultra Evolution Nano packs a mighty punch



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Small wonder

Of the two standmounts in SVS' new Ultra Evolution series, the Nano looks the real deal. Consider **David Vivian** wowed

On a mythical university dedicated entirely to hi-fi studies, my guess is that every student would be required to deliver a thesis on how to design a world-beating £1,000 standmount speaker. Get that one right, I reckon, and the big brands will be queueing round the block come graduation day.

Thing is, there are so many great, over-achieving sub-£500 budget boxes on the market, questioning the need to spend more isn't just understandable but mandatory. In order to generate real temptation, it seems your £1k proposition must turbocharge the same tactic: look and feel like a £2k product at least and, if possible, boast tech from an even

more rarified price point, leveraging to the max the notion that a thousand notes, rather than being an outlay of dubious benefit, is a bit of a steal.

Not the easiest thing to pull off, even for the industry's big hitters. But Ohio-based SVS, perhaps still best known for its mortar-loosening subwoofers, is one of those and, with the new Ultra Evolution Nano – the smallest member of its six-strong premium loudspeaker family – the idea of shrinkage in form factor only, rather than cutting costs and corners in line with physical dimensions, finds a champion.

So, as with SVS' impressively lofty Ultra Evolution Pinnacle floorstanding flagship, driver design, component materials and cabinet architecture are

▶ DETAILS
PRODUCT
 SVS Ultra Evolution Nano
ORIGIN
 USA
TYPE
 2-way standmount loudspeaker
WEIGHT
 6.1kg
DIMENSIONS
 (WxHxD)
 190 x 314 x 243mm
FEATURES
 • 25mm diamond vapour coated aluminium dome tweeter
 • 133mm glass fibre mid/bass driver
 • Quoted sensitivity: 85dB/1W/1m (6ohm)
DISTRIBUTOR
 Karma AV
WEBSITE
svsound.com
karma-av.co.uk

constants to be found in the snack-sized Nano – most notably the angled, time-aligned baffle, the 25mm diamond vapour-coated aluminium dome tweeter sitting behind an 'organic cellular lattice diffuser', the 133mm glass fibre driver (mid/bass for the Nano, mid for the towers) and the superb, class-busting standard of build and finish – be it White Gloss, Black Gloss or Black Oak real wood veneer. The cabinet's radiused corners, the mild taper leading to the angled front baffle and the mirror-smooth tautility of the gloss finish are outstanding. A few juicy lines of marketing rhetoric never go amiss, either: "among the highest fidelity compact speakers ever created" one of the more eye-catching.

Round the back are good-quality single binding posts and a modest 41mm-diameter flared bass reflex port, interestingly offset to the right – possibly a cause of mild asymmetric bass output if the speakers are positioned too close to reinforcing room corners. Or, more usefully, a reminder to give them a little breathing space as the bass on offer doesn't need a boundary boost. The claimed 44Hz extension at -3dB looks very healthy for the size of box, likewise the rather academic but potentially dog-worrying 40kHz ceiling claimed for the tweeter. Amplifier requirements seem far from

arduous given the 85dB sensitivity and 6ohm nominal impedance. SVS says anything between 20 and 150W should be fine.

Sound quality

Is the Nano, as SVS claims: “among the highest fidelity compact speakers ever created”? Probably not – at least not in the strict sense. Is it among the most entertaining and enjoyable? More like it. Indeed, by seeming to resist what some would regard as the holy grail of a flat frequency response, coolly forensic monitor-style presentation, the Nano enjoys the freedom to sound great at every opportunity without being required to labour over ropey recordings or highlight the shortcomings of less than stellar ancillaries. In other words, it’s a quality small speaker – sound in design, build and component calibre – that appears to have been given a subtle yet colourful and enlivening sonic glow up. This could well be an asset in the demo room but, unlike some designs vigorously buffed for showroom sparkle, the Nano’s more measured approach is a good omen for long-term satisfaction at home.

Immediately likeable is the way it melds an invitingly smooth, full and warm presentation with properly incisive detail, crisp timing and top-end air while not making any element dominant. We often talk about ‘balance’ in terms of the prominence given to treble, mids and bass or gradations of tonal temperature and texture. But the ability to combine clarity with cuddly, and not cloud the former with the



The £1,000-£2,000 standmount sector is one of the most competitive going and is overflowing with serious talent. Arguably the sturdiest benchmark is B&W’s £1,300 707 S3 (HFC 513), the entry-level model from the acclaimed 700 Series range. It features a carbon dome and teams this with a 130mm Continuum cone mid/bass driver. Audiovector’s classy £1,350 QR1 SE (HFC 520) counters with an AMT tweeter, but the Nano’s diamond-coated dome more than holds its own with both. Of the three, the B&W is arguably the most technically advanced and is hard to fault, but the Audiovector and SVS are far warmer and more forgiving.

The 41mm flared reflex port is slightly offset from the centre



latter, is arguably more fundamental still and this is one sweet union the SVS absolutely nails.

True, it’s an accommodation that’s probably easier to engineer with a two-way standmount than a hulking, driver-festooned tower but, that said, here’s another notable asset: a quality of bass that, in the upper region, contributes to the attractive fullness and warmth, but doesn’t want for

It melds a smooth and warm presentation with incisive detail and crisp timing

extension or weight given the speaker’s small stature. It’s the reason the Nano can often seem more replete than some of its similarly sized rivals, especially those that set out chiefly to sound super keen and lean.

Does that make the Nano appear comparatively fat and laid back? Hardly. No lazy zzzzzs here, just rolling waves of zip, zest and zeal. On the odd occasion, it can seem as if it’s drawing refreshment from a drip-feed of Red Bull, promoting enhanced openness, energy and attack. This is certainly the case with a 24-bit/96kHz Tidal stream of *Green Flower Street* from Donald Fagan’s *The Nightfly Live* album, the Nano perhaps tailoring things to sound more live than live. Funky without a doubt. The cut doesn’t just come across as being tight, precise and neat in the usual Fagan fashion, but breathes wonderfully, rendering an expansive acoustic space and positively vibrant instrumental colours. Good time listening for sure.

Risking too much of a good thing, a slice of Quincy Jones’ *Q’s Jook Joint – Let The Good Times Roll* – keeps the joint jumping and, again, the Nano seems determined to make the most of what it’s given, the vocal contributions of Stevie Wonder and Ray Charles sounding anchored and powerful, exhibiting fine presence and intelligibility amid the scorching orchestral swell. Once more showing remarkable prowess in the lowest frequencies, the Nano’s bass delivers surprising weight and extension without boom or bloom and has commendable agility and drive.

Conclusion

There will continue to be arguments about what constitutes the ideal compact standmount speaker. Prioritising accuracy, something as much imagined as achieved in hi-fi, has its advocates and then there’s the Ultra Evolution Nano, a small speaker with a big heart that merely wants to give its listeners a good time, even if it means taking a few liberties. Can’t say I mind in the slightest ●



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

| | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★ | LIKE: Size; diamond tweeter; build and finish; feel-good sonics |
| VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★ | DISLIKE: Nothing of note at the price |
| BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★ | WE SAY: One of the best excuses we’ve encountered for spending £1,000 on a standmount speaker |
| EASE OF DRIVE ★★★★★ | |

OVERALL

