



Power tower

Chris Ward listens to German Physiks' latest omnidirectional floorstander to see if it's a great all-rounder

Looking more like a lighthouse than anything else, one glance at this extraordinary loudspeaker tells you that you're going to hear something different. The HRS-130 is no higher or wider than many large floorstanders, but this octagonal cross-section speaker is heavy, strongly braced and seriously dense. The cabinet is lined with a high-mass damping material called Hawaphon that consists of a polymer sheet containing a matrix of small cells filled with fine steel shot. Apart from the twin binding posts, there is nothing to denote a front, back or sides and being omnidirectional, it should deliver the same performance in every direction.

Build quality feels superlative with highly refined engineering meeting exquisite, hand-finished polished

The soundstage is so huge it's as though I can wander through the performers

surfaces. Here we see the gloss piano black, but you can choose from an extensive list of gloss, satin and veneer finishes. The HRS-130's origins can be traced back to the work of Lincoln Walsh in the sixties and more directly to the designs of visionary polymath Peter Dicks in the late seventies. Dicks wanted to create a transducer design that would avoid traditional driver weaknesses. His early designs have been advanced considerably, but this revolutionary driver fittingly retains his name, the Dicks Dipole Driver (DDD).

Put simply, traditional cone and dome drivers are like pistons, pushing sound energy broadly in the same direction the voice coil actuates, leading to the norm of rigid drivers that point towards a listener. The elongated cone shape of the DDD still has a voice coil and magnet assembly (pointing down) to drive it, but this cone is engineered to move, resonate and flex in four highly complex ways. It still acts partly like a piston driver, but the majority of its operating range is derived by the

voice coil pushing against a stiff, near rigid suspension that causes the driver walls to bend, flex and ripple, propagating sound waves up to near right angles to the direction of the actuating voice coil that creates a radiating sound pattern in 360°. The innovative driver design is precision manufactured using a very thin carbon fibre foil (only 0.15mm thick) that is relatively rigid at rest, but can be excited into complex but controllable waves. This is able to reproduce a vast range of frequencies from 220Hz up to 24kHz. Thereafter, the lowest octaves are handled by a 10in woofer firing downwards within the base, claimed to reach an impressive 29Hz. This low crossover point promises a coherent sound as it's way below the traditional midband area, where human hearing is most sensitive to phase errors.

I use a Veracity Mystra DAC (HFC 416) and Shanling CD-T100 transport via Missing Link Dark Art 75ohm digital connector and start by powering the HRS-130 with the Cyrus ONE (HFC 417) connected via Black Rhodium Sonata VS-1 RCA interconnects (HFC 398) and Black Rhodium Foxtrot speaker cable (HFC 412). I know the Cyrus ONE has very strong current delivery that may suit this design. Usefully, there is a system for adjusting the high-frequency output of the speaker if you have a very large or softly furnished listening space.

Room positioning takes a little experimentation. Too close to rear or side walls and reflected sound can upset the musical communication. Conversely, the downward-firing bass woofer can be reinforced by proximity to a wall, so it is relatively simple to move the speakers until the qualities of the DDD and woofer reach a happy balance. This equates to a little over a metre from the rear wall and slightly more from side walls.

Sound quality

Playing *You're The One* by Kaytranada gives me a direct comparison between my reference Cadence speakers and the HRS-130. The opening clicktrack/clap is rendered with real snap and speed. There's already extra ambience

DETAILS

PRODUCT
German Physiks
HRS-130

ORIGIN
Germany

TYPE
2-way floorstanding
loudspeaker

WEIGHT
34.5kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
325 x 1,259 x 325mm

FEATURES
• 1x Dicks Dipole
Driver (DDD)
• 1x 10in woofer
• Quoted sensitivity:
87dB (4ohm)

DISTRIBUTOR
German Physiks

TELEPHONE
0118 9819891

WEBSITE
german-physiks.
com

around this incisive beat that tells me the speaker is bringing something extra to the party. The bass line enters and the HRS-130 handles the lowest register with consummate ease. Deep bass has fantastic agility and is portrayed in an entirely musical way. Some speakers stretch their bass credentials, performing at the edge of their limits, but this just delivers the deepest frequencies without blinking. Warm but richly detailed vocals shine out from a totally immersive soundscape as a shaker or afuche-cabasa joins the mix, positively glistening with sweet, high-frequency sparkle. There is a 'projected' quality to the sound image, akin to a stage actor delivering a subtle soliloquy to the back of an auditorium. Communication is completely unforced, with music just flowing through the whole room, not overtly emanating from the drivers. The omnidirectional design propagates sound in a way that means I can walk around the room with little or no degradation to the image. Even people in the next room can be drawn in to the performance, in a way that other speakers simply can't match.

The HRS-130 presents a 4ohm load; not tough by high-end standards, but demanding a certain amount of power, or more likely current dynamics, to perform at its best. I connect a pair of Acousticimager ATSAH 500 monoblocks (HFC 404) to the Veracity

Looking like no other speaker, the HRS-130 also sounds like nothing else on the market



Q&A

Robert Kelly

Marketing manager,
German Physiks



CW: What are the musical benefits of the German Physiks' design?

RK: Having one compact driver produce almost the full audio range gives much greater coherence than splitting the sound over two or more drivers in different positions with different radiation characteristics. This gives better timing as there is no time delay distortion. Most conventional speakers find it very difficult to make the join between two drivers seamless. We avoid a crossover point in the midrange where hearing is most sensitive to achieve improved transparency.

You're no longer tied to a small sweet spot. You can enjoy a stereo image with even frequency distribution from a broad range of positions in the room, just as you would in the real concert, so several people can enjoy high-quality sound together and long-term listening is more relaxed. In a live environment, much of the sound you hear is reflected, so you sit in an enveloping soundfield. This reflected sound helps to give the stereo image its sense of solidity. Omnidirectional speakers, with a similar enveloping soundfield closely mimic the live event and are able to produce a more natural rendition of the original stereo image. This has excellent depth and focus, but without the overly sharp or artificial image definition that some speakers produce, which you will rarely – if ever – hear at a live performance.

What's special about the approach to engineering and construction?

Work is done by a small number of highly dedicated people working on small volumes to maximise personal pride and attention to detail in creating a very high-quality product. If something is not perfect, it does not get shipped. Cabinets have been built using a local quality furniture maker in Germany for many years. They understand the high level of quality demanded and will even match a veneer or a shade of paint to a sample approved by the customer, so speakers can match furniture or décor.

IN SIGHT



- 1 Dicks Dipole Driver
- 2 System for adjusting high-frequency output
- 3 Bi-wireable loudspeaker binding posts



HOW IT COMPARES

The Magneplanar MG 20.7 is a large but very talented speaker that demands space and power, but rewards with lightning dynamics and very strong top-to-bottom coherence. Being a panel, the sweet spot is more pronounced than the HRS-130 and while bass depth is deceptively strong, many will prefer the slam of the HRS-130.

At a similar price, Wilson Audio's Sabrina speaker is a beautifully even-handed performer with superb imaging. The soundstage produced by German Physiks feels more natural and live, but the Sabrina's more orthodox presentation is very accomplished and highly compelling. If you have the budget, ask quality dealers to provide extended demonstrations in your own listening room.

Mystra DAC, using its gain control to adjust volume. I now have a mighty 700W to see what more the German Physiks can give.

I press play on the same track and the speaker shifts up two gears. I'm drawn into the music and forget to take notes. The soundstage is huge and it's as though I can wander through the performers. Dynamics top and bottom extend and sound quality of the midband becomes translucent, transcending the black towers in the room. Bass quality becomes a set of pure notes with extra texture and a punch that is visceral, but doesn't seem to aggravate room modes. Every individual hi-fi quality has improved, but the effect is complete musicality and unbridled communication.

It's important to underline that this is not a function of brute amplification power. More that this revolutionary speaker design deserves never to be left hungry for the current and control for it to fully perform. It's similar to an F1 car engine; it can be driven at lower revs, but it really comes on song when being worked in a kind of power band that enables all of that engineering to fully optimise.

I switch sources and spin Mike Valentine's direct cut vinyl of *Too Darn Hot* performed by Clare Teale and the

SLO on my vintage Townshend Rock Elite turntable via Timestep T-01MC phono stage (HFC 371). The opening rasp from the brass section is utterly compelling and the kick drum is as fast as a gunshot. The responsiveness and ability to handle fast transients is near the speed of an electrostatic speaker, but without a panel's bass limitations or a 'beamy' sweet spot. Clare's voice has a honey richness and electrified air and every acoustic performer seems to have extra room to breathe, with huge dynamic swings and dense detail effortlessly conveyed. This 'one take', live performance is delivered with stunning top-to-bottom 'live' coherence that completely communicates the musical prowess, emotional power and immediacy of this highly dynamic recording. It really doesn't get any better than this.

Conclusion

The HRS-130 combines the speed and imaging qualities of an electrostatic panel with the coherence and communication of a full-range driver, along with the air shifting qualities of a dedicated subwoofer. Huge, wide, tall soundstages are continuous sweet spots that permeate even large listening rooms in an entirely natural and unforced way with fast transient dynamics, pure bass notes and dense complexity simply flowing as music should. Acoustic music feels live and mesmerising, while electronica is able to transport you to another world. The HRS-130 deserves high-quality and generous amplification to shine fully. £14.5k is a considerable sum, but this is a lot of high-quality engineering and hand-finished luxury for the price, and I've just heard £1,600 of well-chosen amplification create a performance that could challenge some well-regarded six-figure systems. Add another pair of monoblocks to bi-amp each speaker and it could well be a giant slayer ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY



★★★★★

VALUE FOR MONEY



★★★★

BUILD QUALITY



★★★★★

EASE OF DRIVE



★★★★☆

OVERALL



★★★★★

LIKE: Effortless musicality; bass control; natural soundstage

DISLIKE: Demands quality amplification; styling may not suit all

WE SAY: More 'musical instrument' than loudspeaker. Highly natural performance