

Wharfedale Diamond 230 | Stereo speakers | **£500**

Compact floorstanders offer fine value

Our first experience of the Wharfedale Diamond 200 series was encouraging. The 220 standmounters, we decided, are the best-sounding budget speakers around - so much so that we gave them an Award.

No pressure, then, for the Diamond 230s, the compact floorstanders of Wharfedale's entry-level range. Will they be a resounding success like their siblings, or the black sheep of the family? The results are in - and these are great floorstanders for the money.

First things first, you want to give them a good run-in. Fresh from the box, you won't get anything remotely representative of their potential. Give them at least a day. We left them running for a weekend.

At which point, anything more than a cursory listen should lead to the suspicion that these are five-star performers.

The first thing you'll notice is their sense of scale. It's a big sound, easily capable of filling a big living-room. The soundstage is

tall, wide and spacious. Close your eyes and these speakers can give the impression they're bigger than they are.

Of course, size isn't everything. These floorstanders are talented in other areas. The level of clarity is certainly impressive. They deliver a clean sound, helped by precision in timing and definition. That's especially the case in the midrange, which is clearer and more detailed than we'd expect for floorstanders at this price. Vocals are engaging, as is a spot of guitar fiddling. We find ourselves rapt with attention at an unhealthy number of Johnny Cash tracks.

A crisp, punchy sound

Elsewhere, the treble is crisp but not harsh. Move down to the low end, and it's punchy and weighty while maintaining a good sense of agility. It could conceivably do with a bit more texture, but that's not lacking enough to ruin what is otherwise an authoritative, entertaining listen.

The frequency range is well balanced. Nothing distracts, or demands undue attention. We're particularly impressed with the level of integration, the drivers

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Rega Brio-R

It may be only a half-width chassis, but this amp provides wide-screen sound



performing as a cohesive whole, never giving the impression that a rogue element has other ideas.

Try free-standing and toed-in

Do take care with set-up. Wharfedale recommends placing the Diamond 230s at least 20cm from the back wall and 70cm from the sides, and we'd suggest moving the speakers around to experiment. And consider a bit of toeing-in, which helps to firm up the stereo image while sacrificing just a little of the soundstage width.

We're pleased to see Wharfedale has addressed the finish-related quibbles we levelled at the Diamond 100 series. A new lacquered baffle adds class and, where before there were unsightly bumps beneath vinyl wrap, the surface is now smooth.

This is in part thanks to a new cabinet, made with particleboard sandwiched between MDF. This provides a rigid and well-damped structure, which helps to reduce the amount of cabinet distortion.

Internally, there's a bigger magnet on the bass driver's motor system. This makes it easier to drive and improves responsiveness. There's also an upgraded crossover, which aims to improve the integration of drive units. We think it works.

Unusual bass-tuning technology

Elsewhere, the Diamonds are unchanged. The tweeter is the same, sitting in a deeply dished waveguide which helps efficiency.

Also present is the unusual bass tuning introduced in the Diamond 100 series. Instead of going with the more usual front or rear bass reflex port, Wharfedale is firing downwards into a gap between the cabinet and its plinth. This helps with port efficiency and reduces chuffing noise, and is claimed to make the speaker less fussy when it comes to placement.

We really like the Wharfedale Diamond 230s. They're talented performers, and for the money you're getting a great deal.

A new cabinet structure and a lacquered baffle combine to make the classy finish of the Diamond 230s



Rating ★★★★★

FOR Large scale; detailed midrange; good frequency integration

AGAINST Could do with a little more subtlety at low frequencies

VERDICT Wharfedale has made a great pair of budget floorstanders

Also consider

Q Acoustic 2050i
£420 ★★★★★

A multi-Award winner with a smooth, full-bodied sound

