

Audio Solutions Figaro M2 floorstanding loudspeaker

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Without Googling, how many Lithuanian audio companies can you name? Me neither. It turns out there are several, including LessLoss (cabling), Reed (analogue), Silent Pound, Audio GE and 5mm Audiolab (speakers). Impressive for a country of under three million people.

Audio Solutions joins the list with its Overture, Figaro and Virtuoso speakers. Established in 2011, design and manufacturing take place in Vilnius, Lithuania. Prices reach a heady £45k for the Overture L, weighing in at a floorboard-busting 120kg per speaker. Crikey! At 45kg each, I struggled to lug the £9,750 Figaro M2 from pavement to lounge, feeling smug when I did. In situ, the speakers looked rather regal.

Decor be damned

Not least because they're large; 114cm tall, 47cm deep, 27cm wide. The sides are curved and taper backwards, reducing the visual impact. I never lost the feeling of sentinels watching over me, though.

To mitigate that, you can move them back; they're supposedly flexible enough for close-to-wall use. But surely the rear ports would interact with the wall? Besides, UK distributor Elite Audio suggested 20-30cm out to improve soundstaging and lighten the bass. I went with 35cm, with the speakers slightly toed in.

Which sounded good. If that were my only option, I'd genuinely be happy. But with 50cm out, a little airiness and a little detail were sacrificed. Bass lost some vigour, and the sound marginally softened. Such is the Figaro's quality that even minor positional changes are laid bare. The manual suggests the speakers face the listener, for example. For me, that shrank the width of the soundstage enough to matter.

So I stayed with 60cm, slightly toed in. They dominated the newly decorated room visually, undermining its carefully crafted vibe. It was worthwhile, though (I may have been alone in that view).

Note that whilst speaker grilles are included, they weren't supplied for the review. Personally, I'd attach them when not in use. Exposed drivers always look vulnerable (to cats and adolescents in my case!)

Design

Mini horn-loaded tweeters, box-in-box construction and crossover points outside the critical hearing range are the key features of this complex three-way design.

At the top, the silk-dome tweeters are horn-loaded to damp them at high volumes, preventing breakup. Extended-band midrange drivers push the crossover points to 400Hz and 4kHz, reducing distortion and driving phase shift down to virtually zero, apparently. And the use of dual 7" Extra Rigid bass drivers (paper cones reinforced with flecks of hard pulp and fibres) ensures piston-like movement without breakup.

Cabinet construction differs radically in having two boxes, one inside the other. The inner box is lightweight yet rigid to control vibration. Viscous Polyurethane sits between the cabinets, providing further damping. The outer box is made from heavier material that captures any residual vibrations.

The focus on reducing distortion was evident in practice. Clarity was one of the Figaro M2's strengths. It also maintained even tonality when played loud, never becoming harsh, as sometimes happens.

Sensitivity is high (91.5dB), but the nominal 4Ω impedance suggests flea-powered amplifiers shouldn't be used. My 100W PrimaLuna EVO300H amp received the distributor's thumbs up. In-room frequency response is said to be 30Hz; impressive, but it can trigger resonances in anything smaller than an aircraft hangar. Beware.

Beautiful / beautifully built

The Figaro M2 is as gorgeous in the flesh as in pictures. Build quality is very good, commensurate with the price. Despite being no shrinking violet, it's a stylish beast.

The review pair (code RY22FM61) had aesthetic and performance options that pushed the price up by 30%; tread lightly with the configurator (my.audiosolutions.it). Do have a play, though; it's addictive.

Stocking with a base Pearl White, GT Silver, Dark Grey or Zink Grey still gives you a looker. The review pair's Zink Grey was beautiful. Floor spikes are supplied, but do consider the IsoAcoustics or Ceradisc options. I know IsoAcoustics well; its products deliver improvements whenever I've used them.

The defining characteristic, though, was a cavernous, truly lifelike soundstage. With solo performers, the room spread wide beyond the speakers.

Sound quality

Amplification was handled by the EVO300H (valve pre, solid-state power). The source was Musical Fidelity's M8x DAC, fronted by Aurdriana on a laptop.

And so to listening. Great clarity and strong dynamics were Figaro's hallmarks, which impressed from the off. Not always a good thing, it was here. This was the best sound I'd had at home for a long time.

Bass was prodigious, with 30Hz not in question. It was a little soft, though, and slightly prominent in the mix. Metallica's 'Enter Sandman' wasn't punchy. Munch's Saint Saens Symphony 3 (second movement) rumbled a little indistinctly.

I'd moved recently and hadn't measured the new room yet. Forced to address the issue, REW software confirmed two low-end resonances. Makeshift bass traps in the front corners largely addressed them. A little EQ low-down iced the cake. After that, the Figaro M2 snapped into focus, with bass that was proportionate yet extended. I spoke to Terry Ellis of *Pursuit Perfect System*, who reviewed these very Figaros in his slightly smaller, acoustically treated room. He found the bass taught. The key takeaway is to ensure your room can handle the Figaro M2's powerful low-end.

With the speakers set up optimally, I settled into lengthy listening sessions. They were a joy from start to finish. The sound leaned towards the detail and control side of neutral, not normally my cup of tea. But it wasn't overdone. I couldn't tip it into harshness. Even brighter recordings exhibited a hint of sweetness. Andrea Haines' soaring soprano in Voces8's 'All Seems Beautiful To Me', a voice that breaks up many a tweeter, was ethereal.

If Carlsberg did soundstages

The defining characteristic, though, was a cavernous, truly lifelike soundstage. With solo performers, the room spread wide beyond the speakers; in small spaces, you sat close to the artist. You heard performers breathing, fingers running up strings, and pedals clunking quietly, all conspiring to present live performers on real stages.

The effect scaled well, and large orchestral forces were fully realised. Strauss' *Also sprach Zarathustra* (LSO, Francois Xavier-Rothf) was magnificent, with growling double basses, blaring horns and dominant timpani positioned accurately. The Figaros tracked the performers as the sound swelled.



EQUIPMENT REVIEW
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» In my experience, detailed treble, accurate bass and strong dynamics are required for such a palpable listening experience. The Figaros M2 aced it, more than once reminding me of Klipsch's Heritage speakers, which excel here too. A coincidence that both use horn-loaded tweeters?

Dissecting the components

It's a truism, but Figaro's attention to detail unearthed new discoveries in every track listened to. Previously unheard contributions, nuances in performance, vocal inflections, etc. All added to the musical message; they weren't artifacts.

Midrange was drop-dead gorgeous. Richard Burton's prologue to Jeff Wayne's *War of the Worlds* was rich and velvety. Shawn Mullins' *Twin Rocks*, Oregon from Soul's *Core*, my personal midrange standard, communicated beautifully.

Bass was deep and controlled but not overly so. For example, the acoustic bass could breathe. There was texture too, as in Infected Mushroom's *Bliss on Mushrooms*, which proved far more than a self-indulgent synth fest. Layers of bass-within-bass were revealed, all clearly delineated by the Figaros.

To dissect the Figaro M2's performance is to err, though. Its strength lies in bringing everything together into a whole. I didn't listen to the speakers or the accompanying electronics. Sean Shibe was playing *Bach* on guitar in my living room. Jaap van Sweden's NRO gave me a private performance of *Britten's War Requiem*. The Espen Erikson Trio sounded as they did when I heard them live recently.

Summing up

Once set up properly, the Figaro M2 performed faultlessly. Nothing stood out as untoward; all aspects of performance were impressive in a positive sense. Tonally, it's not rich, nor is it clinical or cold. Indeed, it straddles the divide well, a speaker with broad appeal (that only widens given its genre-agnostic nature).

I normally prefer a slightly mellifluous tone. That the Figaros won my affection is therefore telling. I have nothing but respect for them. What would tip that over to love? I'm not sure.

In my room, the Figaro M looked large. The next model down, the S, might fit better. I'm also curious how much of the magic would be retained by the standmounts (hint!). One down from the top Virtuoso models, the Figaros may be the sweet spot in Audio Solutions' range. Whatever, designer Gediminas Gaidelis has crafted a beautiful speaker in the Figaro M2 that fully justifies its price. It's not mainstream, but if you're shopping for a premium floorstander, you really should listen to it. +

Technical specifications

Type: Three-way speaker system with Mini-Horn loaded tweeter

Drivers: 19mm silk dome tweeter, 15.2cm ER paper cone mid, 2 x 18.3cm ER paper cone bass drivers

Crossover frequency: 400Hz; 4kHz

Frequency response (in-room): 30Hz-25kHz

Impedance: Nominal 4 Ohms

Sensitivity: 91.5dB @ 2.83V 1m

Suggested amp power: 10-300W

Finishes: Standard colours - Pearl White, GT Silver, Dark Grey or Zink Grey. Highly customizable (e.g. 36 optional colours) at my.audiosolutions.it

Dimensions (speaker only, HxWxD): 110.8x27.2x47.2cm

Dimensions (with outriggers, HxWxD): 113.8x39.6x47.2cm

Weight: 45kg each

Price: £9,750, €10,990, \$16,200 per pair

Manufacturer Audio Solutions

🌐 audiosolutions.it

UK distributor Elite Audio UK

🌐 eliteaudiouk.com ☎ 0800 464 7274 (UK only)