



BOW WOW!

GARY PEARCE GETS TO LISTEN TO HIS FAVOURITE
CDS ON AN INCREDIBLY HIGH-END SYSTEM

It's not often one is invited to a demonstration of the audio high end, but this is precisely what occurred when Trent Workman from Wilson Audio visited town, along with Wilson's New Zealand agent Romesh Anandaraja (The Listening Post) and Paul Quilter (Australasian Wadia and VTL distributor).

And what an afternoon it was, for Trent had arrived to demonstrate Wilson Audio's Watt/Puppy System 8 loudspeaker system, possibly the most famous high-end speaker system ever made.

A cavernous conference room on Auckland's waterfront provided the venue for the demonstration, and luckily for the hungry among us a hearty lunch was supplied. It's one of the perks of the job!

A floorstanding design, each Watt/Puppy speaker actually comprises two separate cabinets. The bottom module has two 200mm bass drivers, while the pyramidal upper cabinet contains a single 18cm midrange driver and 2.5cm inverted titanium dome tweeter.

These two halves each have a single pair of speaker binding posts, connected via an umbilical cable. Wilson Audio has not designed the Watt/Puppy system to be bi-wired or bi-amped, however, and considering the not insubstantial investment it would be advisable to follow the company's instructions regarding cabling.

Wilson Audio has identified the elimination of crossover-induced 'jitter' as a prime directive in this latest development of the Watt/Puppy System 8s, and the careful selection of crossover components has made this latest incarnation cleaner sounding, smear free and tonally pure. Essentially it provides a clearer window into the music, and greater enjoyment thus follows.

The superbly lacquered cabinets are amazingly inert. Rapping the sides created a 'ping' akin to a slab of granite being tapped, and I was left in no doubt as to the structural integrity and anti-resonant abilities of each enclosure. The substantial floor spikes appear capable of supporting the 77kg weight of each bomb-proof enclosure, and the overall look

was of high-end elegance. At just over a metre tall they aren't overly large and should be quite comfortable in most (upmarket) lounges and listening rooms.

But what was driving the Wilson Audio Watt/Puppy system on that wintry afternoon? Entering from stage left was a four-box CD spinner from Wadia Digital and tube amplification from VTL. Four boxes? You heard me: the Wadia 270SE transport was used in conjunction with the 931 digital controller and two 921 mono decoding computers to, as Wadia explains, uncover the musical magic contained within your CD collection. Discussing the technology Wadia has employed within this CD replay system would be an article in its own right, but suffice it to say the computing power submerged beneath each sleek aluminium chassis would probably run the average South American dictatorship.

And on to the VTL amplification. I had a most memorable afternoon with a pair of Siegfried monoblock power amplifiers early this year. They were effortlessly running a pair of monolithic Von Schweikert VR11s to great effect in a most beautiful home, and here they were again. Rated at 600 watts per mono into 8 ohms, these colossal amplifiers are designed to cope with hard-to-drive loudspeakers – although with a minimum amplifier requirement of seven Watts per channel you'd hardly describe the Watt/Puppy System 8s as the difficult type.

Given the sheer size of the room (three-metre-plus ceiling height and at least 12m wide), I was worried the system would not be able to 'load' the room with enough sound pressure waves – in other words, I presumed even this selection of high-end audio jewellery might sound a little 'light' and possibly bass-shy.

I was only partly correct. Sitting in the 'sweet spot' produced a very accurate and detailed sound, devoid of tizz and bass wallow, while sitting off axis reduced the focus and definition somewhat.

The usual hi-fi demonstration suspects were trotted out (Keb Mo', Norah Jones, Talk Talk and so on) but I can ►



PRODUCT PROFILE



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honestly say that I was entertained by what I heard, even though I've listened to these discs a million times. The music had great pace and drive through the Watt/Puppy/Wadia/VTL system, and detail was finely revealed and easy to decipher from each recording. Deep bass seemed the only casualty of the vast conference room, but once again, as I returned to the sweet spot bass dived an octave lower and appeared to defy the laws of audio physics.

Out came the Heineken – yet another perk of the job – and after a few gulps of Dutch courage I decided to play a CD I'd just purchased. Buying albums because I like the cover art isn't a typical ploy of mine, and neither is playing an unheard album with great cover art by Bjork at a high-end audio demonstration. But that's exactly what I did, and with total abandon I confidently approached the Wadia, CD in hand.

It was possibly the wrong thing to do, as the look on Trent's female companion's face soon signalled total disapproval of my choice in music. To be fair, it didn't sound the best after the smooth jazz and instrumental music I'd heard previously, but it most certainly wasn't the fault of the stereo system. It's a brash, raw recording that is 'in yer face', and to me proved one of the most interesting listens. Music lovers have these CDs in their collections and may possibly play them on systems such as this one. Buying a system of this calibre doesn't condemn you to listen to audiophile demonstration music forever.

Duelling Mexican guitars courtesy of Rodrigo Y Gabriella were next on the musical menu, and here the Wilsons

shone with excellent speed and attack. These performers create their own percussion by 'thrumming' the bodies of their guitars while picking and strumming, and I was impressed at the bass definition of the Watt/Puppy System 8s. Plucked strings were a highlight, too; the titanium tweeter provided excellent leading edge definition and decay without sounding harsh or 'toppy'.

A beer was thrust into my needy hand, and somehow my eyes spotted a CD that just had to be played. I had completely forgotten my Bjork shame as I placed *The Razor's Edge* by AC/DC into the Wadia transport.

What the hell was I doing? Had I gone completely mad? Did I want to write about hi-fi any more?

Luckily, the first bars of 'Thunderstruck' proved the decision was a great one. It sounded simply stunning. Angus (old schoolboy) Young's iconic guitar riff blazed out of the mighty Wilson Watt/Puppys like a laser beam, and once the drums kicked in it seemed I was treated to a live performance by AC/DC. Considering the size of the room, the system provided staggering dynamics that had me completely mesmerised. I'm not a huge Acka Dacka fan, but nevertheless this was the highlight, and what seemed to be a bit of a joke at the time easily became the most memorable part of the afternoon.

This system plays real music for real people, and the Watt/Puppy System 8 loudspeakers, ably supported by landmark audio components from Wadia Digital and VTL, provided real insight into each performance.

AC/DC? I kid you not. ■

SPECIFICATIONS

NOMINAL IMPEDANCE:

4 ohms

WOOFER: 2x 8-inch

MIDRANGE: 1x 7-inch

TWEETER: 1x 1-inch

inverted titanium dome

SENSITIVITY: 92dB @

one watt (2.0V at

one metre)

MINIMUM AMPLIFIER

POWER: 7wpc

FREQUENCY

RESPONSE (WITH PORT

CONTRIBUTION): +0,

-3dB 21Hz to 22.5kHz

HEIGHT: 41 x 13 x 18.75

inches (H/W/D)

SYSTEM PRODUCT

WEIGHT: (each) 77kg

approx.

SHIPPING WEIGHT:

256.7kg (for complete

system)

VTL TL6.5 PREAMP

\$18,995

2X VTL SIEGFRIED

MONOBLOCK POWER

AMPS

\$89,995/pair

WADIA 270SE CD

TRANSPORT

\$18,999

WADIA SERIES 9

DECODING SYSTEM

\$59,999

AURAL SYMPHONICS

GLASS FIBRE CABLE

\$9,000

WILSON AUDIO WATT

PUPPY 8 SPEAKERS

\$50,000

