



NO UGLY DUCKLINGS

This 5.1-channel speaker package delivers both music and movie performance to match its elegance and fine finish.

Swans Diva 5.2 HT
5.1-channel speaker system
Price \$4100

A wise man once advised that despite the excellent room correction features sported by modern amplifiers and receivers, room acoustics have the largest impact on system performance. Working from the listening position out, a little time invested in speaker placement for any given room will pay huge dividends in performance.

Freshly unpacked and thus positioned, the elegant and beautifully-finished Swans Diva 5.2HT surround system, even silent, raised anticipation for the weeks of listening ahead.

EQUIPMENT

Middle children of Swans' Diva series, the speakers in the Diva 5.2 HT system bear many hallmarks from their bigger brethren in

the 6.2 system. The Diva 5.2F front speakers exude quality that belies a relatively modest price — tall and slim, with gracefully curving rich-gloss rosewood sides and piano-gloss black end-caps. And the beauty is more than skin deep, each cabinet weighing in at a hefty 28.5kg and featuring internal CNC milled bulkheads (as used in yacht construction) for cabinet rigidity. Four supplied large gold spikes will pierce any carpet to hold the speaker securely, or for timber floors, a padded end-piece will ensure your floors go unmarked. A semi-circular groove runs from the rear of the bottom cap to a central pair of gold binding posts — this allows for larger diameter speaker cables to be used comfortably while keeping the cable hidden. Neat.

Described by Swans as a three-way, fourth-order vented system, the 5.2 start up top with a 28mm silk-dome tweeter externally mounted into a purpose central-front moulding of the top end-cap. Behind the grille and just below the tweeter, the top half of the cabinet accommodates a 120mm midrange driver above two matching 160mm bass drivers. Two

160mm front-mounted ports complete the behind-the-grille picture. (Ports of matching size to the bass drivers give equal dispersion patterns and, being front mounted, allow a greater ease in positioning the speakers in real-world rooms.)

Efficient at 90dB/W/m, the 5.2F's could be run from smaller amplifiers but, like any good speaker, a little extra amplifier beef will yield the best results and ensure crystal clear sound at higher volume levels.

The Diva 5.2C takes the vital centre-channel duties, finished to the same high standards as the 5.2F main speakers, with piano-gloss black top and bottom and high-gloss rosewood sides. It mounts two of the 160mm drivers as used for midrange in the 5.2Fs, flanking the same 28mm silk soft-dome tweeter.

Ideally, surround speakers should envelope you in the action, creating a realistic ambient environment. Many believe that bipole/dipole designs create an immersive and energetic surround field without distracting viewers from the on-screen action, and Swans' 5.2R bipole surround speakers embody this design

philosophy, utilising two 28mm silk-dome tweeters and two matching 160mm drivers in a sealed cabinet to achieve wide dispersion and believable surround effects. A shallow 186mm depth means the 5.2Rs are easily placed in most circumstances and blend unobtrusively into a room, especially important when the room is multi purpose.

Plumbing the depths in the system is the Swans Sub 60, a 100W active subwoofer, reasonably compact in size at 416 by 378 by 376mm and weighing 23kg. Housed in the now-familiar high-gloss rosewood and piano black is not only a 250mm woofer driven by the internal amp, but also a down-firing 250mm passive radiator. The goal of deep solid bass is often affected by Murphy's law — the bass will sound best in a given room when the subwoofer is placed in the most inconvenient location. Modern electronics can compensate for this extremely well, but if possible, always experiment with a few suitable locations, settling on the one that enables deep, tight bass without the need to climb over the sub to get to your favourite chair.

PERFORMANCE

Set up and calibration completed, I went away for two weeks, leaving the Swans system



to run in under the ears and eyes of my wife and children. On return, a quick poll found everyone happy, the system a welcome part of the family, passing even the aesthetic wife-acceptance-factor with flying colours.

Great speakers are equally at home with music and movie soundtracks, played softly or loud, and the Swans 5.2HT is no exception. At the end of a long work day, lights dimmed, glass of Merlot in hand, and the receiver in direct mode bypassing all processing and playing only the two 5.2F front speakers, discs such as Melody Gardot's *My One and Only Thrill* and Jonathon Swartz *The Sea* washed softly over the room with smooth clarity. The ability for subtle instruments, nuance and detail to shine through when high volume isn't desirable is one mark of a good system. Musically, over the weeks, two-channel listening moved through an eclectic range of jazz, acoustic, pop and rock discs played at various volume settings from background to winding the wick on the Integra 8.8 receiver to neighbour complaint-inducing levels.

The Swan 5.2Fs handled everything thrown at them with aplomb, the only small chinks in their armour being a slight lack of deep bass and mild sound compression at very high volumes on rock tracks. At sensible volume settings, neither was heard. Two-channel music was well balanced across the frequency range, natural and coherent. Listener fatigue was not an issue, even after long listening sessions.

Switching out of direct mode bought the Sub 60 into play, which added a solid platform to music's bottom end, the additional depth and solidness not coming at the expense of bass speed or accuracy. This proved how time taken tuning the subwoofer to the room and system was well spent.

Well-produced 5.1-channel music DVDs transported the listener to the concert venue, with jazz trumpeter Chris Botti Live a particular standout, while *Knights of Cydonia* from the live Muse DVD *Haarp* pummelled the listener with dynamic authority and involvement.

Older they may be, but the movies *The Lion King*, *Outbreak* and *Air Force One* have been heard and compared on so many systems that they make a great reference point. Mufasa and Scar's opening dialogue from the animated classic is a great test of a centre channel's ability. Scar's voice is deep, resonant with weight and authority. Given its physical size, the 5.2C reproduced both Scar and Mufasa extremely well. The receiver had easily compensated for the 5.2C's slightly lower efficiency during calibration, allowing a solid front stage with identical characteristics as sounds move from side to side.

The riverbed helicopter chase from *Outbreak* features great effects and, as the helicopter rotors echo off the riverside cliff walls, a throb so deep that many systems fail

to reproduce it — or it becomes an anaemic facsimile. While not perfect, the Swans here did a commendable job of reproducing this difficult track given their size and price.

The air-force fighter jets swooping in and around *Air Force One* test the seamless integration of effects, balance and timbre. The soundtrack also gives any subwoofer a good workout and the 5.2 HT system with Sub 60 didn't disappoint, the jets flowing around the listener with a solid whoosh.

CONCLUSION

Ignoring price for a second, the Swans speakers forming the Diva 5.2 HT system are high quality, well finished and polished performers in their own right. As a system, they integrate well, with enough flexibility to suit many rooms. Factor in the system's remarkable price value and it's clear that if you're shopping in this price area, the Diva 5.2 HT system should be on your must-audition short-list. *David Small* +

VERDICT

Swans Diva 5.2 HT 5.1-channel package

Price: \$4100

- Value for money
- Well-balanced sound
- Fit and finish
- Main speakers lack the deepest of bass without the subwoofer
- Binding post location on centre and bipoles a little fiddly
- No manuals included

DIVA 5.2F fronts
PRICE: \$2000 pair
SENSITIVITY: 90dB/W/m
NOMINAL IMPEDANCE: 6 ohms
DIMENSIONS (whd): 274 × 380 × 1148mm
WEIGHT: 28.5 kg

DIVA 5.2C centre
PRICE: \$550
SENSITIVITY: 87dB/W/m
NOMINAL IMPEDANCE: 6 ohms
DIMENSIONS (whd): 570 × 300 × 225mm
WEIGHT: 14.5kg

DIVA 5.2R rears
PRICE: \$700 pair
TYPE: bipole
SENSITIVITY: 87dB/W/m
NOMINAL IMPEDANCE: 6 ohms
DIMENSIONS (whd): 411 × 186 × 266mm
WEIGHT: 9.5kg

SUB 60 subwoofer
PRICE: \$850
POWER: 100W
DIMENSIONS (whd): 416 × 378 × 376mm
WEIGHT: 23kg

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