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Wharfedale Diamond 12.1 review

Surprisingly sophisticated standmounters for their size and price *Tested at £249 / \$399 / AU\$699*

★★★★★ By [What Hi-Fi?](#) published

October 01, 2020



Comments (1)



(Image: © Wharfedale)

What Hi-Fi? Verdict ★★★★★

The Diamond 12.1s are excellent speakers for the money and deserve a place on the shortlist

[€298.85 at Amazon Netherlands \(NL\)](#)

[€603 at Amazon Netherlands \(NL\)](#)

Pros

- + Detailed but easy-going nature
- + Seamless and fluid midrange
- + Pleasing build and finish


Cons

- Tough competition

Once in every few generations of its Diamond speakers, Wharfedale tends to start with a clean sheet – and the Wharfedale Diamond 12.1 is one of those occasions. Pretty much everything here is new, from the drive units to the cabinet construction.


The original Wharfedale Diamond was introduced in 1982. Back then it was a single product, rather than the range it is today. That speaker was such a success that it started a dynasty that remains at the core of the brand to this day.

Almost 40 years on, the 12.1 model is a far more sophisticated design, but its mission remains the same: to offer top class sound at an



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The 12.1 is a neat and compact box – standing just 31cm tall, it won't dominate any room. While the older generation of Diamond benefitted from a near-wall placement, these sound balanced even when positioned out into a room. But, importantly for a product of this type, the sound stays listenable if that isn't possible.

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(Image credit: Wharfedale)

Build quality is good and we like the neatness of the finish. The cabinet feels reassuring solid – as it should do considering the care taken in its construction. Where required, the engineers have chosen to make the panels up from differing thicknesses of MDF bonded together to control resonances. Add strategic bracing and the result is a rigid but well controlled box.

These standmounters are a two-way design. The 13cm mid/bass uses a polypropylene/mica composite cone material that the company calls Klarity, and it's designed to offer a good balance between rigidity and damping. This driver is tuned by a rear firing reflex port, rather than the elaborate downward facing design used by previous generations.

The tweeter is a 25mm textile dome designed for wide dispersion, a smooth response and strong dynamics. The two drivers are linked with a carefully calibrated crossover that's claimed to use parts usually found at higher price points.

WHARFEDALE DIAMOND 12.1 TECH SPECS



(Image credit: Wharfedale)

Type 2-way, bass reflex

Max power 100W

Sensitivity 88dB

Impedance 8 ohms

Frequency response 65Hz to 20kHz

Dimensions (hwd) 31 x 18 x 28cm

Weight 6.8kg (each)



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with micro systems, but still have is task well.

used in a way that evades most

budget, and top end manage

We start with Arvo Part's *Tabula Rasa* and the Diamonds put in an impressive performance. They dig up a pleasing amount of detail and manage to organise it in a cohesive and musical way, with easy to follow low-level musical strands and a presentation that doesn't start to get confused when things get busy.

Tonally they're smooth and forgiving but remain nicely balanced, with enough in the way of bite. Feed these Wharfedales a poor signal and they'll tell you all about it, but they also refuse to over-egg things and that's an important quality at this level.



(Image credit: Wharfedale)

We like the reassuring way the Diamonds handle larger-scale dynamics, delivering more in the way of authority and scale than their modest price and size suggest. Low frequencies come through with confidence and more fullness than expected. However, these are small boxes, so if you want floor-shaking bass look elsewhere.

They deliver a good soundstage, too. For the price point, it's expansive and stays stable even when the recording becomes demanding. We switch to Neneh Cherry's *Blank Project*, and the Wharfedales sound comfortable. They have a strong punch and deliver rhythms with a surefooted sense of drive.

We're impressed by the seamless integration between the drive units and the way these speakers convey Cherry's voice with such confidence. The Diamonds sound subtle and insightful with this album, and communicate the passion in the music really well.

But this is a tough part of the market and there's no shortage of talented rivals. Our current favourites are Elac's Debut B5.2s, and in comparison they deliver a bit more transparency through the midrange and have a greater rhythmic snap. The Wharfedales counter with a less analytical but more easy-going nature that will win many friends. The choice comes down to taste and partnering electronics. Either way, you end up with a talented pair of speakers.



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(Image credit: Wharfedale)

Verdict

We're hugely impressed that the Diamond 12.1s can live with the best at the price. They have a broad spread of abilities that will help them get the most from price-compatible electronics and deserve a place high on your shortlist.

SCORES

- Sound 5
- Compatibility 5
- Build 5

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