

Davone Meander all in one system

Alan Sircom



While there are a lot of new audio products out there, few challenge the accepted norms of audio design quite like the Davone Meander. Loudspeakers doubly so – even clever, leading edge

designs – are typically squared-off rectangular or rounded boat-backed boxes. The Danish Davone company is a rare exception to the rule and the Meander shows why.

Those with good memories might recall an early Davone product; the Rithm loudspeaker that we reviewed way back in issue 76. This was a really clever passive floorstanding loudspeaker that looked – from the side at least – a bit like >>



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» the original *Star Trek* badge worn by Captain Kirk. The company has retained a love of curved wood and contrasting drivers hidden behind black cloth, but the intervening dozen or so years has changed everything. In fairness, Davone still makes conventional active and passive loudspeakers, but in that range the Meander stands alone.

Let's start with the obvious, the Davone Meander's industrial design. There are a few inverted conical shapes in audio, but none quite so sweeping. In asking around, this has been described as an 'ice cream cone', a 'tornado' and – said without pretence, and in fairness with some accuracy – 'temaki sushi'. A roll of walnut or oak is wrapped around the central core of amps and drive units, and this sits on a pedestal. It has that timeless Scandinavian cool to it, a bit like Arne Jacobsen's mid-20th Century 'Series 7', only folded in on itself.

Couldn't be simpler

The Meander is an active all-in-one wireless loudspeaker. It couldn't be simpler to use. Plug it in, wait five minutes, point the Google Home App at something called 'SM450', wait a few more minutes, tell it what room it's in, point it at your wireless network and you are done. It talks Google Chromecast and Apple Airplay 2 like a native, is extremely happy living in Spotify Connect land and – in the unlikely event this fails to rattle your cage – the Meander will Bluetooth for fun and profit. If none of these words make sense to you, find a few like-minded friends, join hands, and try to contact the 21st Century.

If Davone's clever loudspeaker has a distinct 'Scandi' appeal in its looks, its sonic performance is similarly angled. The assumption is the speaker is going to sit in a relatively reflective modern living room, not some overdamped, wannabe studio man-cave. High frequencies in particular rely on ceiling rear and side-wall reflection; while I think this is an intrinsically better assumption than thinking reflections are a bad thing and ending up with every room decorated in the last 50 years is too bright, if you have a heavily carpeted



room, this might soak up some of its HF and midrange.

Davone recommends people perform a small amount of pre-placement listening, suggesting a 'sinewave 100Hz' file on Spotify to determine standing wave interaction and then placing the Meander in the corner of a room to determine the impact of room gain. When you have placed the Meander in the best position to limit these problems, there's a room correction app, but Davone (rightly) recommend using as fine tuning; think of this as a Band-Aid, not battlefield surgery. Davone also provides automatic OTA (over-the-air) firmware updates, but you'll probably only notice when the Meander goes quiet for a while. Of course, if it is doing an update, don't unplug the Meander.

Room correction is deceptively simple and effective. After launching the app, let it 'find' the Davone, which takes a matter of seconds. You then press the room correction button on the app, sit and enjoy a few seconds of white noise, while your phone listens to the same through its microphone. It then applies a frequency response curve that it thinks best fits with your room... and you're done. If

you don't find the result to your taste, you can tailor it by running through the tone controls on the same app. My trawl through the room correction options yielded a near-perfect tonal balance in room, but this is contingent upon the quality of the smartphone's microphone.

Placement is easier than traditional loudspeakers because there's just the one Meander per room. While in most cases you need to make a compromise in terms of placement relative to stereo sound (for example, the best position for bass is not the best position for stereo imagery), in the Meander, such compromises are not needed; you place the speakers in the best space relative to the room and let the sound happen. OK, if you want wide and deep stereo, the Meander probably won't be your first choice (although it's better than you might expect). But on the other hand, if you want something that puts a smile on your face whenever you listen to music, this is the thing. »



It's at once powerful enough and yet graceful enough to be the 'always on' product that just sits there making music day in, day out.

» The Meander is the absolute opposite to the 'po-faced audiophile', where music is secondary to the sound it makes or the kit used to make that sound. While the strong design elements are a talking point, the Meander drives you to listen to music; not as some cerebral experience, but music as the accompaniment to your life. Although I could effortlessly stream Tidal through the Meander, I found myself drawn more to Spotify Connect, just because of the wider range of music and podcasts on tap. While I couldn't stomach more than five seconds of Joe Rogan without attacking inanimate objects with power tools in a rage, switching over to something like *Athletico Mince* on Apple Podcasts is a surreal joy. The Meander is great at just making a fun sound and especially a loud and fun sound; it's the kind of thing you want to have around after a difficult week, belting out 'reset button' songs as you mock-karaoke yourself back to some semblance of sanity.

That being said, it's not just a musical pressure wash, in fact, if anything it maxes out on refinement, which makes the sound all the more alluring. It's at once powerful enough and yet graceful enough to be the 'always on' product that just sits there making music day in, day out.

Those of us who have found working from home to be one of the most significant effects of long-covid, the Meander will get some solid use. It's not belittling the Meander to say it's the device that continues a long tradition beginning with radios and came into its own with high-performance smart speakers like the Naim Audio Muso Qb 2.

Davone's Meander is a fuss-free musical friend, possessed of good bass and rhythm, a surprisingly clear midrange. Often, all in one systems that make a good overall sound do so at the expense of midrange clarity and vocal articulation and projection... but not here; while it might not have that near magical vocal clarity of something like an electrostatic loudspeaker (or even a loudspeaker like the LS3/5a which was designed for the task), it's still excellent with vocals.

I was truly won over by the Meander in so many ways, none of which hug my inner audiophile. And that's excellent and how it should be, as it allows the listener to focus on listening, which is – perhaps surprisingly – what good audio should be about. It changes your listening too; you don't sit enrapt at the apex of a perfect triangle of loudspeakers, listening out for details in the soundstage, you get up and listen to the electro-house of 'Head Back' by elkka or the dubby trance of 'Mindforms' by SYZ. These aren't the

kind of tracks that get played often by stick in the mud audiophiles, but I love 'em because they are new and fresh and show that even the male-dominated world of trance and electro are getting their own slice of girl power!

The Meander doesn't meander

In fact, for many the big thing Davone gets wrong about the Meander is its name. It doesn't 'meander' through your music collection; it runs, headlong, into your music joyously devouring every moment. You need to have moved past the stuffy audiophile phase and gone into 'smartphones are fun, aren't they?' mode. Music passes effortlessly from phone (or tablet) to speaker and that intuitive interaction is just part of the fun of the Meander, and at that point you don't just 'meander' through your music, you frolic and gambol through it.

I think the Davone Meander is a game changer for contemporary, metropolitan listeners. It's an extremely elegant design in the Scandinavian sense, and it understands that we all live out of our smartphones and not only accepts that but makes it an intrinsic part of its functionality. And best of all, it sounds fun without making it seem like 'funishment'. If you like those clean lines and aren't one for overdamped, heavily furnished living rooms, the Meander is mighty! +

Technical specifications

Type All-in-one stereo Wi-Fi loudspeaker

Drive units 2x 25.4mm anodised aluminium tweeter dome, 2x 178mm mid/woofers

Amplifier 200W closed loop Class D

Streaming services Google Chromecast, Spotify Connect, Apple Airplay 2, DLNA, Bluetooth Audio and all Chromecast and Airplay-2 enabled apps, OTA upgrades

Wi-Fi 802.11 a/b/g/n/ac (2.4GHz/5GHz)

Bluetooth 4.2, BLE supported

DSP Quad core 32bit/192kHz ADAU1451

Finishes quarter cut lacquered walnut, quarter cut oiled oak

Frequency Response 35Hz–22kHz

Recommended room size 15–70m²

Dimensions (HxWxD) 77 x 44 x 44cm

Weight 16.5kg

Price £2,900

Manufacturer Davone Audio

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Davone Meander

WINNER
ALL IN ONE SYSTEM

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Cleverly, the Davone app also allows room correction, which is both easy to operate and edit, using the microphone in your smartphone to correct the Meander in room. As the loudspeaker is less likely to be placed in traditional audio set-ups, some clever room correction is useful.

The joy of the Meander is the effortless fun it brings. According to Alan Sircom in our review, "The Meander is the absolute opposite to the 'po-faced audiophile', where music is secondary to the sound it makes or the kit used to make that sound. While the strong design elements are a talking point, the Meander drives you to listen to music; not as some cerebral experience, but music as the accompaniment to your life." He also said that the Meander, "is great at just making a fun sound and especially a loud and fun sound; it's the kind of thing you want to have around after a difficult week, belting out 'reset button' songs as you mock-karaoke yourself back to some semblance of sanity."

Alan also felt that, "Music passes effortlessly from phone (or tablet) to speaker and that intuitive interaction is just part of the fun of the Meander, and at that point you don't just 'meander' through your music, you frolic and gambol through it."

He concluded by saying, "I think the Davone Meander is a game changer for contemporary, metropolitan listeners. It's an extremely elegant design in the Scandinavian sense, and it understands that we all live out of our smartphones and not only accepts that but makes it an intrinsic part of its functionality. And best of all, it sounds fun without making it seem like 'funishment'. If you like those clean lines and aren't one for overdamped, heavily furnished living rooms, the Meander is mighty!"

Reviewed in Issue **208**

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