

Hi-Fi Choice

"THE DIREKT PAINTS A RICH, WIDE AND DEEP TAPESTRY OF VOICES AND INSTRUMENTATION"



HECO

Direkt



HECO

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Choice EXOTICA HECO DIREKT FLOORSTANDING LOUDSPEAKER £2,500



Go faster stripes

Chris Ward finds himself reinforcing outmoded stereotypes by listening to highly efficient German speakers

One glance at this Heco speaker – one suspects – will produce something rather different from the norm. Looking over the spec sheet only redoubles the anticipation. Few speakers have piqued my interest more ahead of listening than this. That's because it appears to address a rather underserved part of the hi-fi market. There are relatively few high sensitivity, easy load speakers especially designed for fans of lower-powered valve amps, and the few that exist can be out of reach of

The Direkt paints a rich, wide and deep tapestry of voices and instrumentation

many budgets. For those less familiar with Heco a casual flick through its products confirms it is a major German manufacturing force.

Attaching three perfectly fashioned alloy feet with purposeful bolts enables the speaker to gently lean back. Each foot can take a spike or rubber ferrule to tune your sound or protect your flooring and they raise the speaker a precise distance from the floor that is said to optimise the performance of the twin ports firing down from the base of the cabinet.

Lifting the 25kg cabinet confirms just how well constructed it is and a firm knuckle rap on the substantial, strongly braced shell produces a reassuring sound that suggests this is a product that has not been over-damped, but made to last. The white painted finish feels silky and durable and accentuates the mix of sharp edges and soft curves. Presently available in white or black, both finishes come with a jaunty racing stripe straight down the middle. At first glance it conveys a rather retro

chic, almost as though Heco has a long heritage of racing at Le Mans. Of course, fashions will change and the novelty of the stripe may wane over time, but I'm currently a fan.

The speaker is unashamedly broad with a 440mm-wide front baffle hosting a 28mm silk compound dome tweeter and generous 280mm mid/bass driver. The tweeter employs a solid aluminium front panel along with a short, high-efficiency wave-control horn and powerful double magnet system, while the woofer is a lightweight but stiff Kraft paper diaphragm made using specially formulated long fibre paper pulp.

In practice, the Direkt is fairly room friendly. Positioning it 50cm or more from a rear wall gives it room to breathe and I can subtly fine tune bass response by the proximity to the rear wall. I find gentle toe-in produces a wider soundstage, greater toe-in increases treble dynamics, and further angling the speakers to effectively cross in front of the listening position creates a compelling balance of tone and musicality. I have no doubt you should find an optimum position given a medium-to-large room.

With a quoted 95dB efficiency and 4-8ohm impedance, the Direkt is effortless to drive and I experiment with Audion Golden Night 300B monoblocks as well as an Audio Note OTO SE Signature integrated amp. Both max out at 10 single-ended watts, but create ample listening levels with surprisingly low gain.

Sound quality

I kick off listening with Hello by Adele on vinyl. The opening piano notes have fantastic weight and richness. Pianos are notoriously tricky to portray convincingly, but the Direkt gets straight to the point, combining rich timbre with a lightness of touch. Adele's voice appears centre stage at head height and the Direkt reveals

outstanding imaging. Her vocals have real presence and focus and every tiny inflection of her voice seems to hang in the air above the speaker. This holographic quality is often the preserve of electrostatic panels, but the Direkt seems equal to the challenge.

Choruses build in intensity and with every dynamic gear change the Direkt is eager, willing and very able. Valve lovers often feel they can't have fast, deep bass from sensibly sized speakers, but here the Direkt offers really impressive deep bass that feels entirely credible, although upper bass can just occasionally seem less resonant than the deeper, more port-assisted notes. This is nit picking, though, as many valve lovers in particular will simply celebrate that they can now access deeper octaves previously beyond their reach.

The midband is rich, fast, transparent and especially insightful with vocals and acoustic instruments. Treble is never harsh, but is highly energetic and detailed. Some may prefer less revealing treble, but the clarity the tweeter serves up is highly informative and can easily be controlled with off-axis listening.

Playing Automatic Part 1 and Part 2 from Jean Michel Jarre and Vince Clarke on CD really shows that while the speaker's design may reference a previous era, its sound is bang up to date. The Direkt sets out layer upon layer of highly transparent synth

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Heco Direkt

ORIGIN
Germany

TYPE
Two-way
floorstanding
loudspeaker

WEIGHT
25.8kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
440 x 998 x 397mm

FEATURES
● 28mm silk compound tweeter
● 280mm Kraft paper mid/bass driver
● Quoted sensitivity: 95dB/1W/1m

DISTRIBUTOR
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The Direkt sports twin ports left and right like a BMW M3



Q&A

Shandro Fischer
Head of R&D, Heco



CW: Who is the Direkt designed for, and what was the sonic brief?

SF: The Direkt was made for those whose first priority is reproducing the purest qualities of music. Our goal was to achieve an open and transparent performance with excellent dynamic attack. Some people call this a 'live' sound character. I would prefer to call it accurate and not over damped. Inspiration came from cinema and hi-fi speakers of the fifties to seventies. The combination of wide baffle and an oversized woofer/midrange driver enables us to create a highly coherent, full-bodied sound without any of the side effects that could reduce transparency.

How did you approach integration of the drivers?

We develop our own speciality drivers inhouse in our German lab. We control everything from the design of the voice coils and magnets to basket geometry and construction techniques. Development work is done with the help of laser analysis that gives us electrical and mechanical data about a prototype driver as well as exact details around magnetic force, mechanical damping and cone movement. But while computer simulations give us very important data, we find that the most satisfying results come with the human factor of listening carefully.

What kind of amplification do you recommend for the Direkt?

During product development we tried them with many different modern and classic designs. They sound very nice with a lot of valve amps, but we also got superb results with some modern lower-to-medium-powered solid-state amps. At the moment I successfully drive the Direkts in my office with a vintage seventies solid-state 25W receiver.

Where did the inspiration for the racing stripes come from?

Many people assume it was American cars like the original Shelby Cobra, but the idea actually came from some vintage electric guitars that also use a stripe on their body.

IN SIGHT



- 1 28mm silk compound tweeter
- 2 Single-wire binding posts
- 3 Downward-firing twin bass ports
- 4 280mm Kraft paper mid/bass driver

loops over a razor sharp and deep, punchy electronic beat. Shimmering keyboard chords wash left and right over the soundstage with highly extended fizzing detail, while a simple crystal clear glockenspiel melody hangs stationary above the speakers. Again, the vivid presentation from these broad boxes seems more akin to large electrostatic panels, but it can do this with far more propulsive drive and potent bass than most panels muster, and rarely driven by the most elegant valve designs. This isn't just a highly dynamic performance, it's a fireworks display that has you scanning the room for the sonic pyrotechnics.

By way of contrast I leap back over 400 years and play a hi-res download of Harry Christophers conducting Nisi Dominus from Claudio Monteverdi's 1610 Vespers. Within the first few bars the Direkt paints a rich, wide and deep tapestry of lush voices and Baroque instrumentation. Here the speaker's sensitivity gives excellent light and shade between the intimacy of individual voices and the more opulent choral sections in the large acoustic space. It's this sensitivity that enables quieter elements to be just as communicative as more dramatic dynamics, and the highly nuanced midband performance creates a sumptuous layering of male and female voices alongside a genuine ability to resolve the subtle timbre of the more unusual period instruments

used here. The speed of the speakers also helps the excellent timing and so the music just flows through the drivers absolutely unfettered. In short, it's spellbinding.

Conclusion

At the outset, I hoped that a new high sensitivity speaker choice had arrived, and I am not disappointed. Music flows effortlessly from the Direkt and its lightning speed, potent dynamics and hear-through transparency feels like a speaker with few compromises. The Heco represents a serious new choice for the discerning listener and doubly so if you enjoy low-powered valve amplification. The Direkt's size and proportions won't necessarily be to everyone's aesthetic taste, but its sound qualities should swiftly silence any detractors ●



Audio Note AN-E speakers are similarly designed to excel with low-powered valve amplification. They are just as easy to drive and are very easy on the ear. If space is tight in your room they even relish corner positioning. The **AN-E range starts at** around £3,296. Also worthy of an audition are Living Voice Auditorium and Avatar speakers at around £3,700 and £4,500 respectively. They boast similar sensitivity and quality manufacturing and are probably less controversial to the eye. The fact that I have selected comparative products that cost more than the Direkt underlines the impressive feat that Heco has achieved.

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY



LIKE: Sensitivity; transparency; build; bass; price

VALUE FOR MONEY



DISLIKE: Novelty of stripe may wane

BUILD QUALITY



WE SAY: Modern-looking sensitive speakers perfect for valve amplifiers

EASE OF DRIVE



OVERALL

