

66 ... accurate ... involving

... SUPERB

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"... easy to live with. They offer a big and involving sound that is difficult to resist ... I'm going to keep them."

(Improved over version reviewed for even better sound.)

by William Kelly

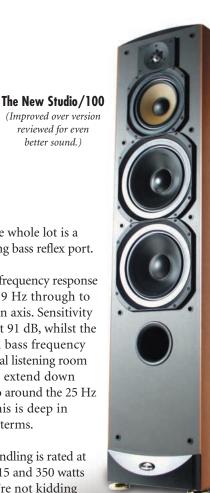
n terms of sheer physical size, the flagship Paradigm Reference Studio/100s are a far cry indeed from the tiny Paradigms that have been reviewed previously. They are, in a word, big. They stand well over a metre high, are 420 mm deep, and 260 mm wide, and each weighs just under 40 kg. This kind of weight is indicative of the extensive internal bracing that is employed in the rectangular cabinet.

The grilles are more than just simple cloth affairs that beg to be removed. They have been designed in such a way that once fitted they form a perfect flush mount with all the drive units, in order to minimize unwanted edge diffraction.

Once removed, the grilles reveal a set of four drivers – one tweeter (25-mm purealuminium dome), one midrange unit (170-mm mica-polymer cone, 25-mm voice coil) and two woofers (215-mm filled polypropylene, 38-mm voice coil). Below the whole lot is a front firing bass reflex port.

Claimed frequency response is from 39 Hz through to 22 kHz on axis. Sensitivity is rated at 91 dB, whilst the extended bass frequency in a typical listening room is said to extend down further to around the 25 Hz mark. This is deep in anyone's terms.

Power handling is rated at between 15 and 350 watts and they're not kidding either. The H/K 1400 managed to drive these monsters adequately, but if the speaker could talk you would hear it saying 'more power, more power' in an increasingly frantic voice. About 200 W per channel begins to make them sing.



"... the illusion of reality that was painted was nothing short of superb."

This impression of quality goes further. The finish of the speakers was 100% blemish free, and the quality of the veneer and cabinet construction was comparable with the very best I've ever seen, never mind reviewed. The speaker itself stands on gold plated (!) feet with adjustable spikes. It's a visual enhancement that may not sound good on paper, but it works in the flesh.

"Bass with authority ... conviction ... extension, slam and impact."

I was expecting to hear a lot of bass. Bass with authority, bass with conviction, bass with extension, slam and impact. Yes, yes we get all that and it's there in abundance, but what makes these speakers special is precisely the opposite.

It's all too easy to get carried away with the low end of the musical spectrum since it is initially very impressive. It's the low end that obviously contributes to the 'big speaker' feel of the music – the element that a small speaker simply cannot reproduce, no matter how clever its design.

But music isn't just drums and bass guitars. There is vastly more musical information carried further up the frequency spectrum, and it's here that our ears determine whether they can live with this speaker or not. It's also here that the neutrality of the speaker is at its most vulnerable, and any colouration that may be present is likely to make its presence felt.

Despite their very high value for money factor, these Paradigms are not cheap speakers, and were expected to perform accordingly. And whilst I would be lying if I said that I had not heard better in terms of upper frequency response or midrange 'naturalness', I've heard it

only in a much smaller speaker costing around the same amount of money as the Paradigms.

"... mids were full ... rich ... and accurate to a tee."

The mids were full, although with more substantial amplification they fill out to a much greater degree. They were rich and resonant, and accurate to a tee.

In this particular area, the Studio 100s made themselves at home with any kind of music. In the case of very simple stuff, one voice and a piano for instance, the illusion of reality that was painted was nothing short of superb.

"... a rock solid performance. ... its detail at the top end is abundant."

The midrange works hand-in-hand with the treble of course, and the tweeter puts in a rock-solid performance. It's never allowed to become sibilant or wayward, and its detail at the top end is abundant.

With more strident music, classical in particular, the Studio/100s managed to retain control and portray the event as a musical one, not as levels of separation.

Paradigm Reference Studio/100s are easy to live with. They offer a big and involving sound that is difficult to resist, especially at this price point. True they need serious amplification, but this is only part of what makes them first class speakers, and a well-judged balancing act as well. I think I'm going to keep them.