

DeVore Fidelity Orangutan O/baby stand-mount loudspeakers

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To be honest, it looks like you built them” was the rather disparaging comment from my partner when confronted with the DeVore Fidelity O/baby for the first time. As well as grossly overstating my ability

to construct anything more lasting than a sandwich, it does rather demean the structural integrity of the smallest freestanding member of the Orangutan series of speakers. Nevertheless, the O/baby looks sufficiently different from pretty much anything else at the price as to confuse the less committed observer into wondering what the thinking is behind it.

As the rather charming name suggests, the O/baby is designed around the same philosophy as the larger O/96 and O/93 models but shrunk down to the point where, even if ‘compact’ is not the word that springs immediately to mind when you encounter them, they are a great deal smaller than the larger models. The premise is a two way design that leverages a wide but relatively shallow cabinet to help dispersion. It’s a simple enough concept but the closer you look the more the specific details leap out of the notionally straightforward speaker.

New Money

The 0.75 inch (19mm in new money) soft dome tweeter sits in a recess in the ply front fascia that acts as a shallow horn. You can actually see the layers of ply that have been carved away to achieve it and testifies to the front baffle being a fairly hefty construct. The O/baby is designed in a such a way that the tweeter should be slightly below your seated ear height (beanbag users need not apply) and this small horn helps the overall dispersion. This hands over to a seven inch (178mm) driver that is made of untreated paper. Both drivers are German in origin and from the same supplier as the larger models.

The crossover that ties the driver together is a fairly minimalist design that hands over between the two drivers at around 2kHz. As befits something fairly simple,

the O/baby supports single wiring via a set of sturdy if unremarkable terminals at the base of the rear panel. What you will also find in the same vicinity is a small offset bass port that vents the cabinet. Its presence puts the O/baby in a slightly different position – quite literally – to some fairly similar looking devices. Where some other speakers of this sort of configuration can be used close to walls and even wedged into corners, the O/baby won’t take kindly to this. To their credit, DeVore Fidelity provides genuinely excellent advice on positioning if you can overcome traditional reticence in men in particular to read instruction manuals.

The cabinet shape, driver choices, crossover and even the presence of the port are geared to ensuring that the O/baby presents benign impedance and high sensitivity. The smaller cabinet means that it cannot match the O/96 and O/93 in absolute terms; DeVore Fidelity quotes 90dB/W/m which is some way down on the bigger models but, combined with an impedance that is intended to be as close to eight ohms as possible across the frequency range, you have a speaker that will not require a vast amount of power to work in room. This does naturally mean that the DeVore Fidelity will be of interest to valve amp users but – as we shall cover – it’s nowhere near as simple as to say that is what it works best with.

You raise me up!

The O/baby is closer in overall configuration to the O/96 in that the 59cm cabinet is not designed to be parked directly on the ground, however much this might simplify the business of getting the tweeter below ear height. The documentation recommends using a stand to add roughly another 12 inches (300mm) to the overall height and DeVore Fidelity makes a dedicated stand for this purpose that was supplied for review. This is a wood and marine ply structure that looks more like a stool frame than it does anything else. It is an attractive and sturdy thing but, at no less than £1,398 for two it’s a fairly pricey way of securing the required elevation. If you can live without the comforting aesthetic match of the dedicated stand though, rather more cost effective options are available.



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» Returning to the appearance of the O/baby, I find myself more positively inclined towards them than my partner but there are some limitations to the way that DeVore Fidelity is finished that do need to be taken into account. The attractive veneer on the front panel is restricted to that side alone and the rest of the cabinet is finished in a black sheen with a slightly odd speckled finish that occasionally had me thinking that I hadn't dusted them properly. I don't have any issue with saying that you can buy more lavishly finished and spectacular looking devices than the O/baby, even when the £1,400 cost of the stands is deducted and they are judged at £6,298, it is fair to say more spectacular devices are available.

This doesn't tell the whole story though. Spend a little time with the O/baby and the care and attention that has gone into its construction becomes more apparent. This is a fastidiously made speaker where behind the deceptively simple premise of its design, a huge amount of thought and experience has gone into its fabrication. In the time they've been here, I have warmed to the O/baby more than I thought I might when I first lifted them out the packaging.

Additional Detail

Of course, some of this softening in attitude can be attributed to the additional detail that I've been listening to the O/baby in the same period and – bluntly – falling for

them in a big way. I have heard the O/96 on two different occasions and the performance on offer has stuck with me but actually living with the O/baby has been deeply satisfying. This has been the case despite me not perhaps being a natural fit for the attributes that this speaker brings to the table. Both main test amps that reside here possess healthy, hundred watt plus power outputs and my musical taste, when left to my own devices in particular, has long leaned towards speakers that go like the clappers.

What the O/baby does with sublime ease is use its effortless sensitivity to demonstrate a speed and sheer immediacy that can leave many narrow baffle rivals sounding languid. The title track of John Grant's *Pale Green Ghosts* [Bella Union] is delivered with an articulation to the deep electronic underpinnings that would genuinely qualify as urgent if there wasn't such an effortlessness to the way it happens. This is the antithesis of the idea of 'grip'; a driver being bludgeoned into starting and stopping with absolute precision but such is the natural fluency, the effect is no less engaging.

This agility is, if anything, a footnote to a selection of other talents that make for a sublime listening experience. As I place speakers relatively wide apart, the O/baby needed a little toe in to truly dial in but once this had been done, the image that they create is utterly spellbinding.

The manner in which they give the required space to the »

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» orchestra in Public Service Broadcasting's *This New Noise* [Test Card Recordings] feels so intrinsically 'right' that going back to even very accomplished resident speakers feels a little like donning headphones. This is not the same type of 'immersive audio' as the one that requires umpteen speakers splattered across your walls and ceiling but the effect it has on your perception of the music is uncannily similar.

Interestingly, the requirement for you to be above the tweeter is genuinely and consistently repeatable. Slouch below the required height and the airiness of the presentation begins to fall away and the impression becomes more directional. Listening to the unplugged version of Fink's 'Maker', released as part of selection of songs at the same time as *Sort of Revolution* [Ninja Tune] and that represents absolutely peerless audiophile catnip, demonstrates this extremely effectively. Sink beneath the tweeter level and the absolute perception of the space that Finn Greenall is performing in starts to fray and things become a little congested. Agree to the O/baby's terms of use though and he's right there occupying the space between the two cabinets, as tangible as I can remember experiencing.

The tonal balance of the DeVore Fidelity is also hugely appealing. The frequency extremes of the O/baby might be considered a little soft; it is hugely refined across the upper registers but people coming from metal tweeters in particular might find some the energy they are used to in the treble is going to be absent. The caveat to this is that the DeVore Fidelity might well be the single most adept speaker at handling less than stellar recordings that I've tested this year. There's also no lack of clarity and detail to material either. The Punch Brothers' haunting cover of 'The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald' on *Hell on Church Street* [Nonesuch] is packed with the little nuances that bring the performance to life and the O/baby handles the build in scale with effortless ease.

The upper registers feed seamlessly into a midrange that manages to balance being the sort of full bodied and tangible thing that has you reaching for all recordings that you know will luxuriate in the performance on offer, while avoiding the feeling that the rest of the response is an afterthought. The handover between the two drivers is seamless and, having picked the baton from the tweeter, the midbass is able to take material down to something around 40Hz with a usefully flat response and, in this room at least, only tailing off gracefully from there.

Beyond this slightly dry description of what the O/baby does is the intangible desire to keep listening to it. This is a speaker that seems purpose built for those listening sessions that cover a good half a day and take you through random corners of your collection without sounding a bum note with any of them. One vinyl-based session uncovered a copy of the Fine Young Cannibals' *The Raw and the*

Cooked [London Records] that I don't ever recall buying (I have a tentative theory that collections begin to manifest records of their own accord beyond a certain point).

Beyond any salient technical detail, the way that the O/baby conjures up 'I'm Not The Man I Used To Be' is a heady combination of time travel and holographic manifestation that significantly more expensive speakers have failed to match.

Impressively transparent

There's one final party piece too and it's a potentially very useful one. The O/baby is impressively transparent to kit changes in a system and there's enough stretch in its capability to front significantly more expensive systems if you wish. What it also does is demonstrate a sort of 'minimum level of capability' that is absurdly high. On a whim, I connected them to a re-released Musical Fidelity A1 and Chord Electronics Qutest and, however lopsided a pricing balance that might look on paper, the result was a joy to listen to. The core virtues of the O/baby are such that they can be unlocked with equipment that need not cost the Earth. When you revert to using the DeVore Fidelity with more expensive gear, you can hear what it brings to the party but when you listen in isolation, what remains is so compelling that you don't really miss it.

In fact, 'compelling' is a neat one word summary of what DeVore Fidelity has built here. The O/baby is a gently concentrated dose of what makes the larger Orangutan speakers such an addictive listening experience and the combination of remarkable docility and user friendliness means that even if you don't think you are looking for a wide baffle, high sensitivity speaker, it might be just the ticket for any system. The O/baby is everything that is truly great hi-fi should be and it represents one of very best speakers available under ten grand. +

Technical specifications

Type Two-way stand-mount loudspeaker

Drivers Horn-loaded 19mm textile dome tweeter, 178mm uncoated paper mid-bass unit

Frequency Response 38Hz-25kHz

Sensitivity 90 dB/W/M

Impedance 8 ohms

Dimensions (WxHxD) 37.5 x 89 x 24.8cm including optional stands

Weight 12.7kg ea

Price £6,298/\$5,700 stands £1,398/\$995

Manufacturer DeVore Fidelity

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