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STANDING PROUD

AUDIOVECTOR R6 ARRETÉ: HIGH-END'S NEW LOOK!



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Audiovector R6 Arreté floorstanding loudspeaker

by Alan Sircom

A sign of just how odd the audio world can be, I feel the Audiovector R6 Arreté's biggest problem is it's too damn cheap! And yet, this is a loudspeaker – from a company known for making good value loudspeakers – that costs as much as a reasonably decent car (although not in its native Denmark, where prohibitive duty imposed on cars mean that sentence reads 'a reasonably decent gearbox' in Danish). You've been drinking the high-end Kool Aid again, Alan!

Here's the thing, though. This loudspeaker – the cheapest of Audiovector's Big Three (the R6, R8, and R11) – might stay just to the right side of £25,000 and that puts it in the 'sharp intake of breath' range for many of Audiovector's client base, but in high-end audio terms, that's possibly less money than a well-heeled enthusiast might spend on speaker cables. While its performance and build quality more than justify its price tag, for those in the upper echelons of audio will just skip over it because it isn't £80,000. In that way, I hope the R6 Arreté won't slip through the cracks, because in many ways it deserves to be taken very seriously indeed, both as an aspirational goal for those already on the Audiovector ladder, and those with lofty bank-balances should be putting this on their check-list because it's just a damn good loudspeaker.

That 'damn good loudspeaker' is the top model in the upgradable good-better-best R6 line, with the Signature and Avantgarde models all using the same cabinet and 165mm bass drivers, used both in front-firing and as an isobarically-loaded down-firing compound bass section. The Avantgarde replaces the soft dome tweeter with an AMT unit (also shared in the Arreté), while this top model brings a rear-firing midrange unit (for extra soundstage performance), as well as the Freedom Grounding system, an internal shock absorption system, improved spikes, improved damping, and even a carbon rear panel. The differences effectively mean the R6 moves from a three-and-a-half way loudspeaker to a four-and-a-half way with the addition of that 100mm rear-firing paper cone midrange unit. The base model costs a shade over £13,000, the Avantgarde just under £18,000 and the Arreté comes to £24,999, but there is an upgrade path.

We've covered a lot of these technologies in previous reviews; in particular much of the technology found in the R6 Arreté has filtered down through the range from the R8 Arreté review from Issue 165 and the R1 Arreté in issue 176. But of those technologies, the Freedom Grounding system is worth a revisit. This is a full grounding system that runs a cable from the rear panel of the loudspeaker to a nearby earthed power socket (the cable is fully isolated so there is no risk of electric shock), and this helps lower noise in the signal received from the amplifier. This has the effect of making the loudspeaker seem more of a point source and seemingly lowers the already low cabinet distortion. This has been used successfully in every recent model to carry the 'Arreté' suffix and – although the cable system itself is an optional extra – the 'word on the street' is that practically everyone who opted for the Arreté option on their Audiovector R-Series loudspeaker has gone for the Freedom Grounding cables... even those with the R1 Arreté two-way stand-mount (and one of my personal benchmark loudspeakers).

The addition of a rear-firing midrange unit in a loudspeaker that stands a little over 123cm tall means this is a loudspeaker for medium-large to large listening room, with the R8 and R11 best used for 'very large' rooms and 'aircraft hangers' respectively. However, the narrow front baffle and the relatively small overall footprint means that – unlike many high-end loudspeakers capable of delivering the same level of result, the R6 Arreté doesn't dominate the room. In fact, it's surprisingly room friendly. Granted it needs air to the side and rear of the design, and demands careful installation that might not sit comfortably in decor-intensive living rooms, but it's a heck of a lot better than the sort of product design that looks like brutalist Cold War architecture, or the kind of furniture that gets turned away from Antiques Roadshow. Better yet, Audiovector has not only resisted the temptation to 'go big' but it's also avoided the pitfall of '... or go Bling!' The understated elegance of the product is free from glitz, gold flashes and acres of chrome. Yes, if you choose one of the wood finishes, the veneer is deep (and if you don't the gloss black or white is more like a piano and less like an Ikea ►

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▶ bookshelf). The one thing that might catch out the unwary is there are two not quite contrasting inlays along the side panels; they are easy to miss at first, and then easy to see as someone scraped the side of your beloved new loudspeaker; closer investigation shows this to be a feature and it actually breaks up the metre and a quarter of tree quite well.

The R6 Arreté is the kind of crossover point between conventional audio and high-end aspirations. By that, I mean where some of the smaller models are less system dependent and relatively unconcerned about positioning, the R6 Arreté demands and deserves more care and attention. In electronics terms, this is mostly more about 'quality' than 'quantity', although I think a good jumping off point is at least 100W of good solid-state audio (just because the Ethos is on my mind, Gryphon's Diablo 120 integrated amplifier is a fine choice, despite the fact the price differential makes this something of a 'mullet' system).

“There are no inconsistencies or changes in tone or response, just more of the same.”

As to positioning, the rear-firing midrange needs some breathing space, and it requires some precision in rear-baffle to rear-wall line-up to ensure the rear reflection is precise. This makes the difference between a stereo soundstage that is good, and one that is remarkably holographic. That aside, you should ensure the loudspeakers are at the same height as one another, with slight toe-in (and in slightly smaller spaces, a small amount of tilt, raising the rear by a few degrees) and at least a metre from the side walls. The AMT tweeter is quite tightly focused (both in height and width), so it's worth making sure the loudspeaker is at ear height and ensure there is good side wall reflection control in room, if possible. However, the R6 Arreté does have that Audiovector property of never sounding bad no matter how slapdash the installation, but when you are working with a loudspeaker with this much scope, spend time making it move from 'good' to 'blimey!'

What I really like about the Audiovector range in its entirety (or at least, the parts of the Audiovector range I have tangled with) is their consistency. The sound you get from the R1 Arreté that I use at home is entirely consistent with the sound you hear from the R6 Arreté... just more of it for a bigger space. There are no inconsistencies or changes in tone or response, just more of the same. This is an extremely hard thing to do, when trying to reconcile the sound of a two-way stand-mount with a four-and-a-half way front, down, and rear firing floorstanding loudspeaker. That doesn't mean the R1 is bass heavy or the R6 is bass light; they both have a decent, deep and 'meaty' sounding bass relative to the size of the room. Yes, we're talking several organ pedals more on tap with the R6, but that's all. This shows great restraint on behalf of Audiovector as the temptation to make a big loudspeaker sound 'BIG' is almost too much to resist it seems. And yet, listening to the R6 Arreté one is immediately struck by just how well balanced the sound seems, just like it did in the R8 and R1 before it.

This consistency also applies to the music played on the R6 Arreté. It does not go for a 'grace and favour' approach to music, making some tracks sound good at the expense of others. It tends to make most things sound good, not through rose-tinted euphonic sound, but just by virtue of being honest with the recording and its overall accuracy makes the best out a track in general. ▶

“There was excellent integration between this deep bass and mid-bass on up.”

► If there is one thing that stands out about the R6 Arreté – and in an entirely good way – it’s that bottom end. It’s relatively easy to make a tight and tuneful two-way stand-mount loudspeaker (the trick is to either use a sealed box, or limit the extent and impact of the port, it seems), but doing the same on a far larger scale is extremely difficult. It’s something few companies get completely right, and either go with a lighter bass or a slower bass. Somehow (and I suspect the word ‘isobaric’ has a lot to answer for here), the R6 Arreté manages to combine bass depth and speed. My ‘go to’ test here is Trentemøller (staying on a Danish tip) and ‘Chameleon’ [*The Last Resort*, *Poker Flat*] and here the bass just pulsed away in time with the music; deep, taut, and very, very low. There was excellent integration between this deep bass and mid-bass on up, too, and this has to be one of the most seamless mash-ups between isobaric and main speaker in years.

Then there’s the dynamic range of these loudspeakers. Once again, we normally test these with large scale orchestral works at this level, to show how the speaker works in extremis. Here it does fine when playing Rachmaninov’s *Symphonic Dances* [Telarc], but more importantly it does dynamic texture well too. This is something that is more the domain of high-end designs, but often they present good microdynamics at the expense of the bigger picture. Here, the refinement of sublime piano playing [Schiff/Beethoven Piano Sonatas, ECM], gets both the force of the piano and the more delicate textures of the piece played perfectly. This gives a sense of realism to the piano recording, helped by the excellent quality of playing and engineering of course. In fact, every aspect of the R6 Arreté’s performance passed muster, and in many ways exceeded what I thought possible at the price.

Like other Audiovectors I’ve tested before the R6 Arreté, what it tends to do is challenge what your priorities are rather than show up its own limitations. If you are more concerned by bass depth or treble extension, the R6 Arreté excels in those aspects. If it’s top-to-bottom coherence, that works too. I’ve found that listening to Audiovectors, I’m more concerned by rhythm and less by soundstaging than I thought; it’s not that the R6 Arreté emphasises one at the expense of the other, it’s just that if it scores well on both, you find yourself either more drawn to one aspect than another.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Type: four and a half way, floor-radiating reflex floorstanding loudspeaker

Drive units: 1x Audivector-produced AMT tweeter, 1x 100mm rear-firing midrange, 2x 165mm Audiovector carbon-fibre mid-woofers, 2x 165mm bass units in isobaric chamber layout

Frequency Response: 23Hz–52kHz (-6dB)

Sensitivity: 9.51dB

Nominal impedance: 8Ω

Crossover point: 199Hz, 350Hz, 3kHz

Finishes: Matte Italian Walnut, African Rosewood Piano, Black Piano and White Piano

Dimensions (WxHxD): 27.8 × 123.4 × 43.1cm

Price: £24,999 per pair

Manufacturer: Audiovector

URL: audiovector.com

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So, I come back to my opening gambit. The Audiovector R6 Arreté deserves to be better known. It’s part of a new shape to high-end audio; a distinctly European approach that meets the demands of smaller rooms and listeners without man-caves. It’s a younger, possibly more chic approach that recognises the importance of sonic performance and domestic styling. It’s also a distinctly Continental sound too, with a performance that doesn’t just maximise a single quality but goes for a more well-rounded approach. The fact it does that with a new ‘compound bass’ isobaric loading system making good, deep, fast bass a realistic goal moves this speaker into the ‘must hear’ stakes. As a result, it’s galling not to see this fine loudspeaker rubbing shoulders with the biggest names in high-end audio. In terms of sonic appeal, build quality and looks, it more than deserves its place at the top table. Partner this with good electronics (not simply good Danish electronics, but that aforementioned Gryphon does make a lot of sense) and you have a system that can take on all comers from around the world. And win!

The fact Audiovector’s R6 can take you from a good loudspeaker (in the Signature) to a truly world-class one (in the Arreté) with a clearly defined upgrade path is icing on the cake, but I think there is a lot more to this design than simply steps on the ladder. The R6 Arreté is simply so natural, so musical and so damn ‘right’ sounding, this might just be the high-end’s greatest secret. +