

Russell K Red 120

TO AVOID ANY POSSIBLE BIAS, WE GAVE THE 150 TO KEVIN FISKE. HE LIKED IT A LOT, SO NOW IT'S BACK TO PAUL MESSENGER FOR THE SMALLER RED 120 FLOORSTANDER

PAUL MESSENGER

The Russell K Red range currently consists of four models: two 2-way stand-mounts and two 2.5-way floorstanders. We've already assessed three of these and achieved excellent results, so what of the fourth, the Red 120? Like its bigger brother it's a two-and-a-half-way, but uses 5in rather than 6.5in cone drivers. As a result it's significantly slimmer and indeed has a somewhat smaller cabinet overall.

Another bonus is the fact that the £2,700/pair pricetag is just two-thirds of that of the senior model, so it could be quite a bargain, as well. (Like the other Russell K Red models, the magnetically attached grille is an optional extra.) One reason for the relatively competitive price is Polish manufacture. However, the design work behind the models is purely British and is also quite radical in its way too.

BBC research had already indicated that 'thin wall' enclosures tended to sound rather better in the vocal region. However, the BBC approach involved adding heavy bituminous pads to damp residual enclosure movement, and this tends to slow down the bass. The radical element in the Russell K range is a complete avoidance of damping materials. The speakers follow the 'thin wall' approach, but replace the damping pads with four stiffening and bracing shelves, aiming for a residual cabinet output that remains 'in time' with the drive units.

The enclosure is actually a mixture of 16mm sides plus a 19mm front panel, the latter finished in a high gloss black, and inset into a 'picture frame' formed by the sides, top and base. The system also has an internal port fitted into the lower shelf and feeding into the small chamber below. Said chamber and port are then tuned to 24Hz.

Another unconventional touch concerns the plinth. While extending the stability footprint to a worthwhile extent, the disposition of the floor-coupling spikes is very unusual. Instead of being located at the plinth corners, the spikes are at the mid-points of each side. This makes levelling very easy, and should ensure tight fore-and-aft coupling (but trolleying becomes much more difficult!).

Measurements

Positioned in free space, the in-room trace might not perhaps be as smooth as some, but it is exceptionally well balanced, holding within $\pm 3\text{dB}$ right across the audio band from 20Hz upwards, apart from a minor peak at the 50Hz room mode.

Sensitivity is a shade below average, while the impedance is inevitably quite complex, due presumably to the unusual bass porting arrangements. Happily it does stay at or above 6ohms throughout.

Sound Quality

Frankly, it's difficult to understand why one should wish to spend any more. This is a truly impressive loudspeaker, both in terms of its overall neutrality and the superior timing, yet at the same time it's quite neat and physically compact. It's certainly a combination of virtues that seems to tick most of the boxes, and does so at a price that's rather nice too.

About the only thing one might criticise is the relatively modest sensitivity, which might (or might not!) affect the dynamic expression (the jury's still out on this!).

The measurements might have indicated some lack of smoothness but this didn't seem particularly audible, or indeed in any way intrusive.

I went through many favourite discs, such as the Lowell George solo album *Thanks I'll Eat it Here*, Ry Cooder's *Paradise and Lunch*, and Tom Waits' *Swordfishtrombones*, and although voices could become a shade aggressive at high levels, that's more an observation than a criticism. Perhaps there isn't quite the 'direct coupled' feeling one gets from a single full-range driver system, but it does have some of that desirable quality.

Conclusions

It's hard to find a reason not to rave about this loudspeaker, as it does most things seriously well, especially the combination of an impressively neutral frequency balance alongside fine timing. Criticisms are minor, limited to some lack of smoothness and a modest sensitivity; fortunately the amplifier loading stays comfortably above 6ohms across most of the band, only dipping below at the frequency extremes. Clearly a Best Buy...

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Manufacturer's Specifications

Drive units	2x 5in bass and bass/mid 25mm tweeter
Sensitivity	86dB (1W @ 1m)
Crossovers	80Hz, 6dB/oct bass driver 2,200Hz, 12dB/oct to HF unit
Size (HxWxD)	91x20x19cm
Weight	15kg
Finishes	various real wood veneers
Price	£2,700 (+ grille)

