

Davone Reference One floorstanding loudspeaker

Alan Sircom

Danish loudspeaker expert Davone has been making loudspeakers since 2007. The company is the brainchild of designer and owner Paul Schenkel. His first commercial product – the Davone Rithm – established the brand as a company that challenges conventions.

The Davone Reference One floorstanding loudspeaker is the company's new top model, replacing 2013's Grande.

A high-end loudspeaker with the word 'Reference' in its name usually sends red flags to bank accounts. "The 'Reference' model, sir? Certainly... and what small island nation would you like to leave as a deposit?" Davone bucks the trend. While the Reference One isn't cheap, many of its flagship loudspeaker peers put an extra '1' before the price tag.

Despite phrases like 'bucking the trend', the Davone Reference One floorstanding loudspeaker looks like a conventional three-way design. Looks can be deceiving. Yes, it's a cabinet with three drivers in treble-mid-bass order, but this design hides some intelligent thinking.

Fun with ports

One of the most exciting concepts here is the port. That is a sentence I never expected to write, but bear with me for a while. Where most ports exit to the loudspeaker's front, rear or base, Reference One's port is at the top. This is hidden from view thanks to a grill resembling the demisting vents on a car window. It's also a corner-free port shape with an area equivalent to 30% of the woofer membrane.

If you think about it, the top of a loudspeaker is a perfect spot to place the port. Firing to the rear interacts with the room boundaries, while firing to the front disrupts the sound from radiating drivers. Meanwhile, the characteristics of a port firing into the floor are variable due to the sonic differences between flooring materials. Firing into the ceiling minimises those potential interactions, and the distance from port to ceiling means its construction is immaterial.

Staying with the cabinet, the 25mm form pressed plywood exterior gives a curved shape to the enclosure. That is reinforced by 18mm and 22mm thick plywood



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» bracing throughout. While the Reference One is not at 'folded horn' or 'transmission line' levels of internal complication, it's still intricate.

The company's distinctive industrial design extends to the Davone Reference One floorstanding loudspeaker. The lower section features quarter-cut walnut veneer, while the upper section is finished in black or soft white European-sourced leather. Note that means hides 'made in Europe', not 'made from Europeans'... hopefully. The loudspeaker is a gentle taper in front and side aspects. It's also mildly backswept to allow a degree of time alignment. With the gentle curve of the base, it rocks forward and back until the discrete spikes are positioned. This rocking motion does allow some fine-tuning of positioning on carpeted floors, but I'd exercise caution, nonetheless.

Compared to other models in the Davone range, this doesn't have the same outstanding Scandinavian design. However, in fairness to the Reference One, the physics constrains the design. I would rather have a three-way

loudspeaker that sounded excellent than one that looks like an *objet d'art*. And the Reference One does sound excellent.

A lot of that excellent sound comes down to the choice of drivers. The Reference One uses a 25mm flush-mounted Beryllium dome tweeter for the high frequencies. This is met by a 110mm woven carbon fibre 'Textreme' midrange with multimodal cone break-up properties. A 250mm hard paper cone – with a long 22mm deflection and a 75mm voice coil – brings the bass.

Davone has made the Reference One moderately easy to drive. The impedance dips to 3.4Ω at 26Hz and stays above four-ohms through most of the frequency range. At 87dB sensitivity, it's not the loudspeaker for two-watt triode designs but as Davone suggests 100W and beyond is fine. This makes it a good match with amps in its price class. While the Reference One demands quality amplification, it's not an amp-fussy design.

Neither are the Davone Reference Ones particularly troubling to install. They need to be about 2m apart and at »

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» least half a metre from the rear wall. They need some toe-in, but again nothing micrometer-precise. The only exception is level. They do need to be accurately positioned so that the top of the loudspeaker is level. Fortunately, the adjustable spikes are easy to raise and lower.

Gestalt performance

More than pointing to a specific aspect of the Davone Reference One floorstanding loudspeaker, however, it's the gestalt that counts. The loudspeaker is an excellent blend of science and art. Many of the things it does so well happen because of the good engineering execution.

A prime example of this is the excellent imaging. The loudspeakers present an excellent sense of stereo staging, fully three-dimensional but in an unforced manner. And the reason for that is the wide baffle, the rolled edges of the loudspeaker enclosure, and its time alignment. All these elements have been known in audio for decades, and the result is good soundstaging. However, Davone brings all three elements in one speaker, creating an extremely natural-sounding stage as a result. Play anything from simple folk to complex orchestral music and you'll hear that separation of instruments in space.

This is supported by a good underpinning of bass. Unlike many flagship designs, the Davone Reference One floorstanding loudspeaker doesn't make its bass felt all the time. Just bass when its needed. That solidity is especially good with classical music. Orchestral pieces retain their 'shape' thanks to double basses, brass, and percussion instruments, and the Davone expresses that well.

The Davone loudspeaker delivers extremely good detail, although it doesn't make too much of a song and dance about it. You can hear this by playing music with which you are extremely familiar. For me that's Joyce DiDonato's *Stella di Napoli* album on Erato. Her vocal articulation, the intonation of the French horn that accompanies her, and the orchestra are all focused and realistic. So far, I've discussed mostly classical works. The Davone's strengths apply universally. I enjoyed the same excellent detail reproduction playing everything from Art Blakey to ZZ Top.

I also really like the excellent tonal balance of the Davone Reference One floorstanding loudspeakers. There is a tendency with modern loudspeakers to push a specific frequency range. For example, many European loudspeakers are 'zingy', with an expressive but topky treble. On the other hand, some American loudspeakers have a strong bass emphasis and sound 'dark' in comparison. Davone remembers that the word 'balance' is involved, and that balance or evenness of bass, mid, and treble shines through. Once more relying on known musical references, I played the title track from *River: The Joni Letters* [Herbie Hancock, Verve]. Due to her own vocal character, Corinne Bailey Rae is a good choice to cover Joni Mitchell tracks. However, without an evenly

balanced loudspeaker, that voice can sound like a Joni Mitchell impression or a pastiche. The Davone Reference One is faithful to the original tonal balance of the recording, and Corinne Bailey Rae's voice shines! If you are used to brighter sounding loudspeakers, the Reference One might seem lacking in 'sparkle'. However, I've always found that sparkle tarnishes fast. The Reference One is in it for the long haul and you'll love that balanced presentation for years to come!

Another Reference One boon is its ability to play from loud and quiet with equanimity. Plenty of loudspeakers can play at 'hearing loss' loudness levels. Others can sing at whisper-quiet levels. But it takes a really good design to sound good across the board, from a whisper to a scream. The Reference One does that, with an 'honest' and refreshingly unexaggerated dynamic range in tow. OK, so if you are wanting a loudspeaker that can double up as a PA system, look elsewhere. But in the real world, this is all the loudspeaker most of us will ever need!

Where's my unicorn hide?

There is a downside to the Reference One; it's not expensive enough! It also lacks some of the touches that separate the high-end from the rest of the world. It isn't made from unicorn hide or a veneer from the last tree of its kind. It doesn't weigh as much as a small planet. It isn't finished in a piano gloss that could be used to signal aircraft. This is why the Davone doesn't cost as much as an S-Class Mercedes. Sadly, a lot of the audio world has gone full-on 'bling' and this fine performer may get overlooked for all the wrong reasons.

That must not happen. In a high-end audio world gone mad, the Davone Reference One floorstanding loudspeaker is a dose of sanity. It's a great sounding performer for good, solid reasons. It's also perfect for listeners wanting a true reference-grade sound without draining a bank account. Finally, it's ideal for real-world listeners not holed up in acoustically perfect man-caves. +

Technical specifications

Type Three-way, reflex-ported floorstanding loudspeaker

Drive Units 1x 25mm beryllium dome tweeter, 111mm Textreme cone midrange, 250mm hard paper cone

Frequency Response 29Hz–30kHz, -3dB

Impedance 4Ω nominal, 3.4Ω minimum (at 26Hz)

Sensitivity 87dB/2.83V/m

Finishes black or soft white leather, quarter cut walnut veneer

Dimensions (W×H×D) 47 × 97 × 37cm

Weight 42kg per loudspeaker

Price £15,999 per pair

Manufacturer Davone Audio

🌐 www.davoneaudio.com ☎ +45 23 88 71 72