

£1,600 per pair ☎ 01623 517000 🌐 www.amphion.fi

AMPHION PRIO 520

Floorstander represents the HFC debut for this Finnish brand

Amphion is a Finnish brand that has been in existence for about a decade. Its speakers have tended to be relatively upmarket as well as notably stylish affairs. But recent additions like the £1,600 Prio 520 are more affordable, while still maintaining those super-clean Scandinavian lines. Our Prio 520s came beautifully finished in a classy birch wood veneer, but that's a relatively costly option at £300 extra. A pair of Prio 520s are also available for just £1,300, provided you settle for a graphite black or white painted finish.

Twin bass/mid drivers are mounted above and below the tweeter, in a configuration named after developer Joseph d'Appolito. And, because these are relatively small units, the speakers are remarkably slim. Both these diaphragm main drivers operate in parallel, so their combined acoustic centre effectively coincides with the location of the tweeter.



In fact, the *piece de resistance* is the tweeter. Although at heart a conventional 25mm metal dome affair, its 'waveguide' mounting is anything but. A species of horn, but with a very wide flare, its ultimate core function is to allow the crossover point to be lowered by about an octave, from the 3kHz norm down to 1.6kHz, so moving it below the zone where the ears are most sensitive. Because it also recesses the tweeter, this improves its potential time alignment with the two cone units.

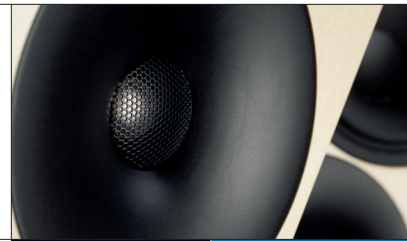
The enclosure comes complete with a proper plinth to improve the stability footprint, but the spikes put cosmetics ahead of function, with short shafts and no locknuts. This not only prevents the spikes being properly secured, it also makes it difficult to tilt the speaker slightly backwards, which is worth doing if you're tall or sit quite high off the ground. Because the two main drivers of a d'Appolito arrangement operate in parallel – effectively simulating a single driver – best focus will be obtained when the two are precisely equidistant from the listeners, with the ears precisely on the tweeter's vertical axis. A single pair of high-quality terminals is fitted close to the floor, just below the generous rear port.

SOUND QUALITY

Delicious and delicate, are the adjectives that first spring to mind. Best suited to free space siting, well clear of walls, the Prio 520 doesn't 'do' really deep bass. But that's a sensible choice in view of its lively disposition through the rest of the bass region.

Tonally it has a warm, rich and essentially neutral character that's very easy on the ears, with impressively clean voice reproduction, albeit with a slight tendency to exaggerate chestiness. Throughout the listening work it became apparent that the Prio 520 is very sensitive to both positioning and orientation. Although results are never unsatisfactory, once both speakers and the listener are positioned exactly right, the whole image snaps sharply into focus. At its best this speaker is capable of fine focus and very superior imaging, with good depth perspectives and precise soundstaging.

While it is a trifle laid back, voices in no way sound 'shut in' here. Rather, the voice band has an engaging openness, yet also sufficient restraint to avoid becoming unpleasantly fierce or aggressive – a persuasive combination that makes this speaker particularly inviting for long term listening. **HFC**



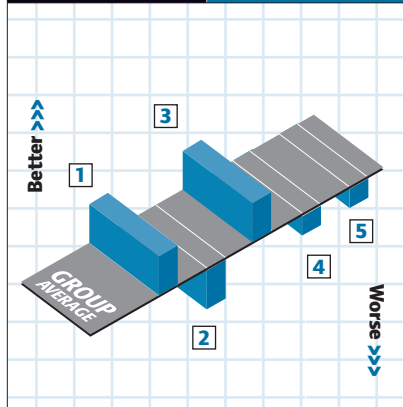
LAB REPORT

The sheer precision of this speaker led to some inconsistencies when repeating the in-room measurements: simply because they 'read' the room modes so accurately, small variations in the speaker positions led to significant response differences.

Our high 90dB sensitivity rating is close to the 91dB claimed and although there's little bass output below 40Hz, the impedance is not unduly difficult to drive, staying above four ohms throughout. However, the curves did reveal some pair matching discrepancies at low frequencies, and a resonance at 180Hz.

Best kept clear of walls, the in-room far-field averaged responses show some unevenness through the bass and lower mid, alongside a smooth and well integrated upper mid and treble. Clearly the waveguide is doing a good job through the crossover region, though the ultimate rolloff above 10kHz is, perhaps, a shade premature.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> +20%
- 2] Bass extension >> -20%
- 3] Ease of drive >> +20%
- 4] Overall frequency balance >> -10%
- 5] Response smoothness >> -10%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	91dB	90dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	4 ohms	6/4.5 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	-	40Hz

VERDICT

SOUND >> 86%

PRACTICALITY >> 86%

BUILD >> 85%

VALUE >> 84%

This exceptionally elegant floorstander uses a waveguide to reduce the crossover frequency and improve voice integrity. The result is lively, with a sweet top end and fine coherence when carefully sited.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE 85%

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DALI MENTOR 5

This very compact and pretty floorstander ticks all the right boxes

Danish Audiophile Loudspeaker Industries (DALI for short) has a number of different speaker ranges and the relatively new Mentors slot neatly into the price gap between the near-budget vinyl-finished Ikons and the more costly Helicon and Euphonia ranges.

The Mentor range has gradually expanded since we first encountered the large floorstanding Mentor 6 a little more than a year ago (*HFC* 290), and if that model proved a little too large and bassy for our 4.3x2.6x5.5m listening room, there's a good chance this smaller Mentor 5 pair will fit the bill rather better.

It's certainly one of the prettiest and most compact floorstanders around, standing just 88 cms off the deck and also looking slim from any angle, thanks to the use of relatively small 130mm bass/mid and bass drivers. High-quality real wood veneered enclosures are available in either cherry or black, too.

All the Mentors use variations on DALI's proprietary dome/ribbon treble module theme, above a range of different size enclosures and

bass/mid drivers. In this middle model, the smallest of three floorstanders, the two 130mm drivers have 95mm dish-shaped doped paper diaphragms. Loaded by a rear-port, the upper main driver operates all the way up to the main 3kHz crossover point, while the lower one is just used to reinforce the bass and lower midband and starts rolling off above 800Hz. The treble module combines a 28mm soft dome and a 17x45mm ribbon on a single chassis, the ribbon just operating above 10kHz, partly to extend the bandwidth and partly to ensure consistently wide lateral distribution.

The enclosure has slightly convex front and back panels, presumably to increase stiffness and marginally reduce standing wave focusing. The whole thing feels very solid too, with a total weight of 13.5kg. The drivers themselves are mounted on an extra silver-grey flat baffle panel. A neat separate plinth improves the stability footprint, and if thumbwheels lock the spikes, they seemed more effective than usual. Twin terminal pairs apply the signal input, permitting bi-wiring/bi-amping options.

SOUND QUALITY

Clearly intended for free space siting, the very compact dimensions tend to place the ribbon tweeter a little below seated ear height. It may, therefore, be worth adjusting the spikes slightly, so that those at the front are slightly longer than those at the rear, giving the speaker a slight backward tilt.

While there's no denying the good overall tonal balance and fundamental neutrality of this speaker, it also has to be acknowledged that in other respects its communication skills are unimpressive. Over a period of several days it behaved itself impeccably, but failed to excite much enthusiasm on the part of the listeners, as both dynamic expression and all-round coherence seemed rather weak.

Some midband boxiness was audible on speech, perhaps as a consequence of that slight upper mid-prominence. The rather strong treble noted in the measurements was also obvious enough, but it's inherently sweet, rarely seemed intrusive and should be easily handled with a little care in system matching.

It's always frustrating to find a speaker that seems to tick all the right boxes in terms of ingredients and measurements, shows no obvious signs of weakness, and yet somehow lacks the vital spark that breaks down the barrier between musician and listener. In the case of the Mentor 5, the whole seems rather less than the sum of its parts, musically speaking. **HFC**

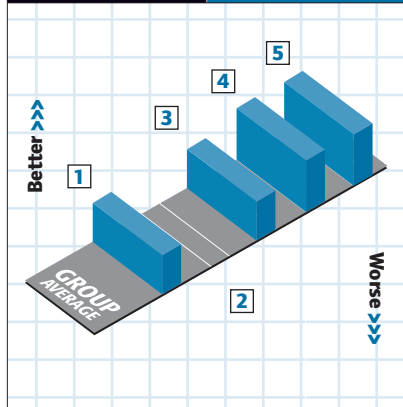


LAB REPORT

The Mentor 5 comfortably meets – indeed marginally exceeds – its 88dB sensitivity rating, our figure just reaching an above average 89dB. Furthermore, it does so without compromising the amplifier load, as the impedance trace stays at, or above, six ohms throughout and demonstrates good pair-matching to boot.

With the speakers sited well clear of walls, the overall in-room far-field averaged response trace looks very well ordered, holding within +/-3dB right across the band, apart from a slight excess around 50Hz, where the 47Hz port tuning frequency coincides with the major standing wave modes in the room used for measurement. There's some unevenness along the way, most notably in a slight forwardness between 900Hz and 1.3kHz, and the treble looks a shade strong, even though it's also obviously flat and smooth, but in truth these are more in the nature of observations than complaints.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> +20%
- 2] Bass extension >> 0%
- 3] Ease of drive >> +20%
- 4] Overall frequency balance >> +30%
- 5] Response smoothness >> +30%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	88dB	89dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	6 ohms	8/6 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	42Hz	30Hz

VERDICT

SOUND >> 77%

PRACTICALITY >> 85%

BUILD >> 87%

VALUE >> 80%

This unusually compact floorstander has all the right ingredients and delivers a good performance. However, the sound quality lacks the dynamic enthusiasm and coherence to inspire listener involvement

HIFI CHOICE 80% OVERALL SCORE