Some say that the finest artistic creations, the purest objets d’art, are those that reflect nature’s paradox of chaos and order in combination. Vivid Audio’s Laurence Dickie might concur – he has expressed aspects of this philosophy in his speaker designs for Vivid Audio which aim to harness organic form to serve sonic function. In part inspired by Dickie’s own iconic Nautilus loudspeaker from his days at Bowers & Wilkins, Vivid’s GIYA speakers seem almost alive, organism-like in form, while the smaller OVAL series speakers retain the curves, the inspiration from nature, but in somewhat more conventional form.

Some years back this writer was impressed by the original OVAL B1, and the team on our sister publication Sound+Image bestowed upon it a Highly Commended award in a field hot with outstanding designs. Since then I have also spent enjoyable time in the process of formally reviewing the GIYA G3 (Judge’s Choice Sound+Image Award in 2014) and more recently the G4. Now, ten years on since the original B1...
specifications

Vivid Audio B1 Decade

Configuration: 3-way vented cabinet
Cabinet material: Balsa-cored quadraxial glass composite sandwich
Drive units:
D28 28mm metal-dome unit with tapered tube loading, D50 50mm metal-dome unit with tapered tube loading, D125 125mm alloy-coned unit (coupled) with new topology rare-earth magnet design
Sensitivity: 89dB @ 2.83Vrms, 1m
Nominal impedance: 4 ohms
Frequency range:
34Hz-36,000Hz ±6dB;
38Hz-33,000Hz ±2dB
Harmonic distortion (2nd & 3rd): < 0.5% over frequency range
Crossover frequencies:
130, 900, 3500Hz
Power handling (music program):
135W
Dimensions (HWD):
700 x 320 x 870
Price: $32,000

Vivid Audio B1 Decade Speakers

Design: Vivid Audio has released a ‘Limited Edition’ B1 featuring the Decade designation, in a genuinely limited production run of just 200 units globally, four of which will be available here in Australia, two each in gloss red and black.

Time travel:
The B1 and the Decade (B1D) version look very similar. Place them side-by-side and the differences are subtle — tweeter and midrange driver protective mesh grilles replaces the B1’s cross bars, while the redesigned front baffle is now in a shallow recess aimed, presumably, at improving dispersion characteristics. Under the surface, however, there are improvements in the driver magnet systems, and refinements in the crossover implementation, as Laurence Dickie explains in our interview on page 42.

The 3.5-way B1D is quoted as having a frequency range spanning from 34Hz to 36kHz at -6dB points, which seems more than respectable for what is effectively a medium sized standmount speaker (even if its stand is inseparable as part of the structure). The impedance specification reads a nominal 4 ohms while 89dB offers good efficiency.

The driver configuration is a standard TMW with the company’s own D28 28mm aluminium-dome tweeter and D50 50mm aluminium-dome midrange, both loaded by Dickie’s signature tapered tube strategy. The new C125 driver with its massive reengineered motor system sits below. But the B1D is tricked out; it features an added 125mm aluminium cone placed on the rear baffle which should provide further bass heft while retaining the mid-sized form factor. This is not a new idea – we have fond memories of hearing Sonus faber’s Extrema with its somewhat similar arrangement – but it's not used as much as it might be, perhaps due to the added crossover and cabinet construction complexity, all adding costs for something which is visually hidden.

The B1D also goes to great length to construct non-resonant high strength cabinets, and the company has been using a vacuum-induced Balsa-cored quadraxial glass composite sandwich and other composite formula enclosures in all its designs. Here in the B1D, we have a new enclosure derived from the flagship GIYA series, while the integral stand consists of a fibre-loaded polymer complex composite. The cabinet is finished in a high-quality gloss automotive paint (available in the aforementioned red and black) with our resplendent gloss red review sample looking splendidly. Vivid persists with an inconvenient binding post location, within a bottom indent in the pedestal’s base which makes it very difficult to use spade connectors even at the spiker’s highest settings. If you’d like to keep a full head of hair – should you have one to start with – use banana connectors at the speaker end of your cables.

Sonics:
The B1Ds are delivered in large timber crates (one per speaker) which provide excellent protection against the clumsiest of couriers. Even the accessories box is timber; this contains the high-quality spiking system and the short bi-wiring connector jumpers. Setting up the B1D is a breeze, so after having placed them just over two metres apart and in a proven position away from the front wall, I was ready to audition. By the way, experimenting with positioning reaped some gains, to a point, but overall this is a non-fussy, very easy to place speaker (at least it was so in my room). Now in my fourth Vivid Audio speaker review, traits that I have found to have been shared within the family are reinforced here but with added gusto. The consistent diaphragm material common across the entire driver configuration brings an astounding timbral evenness, a tonal coherence, throughout the bandwidth. It’s a thoroughly seamless driver-to-driver transition which not only allows consistent tonal qualities but, in the case of the B1D, enhanced detailing with gains in musicality and smoothness across its entire frequency range.

Contact:
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www.avation.com.au

Vivid Audio manufactures its own drivers; the superb engineering is evident in the diaphragm material, non-resonant basket, spider size, magnet system and the overall quality of assembly.

The consistent diaphragm material common across the entire driver configuration brings an astounding timbral evenness, a tonal coherence...
The B1 Decade speaker forms a pivotal point in Vivid Audio’s many an upper echelon design in terms of performance. It’s balanced and refined sound that does not blunt transient attack in the slightest. In fact, the speed of attack is a strength of the B1D, surpassing its already highly competent B1 stablemate. The baffle redesign has also brought further gains in terms of imaging and soundstaging. The Vivid Audio trademark disapparrearing act is taken to a point where instrument placement is extremely focused even when totally outside the speakers’ positions within a large and deep stage. This last, the soundstage scale, is akin to the capabilities of larger speaker systems.

Of course, one of the concerns with speakers that aren’t floorstanding is the limitation in the bass department commanded by the indisputable laws of physics. While there’s no law breaking here, the B1D nevertheless packs a satisfying punch in the bass above the last octave. And what it lacks in terms of ultimate depth and dynamic expression in comparison to larger designs, it makes up for in stunning detail, tonal correctness and tightness. Taking overall dynamic contrast capabilities, torture tests such as Joe Morello’s ‘Take Five’ from Morello Standard Time and Nils Lofgren Band’s Bass Drum Intro from 2005’s live album did not phase the B1D, with the speaker communicating a large slice of the devastating power of these superb recordings. And productions of that nature served to confirm the fact that not only can the speakers happily accommodate demanding material but they also like to be played loud.

Another appealing aspect is the B1D’s handling of the lower midrange response. The speaker communicates a sense of heft that endows instruments with corporeal presence. There’s weight and gravitas to certain instruments which used the GIYA topology to the coil by two steel components. The change directly behind the coil with the flux guided round LD:

Edgar Kramer: The B1 has been a consistent model in the Vivid Audio line-up for ten years now. What were the aims in designing the B1 Decade (B1D)?

Laurence Dickie: Initially the B1D was to be a purely cosmetic change, released simply as a vehicle for a bit of publicity so we could remind folks that we’re a proper grown-up company now! So we did the redesign of the front baffle and all was fine – except it wasn’t. I found myself unable to release a product with only a change in its appearance. I had to do something to the engineering to justify its existence. Now it happened that we had developed a new magnet for the G4 bass unit which used the GIYA topology but which was completely compatible with the standard C125 bass/mid. So putting the two together would be a shoeh. Honestly, I wasn’t prepared for just how much difference it would actually make.

Voicing is a slightly contentious area. My personal belief is that it is only really required when you have to balance compromises in the designs.

VIVID AUDIO B1 DECADE LOUDSPEAKERS

INTERVIEW – LAURENCE DICKIE

A masterful balance of compromises

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Can you explain that further? What were the changes in the magnet system?

All of our drivers use radially magnetised magnets, and while they’re a bit of a pain to assemble, the advantages in terms of flux management are manif. Originally, the C125 had the magnet element directly behind the coil with the flux guided to the coil by two steel components. The change we made in the Giva was to move the magnet around from the rear position to being right next to the voice coil. This makes better use of the magnet but also reduces the inductance of the coil, which improves the top end performance of the driver. That small difference makes a big difference to the overall behaviour of the system.

Did this change then spark other improvements for the B1 Decade?

Inevitably, when you change the drivers in a system you have to change the crossover. But with B1D that wasn’t just a restoration of the standard performance. Because of the extra output at the higher frequencies we were able to roll off the rear driver a bit earlier and the net result has been a clear increase in front-to-back differential in the mid-100Hz region which has had the effect of focusing the sound towards the front of the speaker.

The improvements go further than the drivers; we’ve also taken advantage of our skills in the world of composites engineering so the B1D enclosure is now made using a vacuum-infused sandwich, just like Giva. Having said that, there are some compromises in the overall sound which seem to be appreciably greater than the sum of the parts – they honestly defy my rational explanation.

Considering an improved B1 potentially challenges the K1, are there plans for a ‘Decade-improved’ K1 model?

There are no plans at the moment but clearly the potential is there.

Given your past experience in high-quality amplification – the BW80 series for example – could Vivid Audio consider embarking on electronics manufacturing?

I sadly let my involve-