

# *Stereophile's* Products of 2012 Loudspeaker of the Year

## Loudspeaker of the Year Vivid Audio Oval K1

This race was tight. Of the 11 worthy contenders in our "Loudspeakers" category, seven—from the overachieving Joseph Audio Pulsar to the otherworldly MBL Radialstrahler 101E Mk.II—garnered first-place votes. But no loudspeaker impressed our writers more than Vivid Audio's Oval K1, an unusual-looking design with an unusually powerful and compelling sound.



Though it's been a while since I last heard the Oval K1, I'm very well acquainted with its little brother. Vivid's Oval B1 is outwardly similar to our winner, but has a shorter cabinet and two fewer woofers. At the 2012 Newport Beach Show, the B1 nevertheless knocked me out with its crazy ability to project scale, its superfast transient response, and, most of all, its wonderful, musical bass. Vivid's US importer, Philip O'Hanlon, had showgoers packed into his room and crowded round its door, happy to hear pop hits by Beyoncé and Michael Jackson. It's hard for me to imagine greater bass impact than that offered by the B1, but according to John Marks, that's exactly what we can expect from the Oval K1.

And while JM was indeed satisfied by the Oval K1's remarkable low-end performance, it was the speaker's midrange and lower-treble character that most impressed him: Voices and stringed instruments floated solidly and effortlessly in space, the K1 showcasing the kind of transparency and three-dimensionality common to the best electrostatic designs. JM was happily mystified. How could a couple extra woofers have such a positive overall effect on the music? According to O'Hanlon, the magic comes from the K1's unique crossover design and its higher minimum impedance (4.8 ohms *vs* the B1's 2.8 ohms), making the speaker an easier load for partnering

amplification.

But should we dwell on *why* the K1 sounds so good? Halfway through his review, JM stopped talking about speakers almost entirely, and devoted his attention to the music. He promptly busted out the guilty pleasures—Julie London and Alannah Myles, among others—sat back in the Eames Lounge Chair of his mind, and let the music take him away.

"Vivid's Oval K1 is one of the best loudspeakers I have ever heard," he said. "If you can afford it, I think it delivers even better value for money than the Oval B1. Bravo."

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