REL bass gets better by the minute

Richard Stevenson was so excited to audition REL’s new Predator subwoofer that he forgot to dig out his own Predator UHD Blu-ray...

PREVATOR EVEN IF THE word is a noun, naming a subwoofer after one of the most iconic action thrillers of all time is brave. Yet REL’s new HT/1508 Predator might just have all the right ingredients to pull it off.

This dedicated LFE beast packs a bespoke 15in driver and 850W amp into a (relatively) compact, sealed cabinet. The plain black finish, lack of frills and phonon-only inputs keep the cost down to £1,600, allowing the HT/1508 to stealth into the mid-market jungle and hope to maybe pick off similar-price but lower-spec subs.

An introduction to REL’s new model comes from company head John Hunter, who explains the Serie HT ethos: ‘Whereas traditional RELs are asked to be fantastic all-rounders, the HT (Home Theatre) range is designed to focus on one task, LFE, and do it perfectly. We designed an all-new 15in driver with 3in of stroke fore-and-aft but, as with all REL driver designs, our focus remains on speed and articulation, not just boom!’

That 15in CarbonGlas driver is pretty special. Around 60 per cent of the surface is carbon fibre backed by a lightweight glass fibre mix. The result is a stiff and light cone, terminated with a butyl rubber roll surround, that should deliver super-fast transients with no overhang if given enough power — which is where the 850W NextGen5 Class D Amp comes in, an upgrade on the 500W version found in REL’s D9xHT/1508 (see HCC #200).

Next to the usual bespoke furniture REL cabinets, the HT series is, ‘honestly, I wouldn’t go as far as wheeling out Arnie’s comment on the comeliness of the Predator (Google it, with safe search off) but let’s agree the HT/1508 looks purposeful rather than pretty. The textured matte black cabinet is a slightly flattened cube with profiled side edges and fronted with a hefty MDF-framed grille. It’s not particularly large for a 15in woofer and camouflage well in the shadows of a darkened cinema room.’

The cabinet is not as plain as you might think though. It’s extensively braced internally, feeling very inert to a tap on the side, and the glossy top is a 12mm-thick plate of glass that aids with damping the cabinet, says REL. The cabinet is not as plain as you might think though. It’s extensively braced internally, feeling very inert to a tap on the side, and the glossy top is a 12mm-thick plate of glass that aids with damping the cabinet, says REL. The cabinet is not as plain as you might think though. It’s extensively braced internally, feeling very inert to a tap on the side, and the glossy top is a 12mm-thick plate of glass that aids with damping the cabinet, says REL. The cabinet is not as plain as you might think though. It’s extensively braced internally, feeling very inert to a tap on the side, and the glossy top is a 12mm-thick plate of glass that aids with damping the cabinet, says REL. The cabinet is not as plain as you might think though. It’s extensively braced internally, feeling very inert to a tap on the side, and the glossy top is a 12mm-thick plate of glass that aids with damping the cabinet, says REL. The cabinet is not as plain as you might think though. It’s extensively braced internally, feeling very inert to a tap on the side, and the glossy top is a 12mm-thick plate of glass that aids with damping the cabinet, says REL. The cabinet is not as plain as you might think though. It’s extensively braced internally, feeling very inert to a tap on the side, and the glossy top is a 12mm-thick plate of glass that aids with damping the cabinet, says REL. The cabinet is not as plain as you might think though. It’s extensively braced internally, feeling very inert to a tap on the side, and the glossy top is a 12mm-thick plate of glass that aids with damping the cabinet, says REL. The cabinet is not as plain as you might think though. It’s extensively braced internally, feeling very inert to a tap on the side, and the glossy top is a 12mm-thick plate of glass that aids with damping the cabinet, says REL. The cabinet is not as plain as you might think though. It’s extensively braced internally, feeling very inert to a tap on the side, and the glossy top is a 12mm-thick plate of glass that aids with damping the cabinet, says REL. The cabinet is not as plain as you might think though. It’s extensively braced internally, feeling very inert to a tap on the side, and the glossy top is a 12mm-thick plate of glass that aids with damping the cabinet, says REL.

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The amp panel board takes up much of the sub’s rear, although the connection and control count is frugal. You get stereo phono inputs and one balanced XLR input (not a feature of the smaller Serie HT models), plus balanced and unbalanced outputs for daisy-chaining. Controls are as basic as they get; auto power on, phase switch, gain and crossover knobs.

There are no speaker-level inputs, no 12V or IR triggers, no networking connections, no user EQ system and no remote control. While there are plenty of sub’s around £1,500 that will give you some of those features, none do it with a 15in custom driver and 850W digital amp tuned for purely home cinema use. And this unflippin’-unflippin’ spec does at least make setup fairly simplistic, compared to subs with baffling EQ where you lose it you are in a world of hurt. There was some moving the unit around, flipping of phase switch and setting the gain level by ear before letting my AV receiver sort out the crossover.

Payback Time
The opening scenes of Ready Player One (Ultra HD Blu-ray) were enough to reveal that the HT/1508 was as brutal as its billing.

Spielberg’s threshing street-car race is delivered with a maelstrom of LFE across engine roars, crashes and leaping giant apes hitting the track. The sound is fast, fluid and blessed with trouser-flapping punch.

Switching to more subtle content is interesting. The HT/1508 is quiet, eerily so. I’m used to having a high-level input to a REL sub, hooked up to the main left/right channel outputs to bolster scale at the front of the room. With just LFE going to the woofer (front speakers set to ‘large’), the REL lingers silently in the cinema, ready to strike at any hint of sub-bass action.

Deep rumbling effects are like being washed over by a wave of LF that seems to bypass the ears and go straight, the windows like this big-game hunter – but don’t expect it to move your gizzards and blow out the windows like this big-game hunter.

For a REL, a brand born in sub-bass systems for its subwoofer ranges