



The magic number

Wharfedale expands its Heritage range with a compact three-way that **Ed Selley** thinks has more going for it than nostalgia

Retro revival doesn't seem to be showing any signs of slowing down and companies resurrecting designs from their past has resulted in some fascinating products. A case in point is Wharfedale's Super Denton. The original Denton dates back to the late-Sixties and was a key part of the company's range well into the Seventies. The two-way version was successfully recreated as the Denton 85 a few years ago and, suitably enthused, Wharfedale has now revisited the historic Denton 3 to create the Super Denton. This is a relatively unusual thing in that it is a compact three-way standmount, not significantly larger than the two-way.

In order to fit everything in, the Super Denton staggers the two smaller drivers

above the larger one to the point they are almost side by side. The tweeter looks similar to the unit used in the smaller 85, but is in fact largely new and borrows heavily from the bigger Dovedale. It's a 25mm soft dome with a chamber built into the rear of the housing to prevent energy being reflected back through the dome. This works from a relatively high 4.6kHz crossover point up to the claimed 20kHz roll-off.

This high upper crossover point gives the 50mm dome a fair bit to do. It is an adaptation of the driver used in some of the Evo family and resembles a scaled-up version of the tweeter. This is offset so that owners can experiment with the midrange in or outboard depending on their room. The lower roll-off for the midrange is

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Wharfedale Super Denton
ORIGIN
UK/China
TYPE
3-way standmount loudspeaker
WEIGHT
9.2kg each
DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD on plinth)
246 x 360 x 275mm
FEATURES
• 25mm soft dome tweeter
• 50mm soft dome midrange driver
• 165mm woven Kevlar cone mid/bass driver
• Quoted sensitivity: 87.5dB/1W/1M (6ohm)
DISTRIBUTOR
IAG
WEBSITE
wharfedale.co.uk
iaggroup.com

940Hz with everything below this handled by the 165mm woven Kevlar cone that is pretty much the same as the one in the two-way Denton 85, albeit operating over a smaller bandwidth and making use of the slightly larger cabinet to marginally improve low-end extension.

The crossover takes the same basic principle as the Denton 85, but has been designed from scratch and makes use of niceties such as air core inductors and high-quality polypropylene caps. In keeping with both traditional thinking and modern

It possesses talents that are unusual and beyond most similarly priced rivals

practise, the crossover has a single set of terminals, pointedly ignoring the 20-odd year interlude where we felt that more might have been handy. Everything is placed in a cabinet that makes use of IAG's considerable experience in making things look old while building them in a thoroughly modern way. Made of a sandwich of different materials to control the resonance, it also features computer-modelled bracing to stiffen it further.

Nevertheless, the Super Denton does look extremely retro or just plain old depending on how you view this

current fetish for the past. It is available in three finishes: Walnut, Mahogany and Black Oak and none of them exactly scream modernity, particularly with the supplied grilles fitted. Nevertheless, the Super Denton is a charming thing that has an aesthetic different to most other speakers on the market and it is indisputably very well made into the bargain. If you are looking for something retro, it feels like a lot of speaker for the money with excellent execution and attention to detail.

Sound quality

Early testing of the Super Denton involves experimenting with the midrange drivers facing both in and outboard, and I very quickly settle on the latter for testing. This results in the Super Denton delivering an almost cinematic width to its performance without any unwanted gap or unevenness in the centre of the presentation. I also find that it works rather well on the frame-type stand that IAG builds for the Mission 700 (HFC 496) standmount. Unless your listening position is relatively high, I find the combination very effective.

Key to what the Super Denton does is it carefully makes its three drivers felt without them becoming overt in the presentation and the width it achieves. The equally retro *Anthem Of A Peaceful Army* by Greta van Fleet benefits hugely from the Wharfedale opening up the track's rather narrow presentation and injecting a bit of scale into proceedings. With recordings that are more naturally spacious, the effect can border on



Perhaps the only speaker I've tested in relatively recent times that comes close to challenging the Super Denton for midrange cohesion is the Sonus faber Lumina II (HFC 478), which uses fewer drivers but manages to demonstrate something approaching the same fluency across the midband. Talented as it is, it still falls short of the presence and width that the Wharfedale possesses. The Lumina II is a little more energetic, though, and the styling – while not exactly ground breaking – is a little more up to date than the Super Denton. If you want width and sheer involvement, though, very little gets near it.

Owners can experiment with positioning the offset mid driver in or outboard



surround sound. It is sufficiently different from any other speaker at the price I can remember testing as to make comparisons a tricky business.

At the same time as adding this perceived space, the Wharfedale also demonstrates effortless quality across the midrange and lower treble that speaks to the worth of that midrange dome. The really clever aspect of how it uses this driver is that it is never a focus of your attention. Instead, you simply note that when you play the unplugged version of Emily King's *Forgiveness*, she sounds absolutely sensational. There is a combination of superb tonal realism and fine detail that is genuinely unusual and rather exciting for a relatively affordable speaker. Switch back to even very talented two-way rivals and you note that the midrange on offer simply doesn't feel as effortlessly full and rich as this one does.

The claimed lower roll-off of 52Hz is slightly bettered in this space and the Wharfedale does the all-important trick of never sounding bass light and it integrates the low end it possesses into the upper registers very effectively. This is also a very easy speaker to partner; with the quoted 87dB sensitivity and 6ohm impedance not presenting any serious challenge to a device with 50W or so at its disposal.

I suspect that the people who will flock to the Super Denton won't be as interested in the low-end clout as they are in that spacious and utterly beguiling presentation from the lower midrange up. During testing, I select Poppy Ackroyd's fabulous *Resolve* with a view to listening to a single track on it. The performance that the Wharfedale puts in is sufficiently

arresting that I wind up going through the whole album. The manner in which it captures Ackroyd's unique style and attention to arrangements is beyond anything I can recall testing at the price. There's also impressively little perception of the cabinet in the overall sound – those modern engineering refinements doing a fine job of keeping it entirely inert and unobtrusive throughout testing.

Conclusion

What we have here then is, at face value, another charming piece of retro revivalism that harks back to the glory days of home audio while being thoroughly modern at the same time. Dig a little further and the charms of the Super Denton run rather deeper than that. By squeezing in that third driver, Wharfedale has built a speaker that possesses talents that are genuinely unusual and beyond most similarly priced rivals. The result is one of the most interesting and capable speakers you can buy anywhere near the price right now ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY
★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY
★★★★★
BUILD QUALITY
★★★★★
EASE OF DRIVE
★★★★★

LIKE: Spacious and involving presentation; easy to drive; build
DISLIKE: Not everyone will want such a retro design
WE SAY: A genuinely talented and beguiling little speaker that uses its extra driver to fabulous effect

OVERALL

★★★★★