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“Should be considered one of Elac’s finest efforts”

FOR Detailed, organised sound; solid build; unfussy nature | **AGAINST** Tough competition



Elac’s original Debut speaker range was launched around three years ago to a fair amount of acclaim. We tested the entry level Debut B5s (£250) and liked their combination of fluid midrange and timing, though found that their dynamics and drive fell short of that delivered by the class leaders.

Established budget superpowers, such as Q Acoustics and Dali, could rest easy knowing their respective products still held the upper hand.

This time around we’re not so sure – for the new Elac Debut B5.2s are brilliant performers for the money.

In short, Elac has changed almost everything about the new Debuts. The

cabinet is a similar volume to before, but its proportions are around 2cm different in all directions. They’re now taller (34cm), narrower (18cm) and deeper (23cm) in a bid to look smarter and be less visually obtrusive. To our eyes, these changes have worked, making the new Debuts look more modern too.

The 5.25cm mid/bass unit has been thoroughly revised too, using a new blend of aramid fibres for the cone, combined with a different shape to improve stiffness and damping. That the dust-cap is now convex rather than concave will strike most people as a minor detail, but it has benefits at the top end of the driver’s operating range – the crossover is at 2.2kHz – and helps integration with the tweeter.

Against the wall

As with most of its rivals, the bass is tuned by a reflex port. On the new Debut this has moved to the front panel to make the speakers less sensitive to their proximity to the rear wall, making placement easier.

The tweeter may be hidden behind a distinctive grille, but it marks a major change from the previous version. It’s now a wide surround design with improved dispersion and a top end response that extends to a claimed 35kHz. The old one topped out at a mere 20kHz, so we’re expecting a lot more top-end sparkle and openness now.

These new drivers positively demand a better foundation to work from and Elac’s engineers have obliged with a more rigid, braced MDF enclosure. This is claimed to display fewer resonances and add less distortion to the sound than

KEY FEATURES



5.25cm mid/bass

86dB

Sensitivity
(dB/W/m)



Dimensions:
34x18x23cm



Round the back of the Debuts is a pair of single-wire terminals

that found on the previous model. Connection to the amplifier is through a pair of solid single-wire terminals.

We’re impressed by the build of the B5.2s and admire their crisp lines and feeling of solidity. They’re available in only one finish though – the decent, but slightly drab looking, black ash vinyl you see here.

Prime position

These standmounts prove unfussy about placement. They work best a little out into the room – we start at around 30cm and experiment – but will still deliver relatively balanced results if not optimally placed. Ideally they should sit on rigid stands to get the best sound. Thankfully, the Debuts aren’t particularly fussy about angling in towards the listening position, producing a wide, solid sound stage with little work.

Speakers at this level need to work with a wide range of partnering equipment. They’re just as likely to be fed by a budget micro-system as they are quality separates, and so need to be balanced to work well with both. Elac’s



“Tonally, the Elacs don’t have the sweetness of the Q Acoustics or the luscious midrange warmth of the Dalis, but they pull ahead of both when it comes to insight and composure”

engineers have done a decent though not class-leading job here.

The B5.2s aren’t quite as forgiving of partnering electronics as either the Q Acoustics 3020is or Dali’s Spektor 2s due to a presentation that leans more towards analysis than smoothness or warmth. Any shortcomings of the partnering electronics aren’t hidden, but thankfully, not exaggerated either. These speakers merely reflect the quality of the signal fed to them rather than try to sweeten it.

Singing its praises

Move to quality entry-level separates or higher - the Elacs positively sing with the likes of Marantz’s PM6006UK or Rega’s Brio (£599) with a suitable source - and it becomes clear that these boxes are something special.

Feed the speakers Madonna’s *Ray Of Light* and they have no trouble coping

with the album’s dense instrumentation and complex rhythms. These are expressive performers that deliver sound with a precision and cohesion that’s rare for this level. The old Debuts timed well, but this model goes even further, conveying the changes of musical momentum beautifully.

Tonally, they don’t have the sweetness of the Q Acoustics or the luscious midrange warmth of the comparable Dalis, but they’re even-handed and admirably balanced in the way they deal with poorer, more aggressive recordings. They pull ahead of both rivals when it comes to insight and composure.

You can enjoy a wide range of music with these speakers too. We listen to everything from the sparse electronica of Neneh Cherry’s *Broken Politics* to Dave Brubeck’s *Take Five* and these little speakers take it all in their stride.

The Debuts have the dynamic expression, detail resolution and tonal sophistication to handle it all, and enough stretch in their abilities to get even better when you decide the time is right to upgrade the rest of your system.

Elac has been in the speaker business since the 1980s and has made many fine products in that time. It’s fair to say that these new Debuts should be considered one of the company’s finest efforts, particularly when their price is taken into account. If the established budget speaker brands aren’t worried about these boxes, they should be.

WHAT HI-FI? says

Rating ★★★★★

SOUND ★★★★★

COMPATIBILITY ★★★★★

BUILD ★★★★★

VERDICT These ELAC Debuts are among the most capable budget standmounters we’ve heard