

IS THE TECHNICS SL-1000R THE BEST EVER?

hi-fi+



ISSN 1465-5950



REPRODUCING THE RECORDED ARTS OCTOBER 2019 • 176
www.hifiplus.com

AUDIOVECTOR R1

ARRETÉ BRINGS HOME THE DANISH BACON

OUR
EXCLUSIVE
REVIEW
OF THE R1
ARRETÉ!



EXCLUSIVE: FLYING THE FLAG
WITH WARWICK'S NEW APERIO



EMM LABS DV2

FINK TEAM BORG

MARK LEVINSON 5805

DARTZEEL NHB-18NS/NHB-108
MODEL TWO

NORDOST QPOINTS AND QSOURCE

Audiovector R1 Arreté stand-mount loudspeaker

by Alan Sircom



Audiovector's popular core SR range has been with us for some time, but things move on. Although upgradable, the SR models had reached a point where the next generation of technology developed in top-end models like the R8 and R11 simply couldn't filter down into the more practical and affordable models in the range, so the 'SR' series has morphed into the 'R' range.

A surface reading of the R1 might make you think it's identical to the SR1 that precedes it. Appearances can be deceptive, however, as the cabinet and baffles are both redesigned to be 25% stronger, with a deeper and more solid rear baffle in particular. This means lower cabinet coloration.

The deeper you dig, the more you realise there is a lot new in this loudspeaker. For example, the carbon-fibre sandwich cone mid-bass driver is more than just a refinement over old models, it features trickle-down technology from the lighter, stiffer, and more acoustically 'dead' materials found in the cross-woven Sandwich Carbon Driver developed for the R9 Arreté, and the result is a bass driver that delivers more detail and better soundstaging than its predecessor. ▶

“Freedom routes motion-induced distortion away from the magnesium driver baskets.”

▶ As ever, there is an upgrade path on Audiovector’s R Series. You can start with the good (Signature), and upgrade over time to better (Avantgarde) or best (Arreté, tested here). Each step features changes to the tweeter, with concomitant changes to the crossover. The step up to Arreté also introduces cryogenic (NCS Freeze technology) and internal shock absorption, alongside the move to the Arreté version of the hand-made, open-backed AMT tweeter designed specifically for the R series. These changes combine to extend the frequency response of the R1 concept considerably, from 42Hz–28kHz in the Signature version up to 38Hz–53kHz in the top Arreté design, all the while retaining the same 87dB, eight-ohm load.

The other headline change that comes with stepping up to the Arreté plate (on all R Series models, not just the R1) is it ‘unlocks’ the option for what Audiovector calls ‘Freedom Grounding’. Freedom routes motion-induced distortion away from the magnesium driver baskets, taking a grounding feed from the loudspeakers into a spare socket of a power conditioner. You won’t need to change your loudspeaker cables, as it plugs into a separate 4mm connector on the rear panel of the loudspeakers, leaving a set of single-wired terminals for the loudspeaker signals. The Freedom cable has no live or neutral conductors, just the earth terminal and conductor are connected. This was first seen on the R8 Arreté floorstander that we tested in issue 165.

Larger models like the R8 Arrete act as technology ‘pumps’, meaning the technologies underlying their designs need to be put under the magnifying glass, but the R1 reaches an audience that expect those technologies to have already been ‘sorted’ and have trickled down into the stand-mount model. Endless and forensic descriptions of the innovations are therefore secondary to the ‘yes, but how does it sound?’ part of the test.

First up, the Audiovector R1 Arreté is extremely ‘amp-chummy’. Audiovector has had long-standing bromances with Naim Audio and more recently Gryphon and Hegel (as in, models from all of these brands have been used during listening tests of Audiovector’s speakers), but realistically, you could use the R1 Arreté with almost any amp on the market and get a good performance. OK, so I’d temper that by saying the loudspeaker seems to work best with the sort of damping factor found in most solid-state designs, and no-one is actually going to use an up-market stand-mount loudspeaker like this with a clapped out 45 year old receiver that looks like it lost an argument with a flight of stairs, are they? Used in a proportionally designed system, the R1 Arreté plays nice with its peers.

I’ve long been a fan of Audiovector’s sound, as it’s consistent, precise, and refreshingly free from nonsense. So, core changes to the brand could be a worry in case the company ‘throws the baby out with the bathwater’. But the R8 Arreté showed just how the new direction would be mapped out, producing a sound far larger than you expect from the given size of the loudspeaker, but ▶



“The R1 Arreté has excellent imaging properties. It creates a soundstage that runs very wide of the speakers and deep too.”

▶ with all the adroit timing and coherence we have come to expect from the brand. And that’s what we get with the R1 Arreté, only more so.

I’ve always liked the precision and stereo focus of a fine two-way standmount, but usually wish they had the bass drive and energy of a decent floorstander. There are a few designs that hit both goals, but often in trying to cover both bases, they make a hash of the overall performance somewhere. You end up with a loudspeaker that delivers more bass, but sounds boomy, or uneven, or bland, or any one of a dozen different ways to go wrong. The R1 Arreté is one of the few stand-mounts that successfully straddles that gulf between stand and tower.

The R1 Arreté has excellent imaging properties. It creates a soundstage that runs very wide of the loudspeakers and deep too. It’s not ‘electrostatic-like’ (partly because the R1 has more dynamics than most electrostatics) but it is ‘holographic’ and recordings with good stereo such as Rachmaninov’s *Symphonic Dances* [Zinman, Baltimore SO, Telarc] present the sound of an orchestra in layers. This track also highlights its excellent dynamic range, and it bops along at a fair pace, too. The kings of rhythm, who judge every piece of audio by its ability to ‘time’ will find much to like here. That is hardly surprising, as the previous SR range was popular with ‘Pace Rhythm and Timing’ fans, but the R1 Arreté makes toe-tapping mandatory with everything this side of listening to news broadcasts.

The R1’s ability to resolve fine detail is outstanding. The maelstrom of sounds and samples within Public Service Broadcasting’s ‘Theme From PSB’ [*Inform, Educate, Entertain, Test Card*] can just become a wall of sound, but each individual theme, the detail of picking, playing, and beating those instruments against a diverse set of samples is perfectly teased out here. Add to this a greater sense of musical engagement, a spot of warmth compared to previous Audiovectors, and an ever-agile sound, and the R1 Arreté shines.

The Freedom grounding system is worth a mention here. By helping make the loudspeaker a quieter environment, it makes those innate characteristics of the big speaker in a small box shine through even brighter. It seems to work especially well in the lower registers. It adds authority to the bass, though not in terms of adding extra energy or depth to the sound; instead, just by giving notes the space and air they require, they take on a sense of purpose not commonly associated with stand-mount speakers. People have been experimenting with star-earthing loudspeakers for years; this is the reality.

We are becoming a space-poor species. The pull of the big cities, the limits imposed by new buildings, and the ever-increasing costs of real estate often mean the most expensive part of even the most exotic audio systems is the room in which it resides. Rather than dismiss and disenfranchise those who cannot accommodate a full-size listening room, I prefer to think of this as

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Type: Two-way, bass-reflex stand-mount loudspeaker

Drive units: 1x Audivector-produced 4th generation AMT folded ribbon tweeter with acoustic lens, 1 165mm Audiovector Carbon Sandwich mid-woofers

Frequency Response: 38Hz–53kHz (-6dB)

Sensitivity: 87dB/W

Nominal impedance: 8Ω

Crossover point: 2.9kHz

Audiovector Freedom Grounding (cable optional)

Dimensions (W×H×D): 29 × 37 × 19.6cm

Weight: 10kg

Price: €5,800 per pair

Manufactured by: Audiovector

URL: audiovector.com

Tel: +45 3539 6060

the ‘Small Room Problem’. There are many ways to overcome this problem, but my preferred solution is to use a pair of bloody good small loudspeakers that deliver the kind of low-end needed for such rooms, so they neither sacrifice performance in the mids nor the highs, and don’t swamp the lows. The R1 Arreté is one of the best solutions to the Small Room Problem and have the advantage that they don’t cost as much as a new BMW.

Audiovector has successfully filtered the technologies used in the R8 Arreté into models that fit into a wider range of rooms and budgets, and yet has done so without any compromise. In fact, the biggest hurdle faced by the R1 Arreté is its price... it’s too low to be taken seriously by the high-end cognoscenti. If you listen with your ears and not your wallet, the Audiovector R1 Arreté is the one of the best stand-mounts available today and has become one of my benchmarks. +