

Reviews Subwoofers

Key Features

- Active subwoofer
- 150W RMS power amplifier
- 250mm downward-firing long-throw drive unit
- Bass from 16Hz-99Hz (manufacturer claim)
- Front status LED panel, controlling all settings
- Remote control with user memory settings
- Child locks
- Phono low-level and Neutrik Speakon high-level connections
- LFE by-pass for direct amplifier control
- Power-saving amplifier system

Connections

- 2x gold-plated phono sockets for low-level inputs
- Neutrik Speakon socket for high-level input
- Three-pin IEC mains socket

Dimensions

- 464 x 334 x 324mm



£800

REL Acoustics Strata 5



With a remote control and front LEDs, REL has jumped into the 21st Century with the Strata 5 subwoofer

UNTIL RECENTLY, REL'S RANGE OF SUBWOOFERS WAS sublime, if a bit boring. Other subwoofer companies have sprung up recently, offering extra features that were not present on REL models. Subs have appeared with remote controls, front-mounted controls and extra features that deviate from the basic subwoofer box, all of which make the REL design appear a bit basic. The new Strata 5 changes all that.

Replacing the Strata III (few electronics manufacturers use the number 4, because it's unlucky in the Asia), the Strata 5 has no controls on the rear panel, but has a front-mounted dial instead, blue LED display and remote control. This arrangement allows the user to adjust low and high level, roll-off frequency, slam/depth adjustment and phase, all from an armchair. The big blue LEDs are big enough to be seen from across the room and combine to make setting up the Strata 5 easier than any REL product before it. As long as you keep the manual to hand, that is – otherwise you might spend days wondering exactly what "LFoF", "dt50" or "trHi" mean.

"Sets a new standard at the price"

Fortunately, there's a system lockout to prevent accidental adjustment of one of these myriad parameters. The subwoofer is a closed-box unit with a downward-firing 250mm driver and a 150W built-in FET-based power amplifier. This also raises the power from that of its predecessor, which was equipped with a 100W amplifier.

REL has described a sophisticated setup routine for getting the best out of ST series subs – called POPI (short for Phase, Orientation, Position, Integration). REL suggests starting with the sub in a corner of the room. However, the orientation part of this set up process is not an issue for the Strata 5; it is only relevant for ported subwoofers. Adjust these three remaining

What we like about this sub

- Stunning sound with music and movies
- Remote allows real hands-on control

What we don't like about this sub

- Not as much punch as expensive subs
- Front LED display can be a bit confusing
- Remote can lead to constant fiddling

boomy or shouty. Instead, the subwoofer seems to improve on all the right parameters, like speed, control and finesse.

This is a very fast subwoofer, sounding like it's being controlled by a 500W amplifier rather than a 150W one. And this presents a peculiar, but highly desirable bonus; it makes the other speakers in the system seem bigger and better. This is especially true when used in hi-fi settings, but also happens in multichannel music and movie settings. It's this integration which makes the REL stand out, while the grip it has over sound and the subtle way it manages not to render blockbusters OTT marks it out as something special.

The Strata 5 perfectly balances size, performance and price for most mid-to-high-end systems. New gadgets, like the remote, help make life simple, while the sound is so good that it makes subwoofers costing £1,000 or more seem less impressive. Correctly set-up, this sounds magnificent – just resist the temptation to keep fiddling with the remote.

POPI parameters in order (as described on the REL website) to find the optimum subwoofer sound, and this really works. It might take an inordinate number of hours to set the system up, though, due to time spent playing with the remote. You can get used to this and, if you are not careful, could easily end up in a state of permanent tweaking. The previous Strata III was a tough model to beat, but the Strata 5 doesn't just eclipse its predecessor, it sets a new standard for the price, and beyond. It pumps out good, powerful bass, deeper than before but not

Essential HomeCinema Verdict	
REL Acoustics Strata 5	
Sales	REL 01656 768777
Web	www.rel.net
EASE OF USE	★★★★★
LOOKS	★★★★★
FEATURES	★★★★★
SOUND	★★★★★
VALUE	★★★★★
VERDICT	REL has worked hard on the Strata 5. It's so good, it even overshadows the company's own more up-market Storm subwoofer.
Overall	★★★★★
BEST RIVALS	B&W ASW600 Monitor Audio FastBass FB110 REL Quake