



"Let's go get wrecked"
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A100 earbuds



Hi-Fi Choice

PASSION FOR SOUND

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GAME ON!

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DEPTH CHARGE
Wilson Audio's heavyweight
Submerge subwoofer

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accessories king

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Fosi Audio's ZP3 preamplifier

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"ACE PERFORMER"



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SMALL WONDER



Bowers & Wilkins' 805 D4
Signature standmount

ICONIC EVOLUTION



Ortofon's SPU GTX E
moving-coil cartridge



Choice EXOTICA

HIGH-END DESIRABLES IN PARTNERSHIP WITH **hi-fi**news



DETAILS

PRODUCT
Wilson Audio
Submerge

ORIGIN
USA

TYPE
Active subwoofer

WEIGHT
116kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
457 x 768 x 624mm

FEATURES
• 305mm dual
spider bass driver
• Quoted amplifier
power: 1,600W,
Class D
• Quoted frequency
response: 5-500Hz

DISTRIBUTOR
Absolute Sounds

WEBSITE
wilsonaudio.com
absolutesounds.
com



Bass beast

The Utah-based brand digs deep to take on the challenge of palpable infra-bass with its largest active subwoofer to date. We close all the hatches and dive, dive, dive...

Looking to take your low-frequencies seriously deep? With a name like Submerge Wilson Audio's latest subwoofer conjures up images of the sort of deep, infrasonic bass that would make the Mariana Trench quiver with jealousy.

This latest offering is a far bigger proposition than the previous LōKē, so it's a far better match for Wilson Audio's larger loudspeakers, not just the TuneTot (HFC 447) standmounts and (relatively) compact Sabrina V and Sasha V (HFC 506) floorstanders. Pricing, too, is 'bigger', the Submerge selling in one of five standard Wilson

finishes for a far from insubstantial £32,000, compared with the LōKē's relatively affordable £9,500. Expensive, undoubtedly, but keeping things in context a pair of the company's larger Alexia V or Alexx V floorstanders will set you back a far more eye-watering £76,000 and £165,000, respectively.

Taste the rainbow

In typical Wilson Audio fashion, the new subwoofer's standard finishes (Galaxy Grey, GT Silver, Quartz, Carbon and Medio Grigio) can be exchanged for numerous 'Upgrade' colours (the most striking options

including Fly Yellow, Pur Sang Rouge and Spearmint adding 5 percent to the price), plus 11 different 'Premium Pearl' colourways (adding 10 percent – at these lofty prices, such fripperies become almost inconsequential). Matching it to your Wilson Audio speakers is clearly part of the thinking here, whether or not your bank manager is sympathetic is another matter entirely.

Colour coordination might be desired, because the elephant in the room here is that the Submerge – while not quite looking like an actual elephant in your room – is big. The cabinet, which comes out of the



packing crate on four wheels to make manoeuvring it into position easy (it weighs 116kg, so you won't be lifting it), stands around 768mm tall once attached to Wilson Audio's 'Acoustic Diode' spiked feet. Width is 457mm, and depth 624mm.

Large and heavy aren't in themselves unusual characteristics for Wilson Audio, but the Submerge's styling feels some way off the modern, often angular looks of its

Spaces sound bigger, bass more solid and instruments more textured

loudspeakers. It's similar in appearance to the LōKē, but significantly scaled up and with rotary control dials along the slanted edge of its top surface. Whatever your take on its aesthetics, there's no questioning the Submerge's supreme build quality nor the inert mass of its proprietary 'X-material' cabinet, with claims of "rigidity, inertness, intrinsic damping and extreme hardness" difficult to question. The side walls grow in



thickness towards the front, where they meet an aluminium baffle with brushed finish, below which is a large, slot port. The baffle can be covered by a supplied grille (again with upgrade colours) that's surely one of the heftiest of its type. It attaches through four heavyweight studs – presumably magnetic fixings wouldn't be strong enough to hold its considerable weight, nor perhaps stop it flying off during moments of high-output bass...

While many other rival high-end subwoofers feature multiple driver arrays, the Submerge opts for a single, front-facing bass driver. This is a proprietary 300mm design said to have been: "specifically optimised for the two bottom octaves of the audible bandwidth", and claimed to only move 'pistonically' courtesy of its dual-spider suspension and substantial rubber surround (although Wilson Audio makes no claims about its maximum linear excursion). Onboard DSP-driven Class D amplification is rated at 1.6kW mounted to an aluminium plate, with heatsinking, that occupies most of the sub's rear, 'V-material', back panel.

As for those controls on the Submerge's top, these are analogue pots – similar in appearance to those on Wilson's outboard ActivXO active crossover – that interface with the

built-in DSP to handle all aspects of setup and tuning. There are no controls around the back. Where the LōKē plumped for the combination of a small LCD display with a click/turn navigation rotary to adjust settings, all that's available here are balanced (XLR) and unbalanced (RCA) input pairs, supporting stereo or mono connection and 12V triggers.

In addition to On, Off and Auto power modes, and an option to switch on a subtle backlight around the knobs, the Submerge's controls cover the slope of the low-pass filter (12dB, 24dB or bypass); variable gain (from Min to Max); low-pass filter frequency from 30Hz to 100Hz; an 'Extreme Low-Frequency Eq' (ELF) providing a supplementary 10dB cut or boost below 40Hz; and a Delay control claiming some 15msec of adjustment. The LōKē, by contrast, offers both a conventional phase setting and separate delay adjustment.

Sound quality

It should probably go without saying that Submerge buyers will have their subwoofer installed and optimised by their dealer, with the manual including a Calibration report sheet to be filled out once the setup is complete. This done, there's a certain irony in the Submerge's less-than-subtle physical design, because

Choice **EXOTICA** WILSON AUDIO
SUBMERGE £32,000

'subtle' is a word that, so often, sums up its performance when paired with Wilson Audio's Alexx Vfx floorstanders in our listening room. Beginning with the 'ELF' control set to 0 and a 55Hz (24dB slope) low-pass filter, the subwoofer segues into an extension of the main speakers, providing a low-frequency *coup de*

The Submerge never finds itself being an unwanted star of the show

grâce that, with some material, is hard to put a finger on. Spaces sound bigger, basslines and orchestral lows more solid, instruments a little more textured, but never to the extent that the Submerge finds itself being an

unwanted star of the show. Which is precisely as it should be.

Careful setup is, of course warranted, not only when it comes to placement of the Submerge itself, but with regards to that all-important delay adjustment. During initial listening, using a broad mix of test tones and bass-centric music, including Bass Mekanik's *Long Way Down*, it quickly becomes apparent that the addition of the Submerge is attenuating a particular, albeit narrow, band of the floorstanders' bass output. Adjusting delay/phase puts this right.

Kaleida's *Take Me To The River* is a gorgeous slice of modern pop, with ethereal instrumentation, a playful stereo mix and crystal-clear vocal. It's also built upon long, deep bass notes to provide weight and stature to the whole shebang. The Submerge/Alexx Vfx system guarantees the piece

sounds spacious, the subwoofer increases the feeling of scale as much as it solidifies the bass. And at no point does it do anything to upset the overall balance, so that the almost holographic imaging of the Alexx Vfx floorstanders remains intact throughout the performance.

Marian Hill combines her soulful voice with sparse, bubbling synths and percussive clicks on *Differently* from her *Unusual* album. The effect of the Submerge is to send those synths further into the room, making the track seem richer, bouncier and giving even more of a physical, juddering feel to the lowest notes.

We find that the Submerge's ultimate low-end extension falls a touch short of some, perhaps more cinematically-minded, rivals. Subjectively, however, it's more than adequate for music, and comes into



THE WILSON BUILD EXPLAINED

Rated by Wilson Audio at a notional 1.6kW, the beating heart of the Submerge is a Class D amplifier solution, with switchmode PSU, from California brand SpeakerPower. This fellow US outfit is a subwoofer amp specialist, boasting: “some of the highest power output amplifiers ever made – up to 12kW”! The filter DSP is serviced by the popular ADAU1701 codec from Analog Devices, a 28/56-bit audio processor that includes two input ADCs and no fewer than four DACs. Analogue inputs to the Submerge are sampled at 48kHz before the audio DSP deals with volume, filtering, phase and delay (in

that order) with adjustment from the user via an ‘analogue’ potentiometer interface on top of the cabinet. The ADAU1701 is supplied with SigmaStudio software to: “graphically configure a custom signal processing flow” enabling, presumably, Wilson to expertly build its own filter shapes to suit the high-excursion, reflex-loaded 300mm bass driver. Note that the phase/delay pot covers both functions here – turn anticlockwise and it inverts absolute phase, clockwise is phase positive, before implementing a delay (in msec) as needed to integrate the subwoofer into the system.

its own with tracks that have been deliberately mixed deep.

Jóhann Jóhannsson’s soundtrack to the thriller *Sicario* is a perfect example, making liberal use of low-level effects, particularly the continuous foundation to *Alejandro’s Song*, which is almost drone-like beneath the vocal chants.

The same composer’s soundscapes for sci-fi flick *Arrival* are even more atmospheric – none more so than *Rise*, which delivers bass that shakes our chests. We find selecting a modest 3dB boost on the ELF control to be beneficial – though we’d suggest steering clear of the full 10dB...

Diley Simon’s *Bass Maniac*, played via a Qobuz download does exactly what it says on the tin. Sticking with

the instrumental version, the Alexx Vfx/Submerge pairing disgorges the driving, dance rhythms with effortless slam and speed.

This is one of the Wilson Audio sub’s greatest strengths: the ‘stop-on-a-dime’ nature of its sound, not necessarily expected from a ported design, avoids the bloat or overhang of ‘lesser’ subwoofers, which can make them a turn off to hi-fi traditionalists.

A good example of the Submerge’s foundational impact comes with the American blues-meets-African-blues of Ry Cooder and Ali Farka Touré’s *Talking Timbuktu* set. On the languid, dreamy *Ai Du*, percussion and kick drum are writ large, beneath the sinewy sounds of bows being drawn across strings. Follow-up track,

Diaraby, leaps into life with its guitar appearing from a wide, deep space.

At the very subtle end of the scale is Derek And The Dominos’ *Layla (... And Other Assorted Love Songs)*. The speakers seem to eat the title track for breakfast without need of the Submerge, effortlessly covering the widely mixed drumming of Jim Gordon and Carl Radle’s bass. Yet here, with A/B comparisons, it’s apparent the Submerge lowers the floor a little, particularly when it comes to the resonant piano that kicks off the track’s now famous coda.

The big question, then, for owners of Wilson Audio’s speakers – who this sub is chiefly aimed at – is whether or

Submerge increases the feeling of scale as much as it solidifies the bass

not it will improve their overall performance? On this experience, the answer is a resounding yes, as the brand has engineered a speaker that has the capacity to augment system performance, but take nothing away.

The upright bass on Patricia Barber’s *Bye Bye Blackbird*, the sudden hits of drums, the jazzy piano lines – it all gains an edge in scale and impact, for a more involving experience. But that leaves another question: are you prepared for the Submerge’s size and industrial design?

Conclusion

Outside of Wilson Audio’s existing customer base, the appeal of the Submerge might be limited, given it eschews the parametric EQ, app/remote and larger driver(s) of high-end, yet still often more affordable, rivals. However, its heady mix of control, speed, subtlety and slam – plus its best-in-class build quality – is well worth celebrating ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY

★★★★★

VALUE FOR MONEY

★★★★★

BUILD QUALITY

★★★★★

FEATURES

★★★★★

OVERALL

★★★★★

LIKE: Best-in-class sound quality

DISLIKE: No app/remote control

WESAY: A great sub whose appeal is limited outside Wilson Audio’s existing customer base

★★★★★