

Fully active loudspeaker system "Live 15" by Ascendo

Nomen est Omen



German loudspeaker specialist Ascendo from Ansbach (Franconia) has established its good reputation as a manufacturer of passive, time-corrected speakers. Now, influenced by all those experiences made whilst creating their Ascendo/AIA cinema system, the Ascendo developers let their creativity run wild. Internal developing code: "fun box". As easy as this may sound, the task was not as easy to accomplish. Nothing less than "having fun while listening to music – every kind of music" was the main priority during the construction phase of the "Live 15". Which came to fruition in the first fully active speaker Ascendo ever made.

Programmatic naming

The subject of this review is named „Live 15“. It is the first loudspeaker that belongs to the new line of active Ascendo speakers. Therefore the goals for its performance were lofty: bridging the gap between the power performance well known by stage/pro audio systems and the more refined, delicate „High End“ sound. So here we have a maximum sound pressure of more than 130 dB (even in the low range) – which is a level typical HiFi speakers cannot even dream of. The construction of this loudspeaker inherits some of the best com-



ponents professional audio has to offer. Not to mention the Ascendo/AIA technology used (which received some awards already – e.g. “New Technology Award@ ISE” - categories „Subwoofer“ and „Home Cinema/Multiroom“). Ascendo’s coaxial chassis has a 12 inch diameter (30 cm) with a backside-mounted 1 1/2 inch horn driver attached (see photo). This results in a real one point source seamlessly covering the complete frequency range down to 60 Hz. As we have already come to expect from an Ascendo speaker the „Live 15“ shows an almost perfect soundstaging. And even more...

The „Live 15“ is a modular concept. Its subwoofer unit uses its own power amp with 1000 watts (sinus) and an input DSP network section. The same amount of power is available to the coaxial unit. Even the input DSP network section owns a dedicated amplification section. Each amp is supplied with its own power sup-

ply, of course. The 15 inch membrane of the bass driver with hard suspension is made of titanium. Based in professional audio it is equipped with a neodymium magnet. In addition, this high tech driver has a linear swing length of 36 mm to offer. Any questions left? The chassis is mounted in a well strutted closed cabinet boasting a 40 mm thick, massive front plate. The internal wiring (developed inhouse) is of high quality, too. Naturally.

More comfort

Whatever can be configured here can be done browser-based via WLAN. Which translates to: Easy to use and independent from any operating system used on your computer, smartphone or tablet. There is not even a need to install an app or any software or tool. Room correction is an integrated feature, too. This allows

Ascendo’s „Live 15“ to be adjusted perfectly to the individual room conditions it faces.

Where can we go?

Due to its modular construction one of the obvious choices for Ascendo’s „Live 15“ system is putting it to use in a combined home theater/stereo setting. It doesn’t take long to connect the coaxial units to the „Front Left“ and „Front Right“ outputs and the subwoofer unit to the „Sub Out“ of a home theater processor. So when you use an Ascendo Live 15 you will need nothing more than an additional two surround speakers plus one center. The result is a full-fledged, extremely powerful cinema setup with perfect speech intelligibility. These components are disposable by Ascendo, too. Fully active onwall speakers with just 10 cm in depth and matching center are available. So, if you dare...?

This setup can trigger each of these speakers via network wire. Which means that no other wiring will be necessary. The beforementioned award-winning Ascendo/AIA technology allows them to stream high resolution audio signals to an unlimited number of speakers belonging to the new „Live“ series via the integrated AVB Ethernet network. This technology is not limited when it comes to the number of possible channels, maximum flexibility is guaranteed.

Stereo sound

The „Live 15“ speaker design unites all of the well-known capabilities Ascendo speakers have made a name for in a 123 x 44 x 35 cm (HxBxT) large and 75 Kg weighing cabinet. Homogeneous symmetrical emission, distortion-free and uncoloured sound combined with a perfect soundstage, that is what we’re talking here. Throw in tremendous speed and fantastic dynamics and it sounds almost too good to be true. Most astonishing is the fact that Ascendo’s Live 15 is able to reproduce even most complex musical challenges with ease. So better be careful – addiction alert! But there is no wizardry involved. Just the simple fact that Ascendo has translated the old saying that „...cylinder capacity cannot be replaced – except by more cylinder



capacity!“ into HiFi language as „...the surface area of a membrane cannot be replaced – except by more...”

As we expected the Ascendo Live 15 reproduced frequencies from under 16 Hz up to more than 20.000 Hz perfectly time aligned. So like they do in real life, each and every note reaches the human ear at the same time. This tonal correctness is so impressive that you will hear it immediately. Deepest bass notes are reproduced with enormous slam and authority. Accuracy, closeness and homogeneous reproduction are as close to the „perfect source“ as we have ever heard. In typical As-

cendo fashion as a standard there are two high gloss finishes available: black and white.

What did we listen to and which equipment did we use?

Our whole editorial staff was on hand for our annual meeting so I decided to skip my usual routine of starting my listening session with female voices. Instead I dug right into my Jazz collection and came up with Miles Davis' second soundtrack album „Jack Johnson“ (one of boxings all time greats). Arguably this is the most „rock-



ing“ recording Davis ever made. Surrounded by exceptional musicians like famous guitar player John McLaughlin, the great Herbie Hancock performing on organ, bass expert Michael Henderson and highly regarded drummer Billy Cobham, Davis recorded an album still looked at with a wink by aficionados. That is, because these five guys put some very intriguing takes onto it. To cut a long story short: pure dynamics! That's it.

All of this was presented to us by one of Clearaudio's top record players, the Innovation, in combination with their tonearm Universal and pick-up Stradivari, all of these being well-trusted workhorses making up for a great sounding combo in my setup. The Innovation was connected to my Nagra BPS phono stage via HMS Gran Finale cable. As a preamp I used the unbelievably agile Octave HP 300 SE which integrated perfectly into my setup right from the bat.

The world of classical music always bears new findings for me. As is Béla Bartók's violin concerto Nr. 2. What a joy to listen to, from the first note of the first tune to the last note of the final tune. I definitely will remember this performance for a long time to come as it exposed all of the Live 15's potential. For sure the big coax driv-

er has its advantages when it comes to displaying the orchestra and stage depth. But this is being presented in a matter of course very rarely ever heard. This is the Live 15's outstanding attribute as I see it.

Drumbeats? Hell, yeah – true-to-life! To me, „Elbtoneal“ cannot really be considered music. But the performance delivered here by percussion instruments is a real feast for the Live 15 – you must have heard the self-evident style it delivers true 16 Hz! Listening to smaller Jazz



combos via the „Live 15“ system is just about the limit. Right now we're talking about Danish trio Danielsson, Neset and Lund playing „sun blowing“. We put the CD into the player and the musicians were right there. Shining saxophone sounds, authoritative upright bass and a drum set being played with lots of passion – „being part of it“, thats how I felt.

Finally – voices! It did not take us long to agree that Sara Bareilles' „Brave Enough“ (listened to at almost life-like levels) delivered exactly the right mood and intensity. The boys kept wondering again and again „Are you dumb now, buddy...?!“ (in German/Bavarian „Bist Du depert...?!“ – editors note: emphasis must be on the first word...). This exclamation of delight was the common sense on what we had experienced.

How did we listen?

Well, on numerous occasions quite loudly. Although especially listening to music at moderate levels always led to an exceptionally good performance we sometimes just had to crank it up...!

This speaker system never neglects even the smallest of signals – at whichever listening level you may choose. The treble range is not only reproduced as clean and crisp as expected but also shows astonishing good qualities in every other aspect. This came as a real surprise.

If we look at it matter-of-factly one thing stands out very clear: Perfectly implemented professional audio gear can not only be equivalent to the „High End quality“ we've gotten used to but sometimes even superior. Especially if we bear in mind that the term „High End quality“ is nowadays quite often stressed to its limits, if not overblown. Within our editorial staff one thing is for sure: We will definitely not be a part of the discussion on how this lofty term is to be defined. That is, because neither the sheer price of a component nor any attempted redefinition of physical laws by its producer will be able to convince us of a units capabilities. In the end one thing remains as the sole decisive factor: Either you like the sound – or not.

In a nutshell

Ascendo's approach of transforming the subwoofer from their already existing home theater range into a full range HiFi speaker by adding a matching coaxial unit works greatly. The blend of these two units into one „box“ results in a highly addictive stereophonic sound. Is this statement of mine more of a threat or more of a promise? Well, listen and decide for yourself...!

Information

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