

Wilson Audio Sabrina V

The compact SabrinaX floorstander has been reimagined from top to bottom, resulting in the aspirational Sabrina V
 Review: **Andrew Everard** Lab: **Paul Miller**

Everywhere, from the alphabet to Roman numerals, V comes before X, so you might expect Wilson Audio's Sabrina V to be a lesser version of the SabrinaX model [HFN Dec '20], which was an upgrade of the original Sabrina [HFN Aug '15]. Not so: the Sabrina V is a redesigned and rethought version of the X, with changed and improved components, sharpened up styling, and a significant price increase.

While the SabrinaX started from just under £21,500, the new Sabrina V's ticket is heftier still, starting at £32,998. This brings the Sabrina V up against a range of mightily impressive rivals – especially when you consider that this is the company's smallest and most affordable floorstanding model, a very long way short of flagship designs such as the Chronosonic XVX, which are comfortably in 'POA' territory. Fortunately – to these eyes at least – the Sabrina V, while definitely distinctive, is a lot more conventional than the sci-fi 'Mechatron meets Transformers' look of those top models.

TROOPING THE COLOUR

Instead, the Sabrina V's tapered pyramid style is a little taller, more elegant and subjectively less 'boxy' than that of the SabrinaX. Standard 'WilsonGloss' colours are Galaxy Grey, Quartz and Carbon, with 'Upgrade' options (+5%) of Ivory, Diamond Black and Crimson Satin. There are a further 11 pearlescent colourways – from Saffron to Blue Orchid – and then a choice of custom colours from the RAL/PANTONE, etc, automotive lists at extra cost. Our Sabrina V review pair was finished in a custom Rubellite Red Metallic (a Maybach colour!) which looks like a very dark hue of cranberry and aubergine.

Under all this colour, the speaker enclosures are built using a combination of Wilson's proprietary composite materials – mineral-loaded polymers of varying density, stiffness and damping properties.

The Sabrina V still uses X-Material for the outer cabinet panels, but combines this with the slightly softer H-Material, which is said to offer better damping properties for the baffle. Meanwhile, the company's V-Material is used for the base of the cabinet, into which the supplied spikes can be bolted (of which more later).

SOUND SYNERGY

The drivers here have all been upgraded and are now shared across various models in the Wilson range [see PM's boxout, p53]. The tweeter is the company's Convergent Synergy Carbon (CSC) design, with a lightly doped silk dome, while the midrange is a 7in/178mm unit with paper-pulp cone and

AlNiCo (Aluminium/Nickel/Cobalt) QuadraMag 'motor', designed for 'warmth and linearity in the all-important vocal/instrumental band'.

This midrange driver is mounted in its own enclosure, with

a dedicated resistive vent, while the 8in/200mm paper-composite bass unit has also been developed not just for its light weight but also speed and agility, these last qualities being especially evident when listening to the Sabrina V.

The three-way crossover, mounted into the base of the cabinet, is another Wilson speciality, using in-house-made components, and point-to-point wiring rather than a default PCB. Notable here are the in-house 'Reliable Capacitors' (Rel-Caps) used in all the company's loudspeakers, and particularly the copper-wound AudioCapX-WA capacitors, claimed to realise improved low-level resolution and tonal subtlety. Additionally, Wilson's familiar mid/treble protection and tuning resistors are now mounted

RIGHT: Seen here in 'Rubellite Red Metallic' the 'X-Material' cabinet with 'H-Material' baffle is supported on substantial spikes and hosts a 200mm reflex-loaded pulp woofer, 178mm QuadraMag midrange and 25mm CSC tweeter

'There was a delicious growl from Peer Gynt's basses'



'The mid and treble protection and tuning resistors are now mounted into an easy-access port'

DRIVER RATIONALISATION

Wilson Audio has ploughed significant resource into its driver development which probably explains why it has fewer individual driver types than it has speaker *models*. For example, its Convergent Synergy Carbon (CSC) tweeter, developed for the Alexx V [HFN Jan '22], is also deployed across the range in the Alexia V [HFN Jan '23], Sasha V [HFN Sep '23], The WATT/Puppy [HFN Sep '24], Mezzo CSC and Alida CSC as well as the new Sabrina V auditioned here. The 200mm woofer of the Sabrina V is also used in the Sasha V, The WATT/Puppy and Mezzo CSC, but differs from the Alexx V's 200mm unit which was designed to complement a partnering 255mm woofer, these both derived from the flagship WAMM Master Chronosonic. However, it's the 178mm QuadraMag midrange, originally developed for the Chronosonic XVX, that's most extensively 'trickled down' into the Alexx V, Alexia V, Sasha V, The WATT/Puppy and Mezzo CSC as well as the Sabrina V.

Inevitably, both the QuadraMag midrange and woofer are best suited to specific cabinet volumes so Wilson's expertise comes into play where the cabinet volume falls below this 'sweet spot'. In practice, the driver loading is optimised by adjusting the cabinet dimensions for a given air volume, in addition to the crossover, the venting and the internal acoustic damping. Ultimately, 'Listening and fine-tuning this equation brings us to what sounds "ideal" given the audio band the driver is responsible for reproducing', says CEO Daryl Wilson. 'It is a blend and balance of science and art.' PM

into a port at the cabinet rear, framed by a machined aluminium panel decorated with the Sabrina V logo [see p51].

Coming back to those feet, while the standard spikes supplied are of extremely high quality, their large-diameter threads are designed to make it easy for the user to substitute Wilson's 'Acoustic Diode' feet if required. These use a section of V-Material between the thread bolted into the speaker cabinet and the spike itself, with the aim of dissipating unwanted energy from the speaker while stopping any vibrations from the floor going back up into the cabinet. They're yours for £4500 for a set of eight.



V FOR VICTORY

Used on the end of the dCS Varèse streamer/DAC [HFN Feb '25] and Constellation Audio Revelation 2 [HFN Jan '25] system in the HFN Listening Room, the Sabrina Vs proved that, despite their relatively compact dimensions – oh, all right then, they're not huge, anyway – they can deliver a big, bold, room-filling sound without trading away any detail or definition.

From the outset, the Sabrina Vs impressed with the latest Rachel Podger/Brecon Baroque release, *Just Biber* [Channel Classics CCS48525] where the sound was warm and generous, but with a truly human scale. There was fine listen-in detail rather than elements being over-emphasised, and speed and attack in the playing, along with excellent tonality in the strings and

continuo. The soundstaging was open and clean, relaxed but totally involving, while the tone of Podger's violin proved nothing short of glorious.

SHOOT TO THRILL

With larger musical forces, in this case the Vienna Philharmonic under Tugan Sokhiev on the *Summer Night Concert* release [Sony 19802935402, 96kHz/24-bit], the Sabrina Vs delivered a vivid sense of the weight of the orchestra, again with that unforced instrumental separation. There was also a delicious growl in the basses on the 'Morning' section of Grieg's *Peer Gynt*. Notable too was the drive and rhythmic acuity on Strauss's *Wiener Blut* waltz which ends the programme, the dynamics thrilling as the piece builds, but with an easygoing swing and flow to the music.

A complete change to the new remix of Jethro Tull's 'Locomotive Breath', from *Still Living In The Past* [Chrysalis 5021732368409], found the bass remaining tight, fast and extended, with excellent slam in the rhythm. The vocal here is a little recessed, but the sound was open and transparent with Steven Wilson's 2016 remix of 'Living In The Past', and Ian Anderson's flute had excellent breathiness, as one might hope.

There are times when the Sabrina Vs' hefty bass can almost be their undoing; they just about keep under control the over-heavy lows of the extended

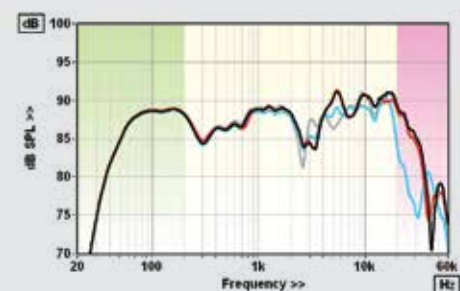


LAB REPORT

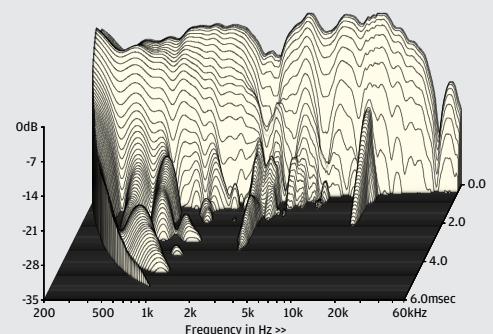
WILSON AUDIO SABRINA V

The technical performance of the Sabrina V versus the previous X [HFN Dec '20] can be summed up quite simply: it is slightly less sensitive (88.9dB vs. 89.6dB/1kHz), the response is slightly less uniform (errors are ± 3.8 dB vs. ± 2.9 dB, re. 200Hz-20kHz) and it's a little tougher to drive, but all this is traded for lower distortion and significantly better bass extension. The SabrinaX already boasted very low distortion, but the V is more linear still, particularly through the bass where it settles out at $\sim 0.1\%$ THD (re. 50Hz-200Hz, 1m/90dB SPL). Port output has been increased, without exposing quarterwave or pipe modes, while the bass tuning reaches down some 10Hz lower than we saw in the SabrinaX. The diffraction-corrected bass extension still shows a fairly steep roll-off but this is now at 42Hz instead of the X's 52Hz [-6dB re. 200Hz; green shaded area, Graph 1].

Otherwise, the V's forward response [Graph 1] clearly inherits the dips in upper bass and mid/presence seen with the X, albeit slightly shifted in frequency, plus associated milder driver resonances, and 15kHz dome mode [see CSD waterfall, Graph 2]. The press-to-fit grille has an impact – not entirely unwelcome – to presence and treble [grey trace, Graph 1] but a far smoother response, with reduced ± 3.4 dB errors, is revealed by toeing the speakers a little off axis [blue trace] – this will surely be the preferred set-up for many listeners. Impedance has got a little tougher, as I mentioned, so while the nominal is quoted as 4ohm with an accurately specified 2.2ohm/121Hz minimum, the accompanying swings in phase angle from $-65^\circ/65$ Hz to $+43^\circ/1.4$ kHz result in a very tough 0.95ohm EPDR at 84Hz. PM



ABOVE: Response inc. nearfield summed driver/port [green], freefield corrected to 1m at 2.83V [yellow], ultrasonic [pink]. L, black; R, red; $\pm 15^\circ$, blue; grille, grey



ABOVE: There are mild driver modes at 2.3kHz and 15kHz, the former also seen in The WATT/Puppy

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Sensitivity (SPL/1m/2.83V – 1kHz/Mean/IEC)	88.9dB / 87.7dB / 86.1dB
Impedance modulus: minimum & maximum (20Hz–20kHz)	2.27ohm @ 125Hz 20ohm @ 18Hz
Impedance phase: minimum & maximum (20Hz–20kHz)	-63° @ 65Hz $+43^\circ$ @ 1.36kHz
Pair matching/Resp. error (200Hz–20kHz)	0.5dB / ± 3.8 dB / ± 3.9 dB
LF/HF extension (–6dB ref 200Hz/10kHz)	42Hz / 31.8kHz/32.3kHz
THD 100Hz/1kHz/10kHz (for 90dB SPL/1m)	0.1% / 0.15% / 0.3%
Dimensions (HWD) / Weight (each)	990x305x391mm / 56kg

LEFT: The 200mm bass driver is reflex-loaded via an alloy port while a resistive slot serves the midrange driver. As with other Wilson speakers, the Sabrina V is fitted with a single set of 4mm terminals

section, with crisp percussion, deep bass and great backing vocals behind Gabriel's distinctive voice. And yes, it sounds live!

PLAYING IT COOL

Give the Sabrina Vs a chill-down with the gentle beats of Azimuth's 'Last Summer In Rio' [Marca Passo; Far Out Recordings download], and they reward with a gorgeously rich and detailed sound. Here the bass and drums were crisp, tight and powerful, with the guitars and keys soaring eloquently above them – ideal listening during the heatwave at the time of writing.

The speedy, extended sound of the Sabrina Vs dovetailed well with the vocals and harmonies of the Eurythmics' 'There Must Be An Angel', from the 2018 edition of *Be Yourself Tonight* [Sony Music download], where Dave Stewart's multilayered scoring underpins Annie Lennox's wonderful voice. And their ability to reveal fine production elevated the 'Mamunia'/'No Words'/'Picasso's Last Words' sequence from the 50th Anniversary release of Wings' *Band On The Run* album [MPL/Apple/Capitol 5543565].

It's all wonderfully understated musicianship, and the Sabrina Vs, fed from the high-end dCS and Constellation hardware, made it so effortless and yet captivating right through to the distant reprise of 'Jet' and those lush strings. ☺

HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

The Sabrina Vs may not quite scale the heights of the brand's massive flagship models, but they do still offer that same ability to communicate music that's both new and familiar with ear-opening insight and total ease. They are also more domestically acceptable, and more affordable. Well, sort of... Just be careful with those colours: with so much choice on offer there's a fine line between classy and truly garish!

Sound Quality: 90%



remix of Bronski Beat's 'Smalltown Boy' [Forbidden Fruit (The Age Of Consent Remixed); London Records LMS1725439], even though the mix always seems to be doing its damndest to submerge Jimmy Somerville's voice. And the speakers' revealing nature proved well-suited to the live version of 'Firth Of Fifth' from Steve Hackett's *The Lamb Stands Up Live At The Royal Albert Hall* [Inside Out Music IOM748], even if the big, spacious sound is pretty much bereft of audience ambience, save the odd polite smattering of applause. This is one of those super-precise live recordings, and while the Sabrina Vs bring out all the skill of the mix, there's not much they can do to inject any atmosphere.

Change to another live performance from a former member of Genesis, in this case Peter Gabriel's 'In Your Eyes' from *In The Big Room* [Real World download], and the speakers bring out the propulsive power of the rhythm