

Wharfedale Diamond 12.2 Standmount Speaker Review

Shine bright like a Diamond.

by Ed Selley Jun 15, 2021

Review Specs Discussion (15)

HI-FI review

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WHARFEDALE DIAMOND 12.2 HI-FI SPEAKER (2021)

SRP: £299.00

Introduction - What is the Diamond 12.2?

The Wharfedale Diamond 12.2 is a two way standmount speaker. It is the latest version of the long running Diamond series of speakers that has been both a defining part of the Wharfedale range and the 'first speaker' for a huge number of people, many of whom have proceeded to climb a long way up the ladder from these relatively humble beginnings.

Furthermore, when I say 'latest version', the Diamond really is something of an institution in this regard. This is the 12th generation (I now find myself idly wondering if the company will go for a 'Diamond 13' in due course but I guess that's something to find out in the coming years) and, since the company was purchased by IAG, they have been technically interesting, beautifully made and often very attractive. A new range of Diamonds is a big deal so it makes sense to check a member of the range out.

The 12.2 is the logical candidate for that for two reasons. One, it hasn't been reviewed up to this point so you are being treated to something new. The other is that the configuration of the 12.2 - as we will cover in much more detail presently - is a 6.5-inch mid bass driver with a 1-inch tweeter. Not only is this something of a sweet spot for speaker size in this test space, it is exactly the same as the recently tested [Q Acoustics 3030i](#) and that currently wears a Best in Class badge. Can the Diamond 12.2 make that one of the shortest reigns in speaker history? Time to find out.

Specification and Design

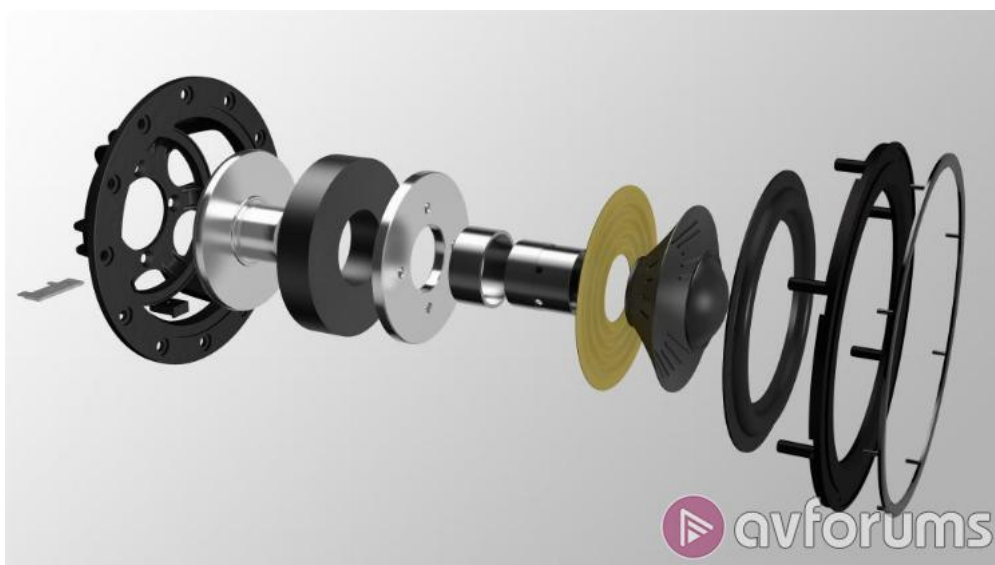


The design of the Diamond 12.2 is technically interesting for a relatively affordable speaker

Before the what's and how's of the Diamond are covered, there's a rather significant 'who' to mention as well. This Diamond range is the first to feature design input from Karl-Heinz Fink. Fink is a designer and consultant of considerable repute; I hesitate to use 'Pep Guardiola of loudspeaker design' but I guess I just have and won't row back from it. Fink combines two great assets as a designer. The first is that he's had some very good ideas over the years. The second is that he's just as capable of having a good idea that can be gainfully used on a £300 speaker as he is one that only works at the sort of price point that the actual Pep Guardiola might describe as 'a solid weekly wage.' His involvement isn't a guarantee of greatness... but it rarely does any harm.

Perhaps because of this, the hardware of the 12.2 differs quite significantly from the preceding 11.2. Generations 8 through 11 were built around Kevlar weave drivers and very effective they were too but the 12 series uses something completely different and that something is called Klarity. Essentially, Klarity is based around polypropylene - a material that has been used for Diamond mid bass drivers in the past - but here, a limited (but unspecified) quantity of mica is added to the mixture. This increases the stiffness with little to no increase in mass.

Stiffness is clearly a design priority for Wharfedale though because the driver also has a fifteen ribs that extend out from the central dust cap and reduce the flex of the cone still further. The main reason for these ribs though is not that Wharfedale is concerned by the overall wobbliness of the driver but because it has an effect on the surround that can be used. The stiffer driver means that less damping needs to be applied by the surround. This in turn reduces colouration and increases dynamics, avoiding the slightly 'overdamped' sound that can result from polypropylene (that, whisper it, I rather like) and should result in a more natural performance. There are some other nice touches too like an epoxy rather than an aluminium bobbin onto which the voice coil is wound which makes the control of the magnetic field easier and avoids unwanted eddy currents.



The construction of the Klarity driver uses features not often seen at the price

This is partnered with a tweeter that has more in common with previous models in that it is a 25mm soft dome design. Where this tweeter is interesting is not so much in the design as the execution. The dome is a single type with no outer surround and it is mounted with little in the way of recessing or waveguide. Crossover is at 2kHz and the overall frequency response is quoted at 50Hz-20kHz at +/- 3dB (with 43Hz available at +/- 6dB).

The involvement of Karl-Heinz Fink is most notable in the crossover and the cabinet. The crossover employs a 24dB slope and air core inductors (I leave you to use the excellent search function that AVForums possesses to check as to where those design features have turned up before). This is fairly serious stuff for an affordable speaker and is a clear area where the considerable resources of IAG are being effectively employed. The cabinet is less exotic but still

makes use of extensive bracing and makes use of sections of MDF of varying thickness to reduce resonance and even the glue that holds the sections together is included in the final calculation. This means that the cabinet is usefully inert.



Biwiring is supported

One other area that has changed is quite an interesting one. The previous generation of Diamond used a slot port but the new version reverts to a conventional cylindrical one on the rear. *In theory*, this is less room friendly than what went before but Wharfedale argues it provides a better means of venting the cabinet at a rate proportional to the volume than the slot port does. One carry over that is also fairly unusual is that the Diamond can be bi-wired should you so wish.

The aesthetics of a Diamond are also worthy of note. In the time I have been active in the industry, Wharfedale has treated us to one of the ugliest speakers ever made (the Diamond 7 series had the aesthetic charm of a badly painted breeze block) and one of the best (just two generations later, the Diamond 9 was a genuinely handsome looking speaker that still looks good over a decade later) so a new model can go either way. For the 12, they don't quite hit the heights that they have before but this is still a nice piece of industrial design. I'm not completely sold on the finish of the review samples - in part because it clashes with the black drivers - but the combination of gloss baffle and wrapped sides is a good one that looks classier than the price point usually allows. Black and dark wood finishes are also available. Like everything that IAG has ever sent me, the build quality is superb for the asking price.



BB This Diamond range is the first to feature design input from Karl-Heinz Fink

How was the Diamond 12.2 tested?

The Wharfedale has been run principally on the end of a [Naim Supernait 3](#) and [Chord Electronics Hugo2](#) and 2Go running as a [Roon](#) Endpoint and taking power from an iFi Powerstation. Additional media was available via a PS4 connected to a Sony Bravia LCD TV outputting to the Hugo2 via optical. A limited amount of testing took place via the [Rega Io](#) and [Chord Electronics Mojo](#) and [Poly](#) to better benchmark the Diamond 12.2 against the 3030i. Material used has been FLAC, AIFF, DSD plus [Tidal](#), [Qobuz](#) and some on demand TV services.

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Performance



Black and wood finishes are also available

The review samples arrived looking very new so they were left running for 48 hours before any critical listening took place. Having done this, the Diamond 12.2 impressed from the outset. Historically, IAG has made the subtle distinction between Wharfedale as a sort of 'budget audiophile' brand (although, one where the range now extends well beyond budget) and Mission as the more fun and upbeat company in order to have two roughly parallel ranges operating at the same time. The arrival of the Mk2 version of the LX Series blurred that somewhat and this latest Diamond continues to do.

To be clear, preceding Diamonds were perfectly capable of having a little fun when called upon to do so but there's a clear step forward in the endlessly subjective area of timing. Obviously, you can bolt most things to the Supernait 3 and get a convincingly rhythmic performance out of them but the 12.2 is effortlessly together. It thunders through Gary Numan's *Intruder* with a real snap and energy. This new Diamond feels faster and more urgent than older models. It gets the head nodding and foot tapping more effortlessly than I recall older models ever doing.

It can hit impressively hard too. On the proviso that the conventional port needs to be around 30 centimetres or more from a rear wall, the Diamond 12.2 generates a low end that can be felt and that starts and stops with useful enthusiasm. I understand Wharfedale's enthusiasm for avoiding the feeling of being overdamped but I'm pleased to say that this hasn't been bought at the expense of any damping at all. Instead, on both the Naim and Rega, the Diamond delivers a decent low end enough control to keep up with anything you want to play.



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The range is usefully comprehensive

The upper registers integrate well into this low end and manage to balance detail and civility very well. Like many affordable speakers, the 12.2 feels like it has been voiced to work with the slight brightness that some affordable sources can bring with their presentation and this means that when this isn't present, they can come across as fractionally rolled off. The obvious counter to this is that it's extremely hard to provoke the Wharfedale into sounding forward or aggressive. What's also worthy of note is how together it sounds. I am aware that 'together' is not a terribly technical term but, sit and listen to the Wharfedale for any length of time and you tend to stop listening to it and start listening to the music instead.

Of course, it's only fair and proper at this point to bring up that another speaker that did a fine job of this is the Q Acoustics 3030i. Making comparisons between the two is hard because the Q Acoustics has long since departed but there are a few things I can say with a reasonable degree of confidence. The Wharfedale is more propulsive than the 3030i. Something like *My Own Soul's Warning* by The Killers is more urgent, more rhythmic and more compelling in the hands of the Diamond 12.2. There's literally a single figure of hertz in it but the Wharfedale has better bass too.

The 3030i has virtues of its own though. The Wharfedale never feels coloured in its presentation but the Q Acoustics can, with a little care taken in its placement, vanish into the soundstage in a way that the Wharfedale can't. This impressive lack of colouration means that some fine detail that the 3030i picks up can be missed by the Diamond. Both are easy speakers to drive but the 3030i might have that by a whisker too. The comparison between these two speakers is keenly contested and the winner is likely to come down to your subjective preference.



A fine budget loudspeaker

BB Sit and listen to the Wharfedale for any length of time and you tend to stop listening to it and start listening to the music instead

Conclusion

Pros

- Big, fast and engaging sound
- Very well made
- Easy to drive

Cons

- Not necessarily beautiful
- Some constraint to soundstage
- Need to be a fair distance out from a rear wall

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In a way though, that doesn't matter. This keenly fought rivalry (to which other brands are participant too) means that, for £300 you can choose an absurdly talented speaker of your choice. And make no mistake, the Diamond 12.2 is absurdly talented. This is the most fun and focussed Diamond yet; a speaker that needs little help to engage you in what its doing. It achieves this without compromising on the fundamental user friendliness of the Diamond models of old. When you also consider that is it a well made, handsome and practical design that is likely to shine in a wide selection of settings, the only logical conclusion is that the Diamond 12.2 has to be seen as a Best Buy.



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Scores

<i>Build Quality</i>	9
<i>Connectivity</i>	8
<i>Sound Quality</i>	9
<i>Ease of Use</i>	9
<i>Features</i>	8
<i>Value for Money</i>	9
<i>Verdict</i>	9

9
OUT OF 10

A purple circular icon with a white play button symbol, with the word "SCORE" written below it.

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