

Wilson Audio Alexia V

It's V for Victory as Wilson's Alexia loudspeaker is more than simply 'tickled-up' with a host of detailed revisions
 Review: Ken Kessler Lab: Paul Miller

Ah, the sweet spot! Positioned in the exact middle of a seven-model range of Wilson Audio floorstanders, between the Sasha DAW [HFN Mar '19] and Alexx V [HFN Jan '22], the new Alexia V – by accident or design – now occupies that most coveted of spaces. One of hi-fi's inexplicable phenomena, a 'sweet spot' seems to exist in pretty much every hi-fi model range, from turntables to amps to speakers, when a stand-out in performance relative to size and cost just happens. Yes, the new Alexia V is that special.

Starting at £79,998 per pair, the Alexia V is priced at roughly double that of the Sasha DAW below it at £44,998, but half that of the £158,000 Alexx V. As with all Wilson Audio's speakers, pricing depends on the three levels of WilsonGloss finish (enhanced by matching or contrasting grilles). There are four standard colours – dark Galaxy Gray, the lighter GT Silver, the champagne-y Quartz and the near-black Carbon. A dozen more exotic colours including shades of orange, red, yellow, blue, some black hues, etc, are offered by way of upgrade at +5% while the ten deluxe Premium Pearl finishes are an extra 10%.

Custom RAL colours are available to special order, including the gorgeous, captivating Spearmint – or Robin's Eggshell Blue depending on your relationship with Pantone charts – of our review pair. Suffice it to say, everyone who laid eyes on this finish was charmed by the freshness.

UPGRADE PATH

Occupying 129x40x61cm (hwd) without its spikes, the Alexia V is only slightly larger than a Sasha DAW at 113x36x58cm (hwd). It thus represents a logical upgrade for Sasha DAW owners if so inclined, with only the need for extra cash rather than

more space. And they look so similar that a move from Sasha DAWs to Alexia Vs might go unnoticed, especially the side view, with the Alexia V sporting the 'woofer blade' cut-outs at the top of the lower housing. They may look like handy handles, but they are not: a complete Alexia V weighs 120kg, most of which is the section they crown.

DECADES OF DESIGN

Part of what distinguishes the Alexia V from its little sister, among other things, is an adjustable tweeter module. While the Sasha DAW employs a bass enclosure topped by a truncated pyramid for mid and treble drivers, a tradition dating back to the original WATT/Puppy of three decades ago, its top section is a single piece.

So, while the Sasha DAW's top tilts, in the Alexia V the midband and treble can be precisely positioned relative to the listener to achieve the best time alignment.

This is key to

understanding the Wilson ethos, just as electrostatics once defined Quad, and it's a philosophy that dates back to the original WAMM of 40 years ago [see PM's interview sidebar, p43].

All Wilson drivers are proprietary, manufactured to their specific requirements. Inside the bass enclosure, which sits on the fully height-adjustable Acoustic Diode spikes, are one 10in and one 8in

RIGHT: A little bigger, curvier and with increased cabinet volume over the Alexia 2, the Alexia V allows its 1in carbon/silk dome tweeter and 7in pulp mid to be aligned and angled with pin-point accuracy. Stiffened 8in/10in woofers are rear vented



ALEXIA 2 VS ALEXIA V

It's not just a leap in numbers from Alexia Series 2 [HFN Mar '18] to Alexia V – the 'V' is the Roman '5' to indicate five years of the Alexia 2 and also the new model's adoption of Wilson's V-Material, employed in the woofer and midrange enclosures. As discussed in our Alexx V review [HFN Jan '22], this mineral/fibre-loaded polymer has been developed to better manage vibration and increase module isolation. X-Material remains the primary enclosure substrate (S-Material for the midrange baffle), with increased bracing to further improve damping, just as the 'alignment bridge' for that mid module is also now fashioned from X-Material and aluminium.

Visually, the new Alexia evolves the curvy aesthetic touches seen in the taller Alexx V, which CEO Daryl Wilson says were inspired by the wind- and water-carved rock formations of his Utah home state. Driver alignment has been improved too, for better on-axis and more uniform off-axis responses, ensuring the Alexia V is no 'hot seat' loudspeaker [see PM's Lab Report, p45].

The speaker size and cabinet volume has increased marginally, the 'V' being 32mm deeper, 6mm wider and 7mm taller than its predecessor – the midrange module's internal space is thus 6.4% larger, and the woofer enclosure up by 8.9%. Inside the midrange module, the Alexia V's 7in pulp-coned driver is now fitted with the Alnico 'Quadra-Mag' motor developed for the much larger Chronosonic XVX. Greater extension, a 1dB boost to sensitivity (without rendering a tougher load impedance) and faster transient recovery is claimed for all these revisions taken *en masse*.

Down below, the rear bass port is re-engineered for reduced turbulence while, up top, the 1in silk-dome tweeter is loaded into a 3D printed 'Convergent Synergy Carbon' (CSC) rear-wave chamber – another trickledown from the Alexx V. Other changes cascading down from the dearer models include beefier bespoke Wilson Audio binding posts, the new Wilson Audio Acoustic Diode spike system, and the same spade connectors for the links to the upper modules as used in the Chronosonic XVX and Alexx V.

Luxurious visible hardware at the back now includes a new external cable wrap and dressing, plus a new look to the alignment block 'staircase', aiding installers during setup. Even the resistor/heatsink cavity [pictured, p43] is beefed up, and there's a bubble spirit level in the top of the woofer enclosure. Inside, the refined crossover system features new AudioCapX-WA capacitors 'uniquely wound at Wilson Audio to extremely tight tolerances' and the circuit tuned and modified to improve the load 'seen' by the amplifier.

woofer; the Sasha DAW uses two 8in woofers. The upper housing contains the 7in cellulose fibre/carbon composite midrange unit as initially found in the WAMM Master Chronosonic and used in the Alexia 2 [HFN Mar '18], but is now further improved by the incorporation of the Alnico QuadraMag magnet [see boxout, above]. The treble enclosure hosts a 1in silk-dome tweeter.

THE BIG COUNTRY

In the two installations where I auditioned the speakers, they were located well away from the walls, enabling them to 'breathe', so to speak. The woofer cabinet is rear-

ported and the midrange module vented, and the speakers can work nearer to the walls with judicious positioning, but – like free range eggs – everything improves with wide-open spaces, as if in homage to the vast plains in America's West, where these were born.

Give free rein to the Alexia Vs, and you will hear from the first seconds of play that most immediate manifestation of its capabilities – an enormous, coherent and convincing soundstage. One could, I suppose, bi-/tri-wire or bi-/tri-amp the Alexia V with some external high-end crossover and lateral thinking, as the bass, mid and treble sections are



ABOVE: Protection and tuning resistors for the mid (2x2.1ohm) and treble drivers (2x4.8ohm) are accessible behind a glass panel. Cabling for the mid/treble units exits from the same reinforced panel that carries the grooves and rear 'staircase' adjustment for angling the heads

accessible via their own binding posts, but that defies the resolutely 'single-wire' attitude of Wilson Audio. When I once asked founder Dave Wilson about it at a CES in Las Vegas, during the height of the bi-wiring/bi-amping craze, he matter-of-factly told me, 'Ken, we want less wire, not more'.

Instead, at the top of the woofer enclosure, two short, separate cables exit to connect to the upper module [see picture, above]. One feeds the midrange module, the other the tweeter, emerging on either side of the aluminium positioning gauge and 'staircase' that sets the 'tip' of the mid/treble head assembly. All these various fittings look so 'heavy duty' that they scream 'military spec'!

Inside the top of the woofer enclosure is the complex crossover, with – as is Wilson practice – access to the resistors for adjusting mid/treble levels. At the bottom of the rear panel [see p45], the multi-way binding posts are sufficiently robust that they will support the heftiest of speaker cables.

V FOR VICTORY

A half-century-plus into audiophilia, few sessions make me reassess what I thought I knew. An initial, intense 90 minutes with the Alexia Vs and a guided tour by Wilson Audio's Peter McGrath served as an introduction which will remain with me for whatever time I have left before

entering that level of Hell reserved for hi-fi journalists. Then followed a far longer session in PM's room [see p39], the Alexia Vs accompanied by a Vivaldi One Apex player/DAC, Constellation Centaur II 500 amplifier [HFN Dec '19] and Transparent cables throughout.

Not even my years with the Sasha DAW, nor (during non-work hours) a recent return to Quad ESL63s prepared me for the absence of cabinet intrusion, the scale of the aforementioned openness, nor the sheer grandeur of a speaker that could only be described as 'diminutive' next to its taller siblings, or any tower types in the six-figure-plus sector.

AMAZING BASS

The Alexia V doesn't just punch above its weight, it re-establishes what a system of not-too-intrusive dimensions can deliver.

(Brief aside – I know that some of you are thinking: 'They're massive! My wife would divorce me!' or other expressions of dismay. Please see my Dec '22 'Off The Leash' for context...)

Long-term readers know that I am not seduced by

the lower octaves so much as I am by three or four other considerations above bass quality. But we'll get to the midband, stereo imaging, treble behaviour and the rest shortly. The Alexia V is a speaker that will save any sane individual the need for a subwoofer unless he or she has a hearing deficiency or happens to play bass guitar.

With the cavernously deep funk of the title track of Johnnie Taylor's *Who's Making Love* [Stax SCD24 4115-2], I was hearing extension previously denied to me. What the Alexia V established was a foundation

'Listening turned into a life-affirming experience'

RICARDO FRANASSOVICI

'I first met David Wilson when he was writing for J. Peter Moncrieff's IAR (*International Audio Review*) in 1981', remembers Absolute Sounds MD, Ricardo Franassovici, 'and then our paths crossed again at the Las Vegas Jockey Club at CES in 1982 where he was showing the first version of his WAMM loudspeaker'.

Over 40 years later and the origins of today's Alexia V can be seen in the skeletal tower of that WAMM (Wilson Audio Modular Monitor). Comprising two towers per side, one housing big (18in) Magnat drivers in a sub-bass enclosure, the WAMM speaker system hosted KEF B139 bass drivers in a 'mid bass' box with two 'midrange' enclosures (each a 4in mid/1in tweeter two-way in their own right) above and below a curved electrostatic super tweeter.

The latter crossed over above 15kHz and was sourced originally from Janzsen and then RTR, its acoustic centre and that of the two midrange enclosures being user-adjustable. The WAMM was 'retired' in 2003 after at least seven iterations (the WAMM 7a was the final version) and at least unofficially replaced by the Alexandria floorstander in 2004.

Absolute Sounds' first Wilson UK import was the WATT standmount in 1985 alongside Threshold amplifiers (replaced by the first Class A Krells), the iconic Oracle Delphi turntable, Sumiko MDC-800 tonearm and, of course, the Koetsu MC. 'David was a true gentleman, and a pioneer of the high-end loudspeaker industry', remembers Ricardo. David passed away in 2018 and is succeeded by his son, CEO Daryl Wilson. PM

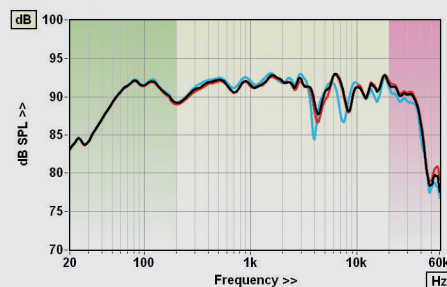


LAB REPORT

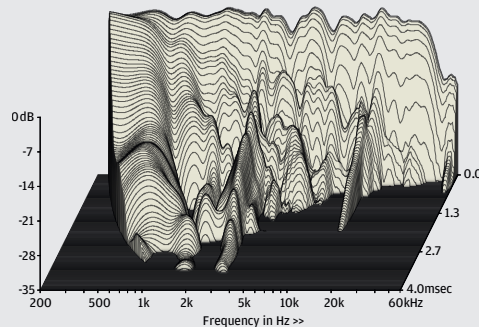
WILSON AUDIO ALEXIA V

Although our listening was performed at 4m distance, the Alexia V's mid and head assembly was realigned to better suit the standard 1m test distance. Here the Alexia V's forward response is very flat through upper bass and midrange [see Graph 1] with notches at 4.3kHz and 8.4kHz integrating out at greater distance. The earlier, minor, notch and peak at 2.6-3kHz coincides with the upper limit of the 178mm pulp midrange unit, the mid/treble crossover and a possible cone/surround misterrmination revealed on the CSD waterfall [see Graph 2]. There is another minor mode at 14kHz, otherwise the Alexia V has a 'clean' and extended top-end reaching out to 43kHz (-6dB re. 10kHz). The notches contribute to ±2.7 and ±2.6dB response errors – again, progressively reduced at 2, 3, 4m, etc. distance but not improved by the press-to-fit grilles [blue trace, Graph 1] – but pair matching is impressively tight at 0.7dB.

Sensitivity, re. 2.83V/1m, is a very high 91.5dB/1kHz (91.4dB from 500Hz-8kHz), distortion very low at <0.1% midband (re. 90dB SPL/1m) and bass extension audibly extended down to a low 33Hz (-6dB re. 200Hz). The latter is a product of the 203mm and 254mm hard paper woofers, with 45Hz-160Hz and 43-146Hz bandwidths, respectively, augmented by the rear-firing port tuned across 12Hz-57Hz (all re. -6dB). However, both this sensitivity and deep bass are won at the expense of a modestly challenging load that falls to 2.5ohm/87Hz (sub-8ohm from 50Hz-2kHz), with swings in phase angle of +32/-57° in the bass. The min. 1.07ohm/67Hz EPDR (sub-3.3ohm from 47Hz-1.3kHz) will be within the scope of all likely partnering amps. PM



ABOVE: Response inc. nearfield summed driver/port [green], freefield corrected to 1m at 2.83V [yellow], ultrasonic [pink]. Left, black; right, red; w. grille, blue



ABOVE: A resonance at the top of the mid unit's range (3kHz) is joined by a short-lived treble mode (14kHz)

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Sensitivity (SPL/1m/2.83V - 1kHz/Mean/IEC)	91.5dB / 91.4dB / 89.1dB
Impedance modulus: minimum & maximum (20Hz-20kHz)	2.47ohm @ 87Hz 15ohm @ 43Hz
Impedance phase: minimum & maximum (20Hz-20kHz)	-57° @ 53Hz +32° @ 34Hz
Pair matching/Resp. error (200Hz-20kHz)	0.7dB/ ±3.1dB/±2.6dB
LF/HF extension (-6dB ref 200Hz/10kHz)	33Hz / 43.5kHz/42.5kHz
THD 100Hz/1kHz/10kHz (for 90dB SPL/1m)	0.2% / 0.09% / 0.3%
Dimensions (HWD) / Weight (each)	1350x400x614mm / 120kg

LEFT: Back view shows lower-to-upper cabinet connections, rear-firing port, midrange vent and access to crossover resistors. As the crossover is in the main cabinet, it does not support bi-wiring

the performers and the instruments, and their relative sizes. Retrieval of detail was of macro-lens precision, as was exact instrument positioning. Confirmed in part by images in the CD's booklet, it occurred to me that use of the term 'uncanny' is actually an understatement.

What turned this into a life-affirming experience, after dozens of favourite test tracks including most of Lou Rawls' *At Last* [Blue Note CDP 7 91937 2] and the most authentic reproduction and contrast between his growl and Dianne Reeves' sparkle, as well as Keb' Mo's *Peace... Back By Popular Demand* [Okeh/Epic EK 92687] with its gorgeous piano passages, was a recording from the Age of Sibilance. I don't know why so many 1980s recordings are the antithesis of those from the velvety 1950s, but too many nestle on a knife-edge between treble extension and torment.

SWEET AND SPARKLE

My adoration of Juice Newton, however, means that I would even listen to her via ear-buds if that was all I could find. Her soaring vocals – see Dianne Reeves, above – came through with such presence on 'Break It To Me Gently' from *Greatest Hits (and More)* [Capitol CDP 7 46489 2], it had never sounded so sweet, so devoid of sibilance. I was even driven to contemplate the draining of my pension pot. ☹

HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

After sessions in different rooms and with contrasting systems, I am at a loss to describe the Alexia V as anything other than Daryl Wilson's *Sgt Pepper*. Neither he nor his retailers will thank me for declaring that it makes little sense to spend more, unless your room is so huge that it'll swallow these 1.4m cabinets. There's more bass and scale to be had with the Alex V, but for most of us? The Alexia V borders on the supernatural.

Sound Quality: 94%



that defined all that I would hear – even in delicate recordings of a near-unplugged nature. It took all of, oh, one second to realise I had to hear a hefty dose of Kodō via *Warabe* [Sony SRCL 467 1]. If you're familiar with these traditional Japanese drummers, you know it's not just about the bass, but also the space.

OUTER SPACE

The drums are gigantic, and so was the sound which the Alexia V delivered. You could actually hear the drum skins, the mallets, and every other detail – which brings us to my other personal criterion: three-dimensionality.

Recalling a mentor who said, 'If the soundstage is correct, all else will follow', as with the Wilsonian concern for coherent and correct time arrival, within the soundstage – thanks to its scale, width, depth and height – I could picture with ease