



RICHTER MERLIN S6

STEREO LOUDSPEAKERS

Careful design and development has yielded award-winning performance from these fine little Australian-designed bookshelf speakers.

When products arrive for review, we check them out, plug them in, warm them through, then settle in for listening.

But manufacturers take rather more time in their preparation, of course. Before the wheels turned on the production line for Richter's Merlin standmount speakers, even before the first lines were drawn on a sketchpad, Richter undertook two years of research to make sure its new Series 6 version of the Merlin would, as they put it, "pass the pub test".

Richter's research revealed that peg-and-socket grille attachments are not much loved, partly because they can break, but also because they leave holes showing on the front baffle for the great number of Australians who don't use the grilles. So the new Merlin has a magnetic grille. There's also a badge under

the grille as well as on it, because people like badges no matter how they use their speakers.

Bolts securing drivers? Ugly, said the research. So Richter designed and tooled special driver surrounds to hide such fittings.

Discovering that many Australians tend to shelf-mount rather than stand-mount smaller speakers, Richter then researched Australia's best-selling shelves — which turned out to be the Ikea Kallax system of 33cm cube-shaped shelves. The new Merlin measures 32.5×21.9×32cm (HWD), so guess where it will fit?

Most importantly of all, of course, the new Merlin (which replaced not only the previous Merlin V but also assumes the place of the Mentor) had to be a great-sounding speaker. And its early win of a Sound+Image 2020 award would seem to indicate that this priority has been particularly well addressed.

Equipment

New drivers were developed to meet the sonic brief for the new model: a bespoke bass/midrange driver and a tweeter specifically made for the Merlin S6, a 25mm fabric-domed tweeter that sits at the bottom of a small horn that improves its dispersion and efficiency, along with increased high-frequency extension over the tweeter previously used on the Mentor. This crosses to a high-efficiency 165mm bass/midrange driver using a coated paper cone. The crossover network comprises high-quality audio-grade polypropylene capacitors, both air-cored and ferrite-cored inductors, and high-power cermet resistors. Mounted on a PCB, the inductors are all cross-mounted to eliminate the possibility of magnetic interaction between them.

There are only two gold-plated terminals on the rear of the Merlin, so there's no path for bi-wiring or bi-amping, and rather than being attached to a plastic extrusion, like most such terminals, the ones on the Merlin S6 are attached directly and super-solidly through the rear panel.



Also new is the shape of the bass reflex port which exits just below the centre of the rear; this flares from a diameter of 35mm at its inlet inside the cabinet to a diameter of 50mm at the flared exit, over a 100mm length.

This tapered port behaves as if it is longer than a straight ducted port, which can be a very useful trick in compact systems where port length is often restricted. All other things being equal, the Merlin S6's new port will provide improved bass response, increased immunity to overload (in the form of chuffing) and will keep the inside of the cabinet cooler, allowing maximal performance from the drivers, than would a conventionally-shaped bass reflex port.

Cabinet colour and finish was reportedly a deal-breaking preference, with many of those surveyed by Richter wanting a light and easy-care finish that didn't show dust. So the Merlin S6 is also available in walnut as well as black, and in matte finishes, textured rather

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than grained, and it looks very good. The baffle is finished in smooth matte-finish black paint, and has rounded edges at each side, but not at the top or bottom.

Performance

Lacking Ikea Kallax shelving on which to place the Richter Merlin S6s for listening, we used them both on ordinary shelves (where they fitted perfectly) and atop conventional speaker stands. On the shelves and when the stands were within 10cm of a rear wall we were amazed at the level and extension of the Merlin S6's bass response. Listening to Ed Sheeran's *Castle on the Hill* (from his album 'Divide'... or, if you prefer, '÷') we were struck first by the authenticity of the drum sound, and then by the depth and musicality of Pino Palladino's bass when it enters 20 seconds into the track.

We further marvelled at the sonic differentiation between Pino's bass and Sheeran's own guitar when the two play in unison. That such small speakers could exhibit such revealing bass is a wonder! Then, just a few tracks on, we found ourselves admiring the sound and tonality of a double-bass whilst listening to *Perfect*. This same track allowed us to enjoy the midrange sound of the Merlin S6, which is beautifully balanced: you'll instantly hear, for example, that Sheeran is using a real string section, not a synth.

The Merlin S6s' high-frequency delivery didn't disappoint either. An album that is renowned for its hard-to-handle highs is Max Roach's album 'It's Time'. Even on the remastered versions the sound of Roach's hi-hat and ride cymbals is a tweeter tester, along with the squeals of the highs from Clifford Jordan's sax. Through many tweeters these notes can grate, particularly at higher volumes, but through the Merlin S6s they just shone brightly. Being small speakers, there are of course limitations to how high you can turn the volume before some harshness creeps in, but even at these levels the Merlin S6s still exhibit their mettle.

Conclusion

Another finding from Richter's research was that Australians these days are keen to buy Australian products from an Australian company. This is a discovery that pleases us greatly, for two reasons — firstly because that was definitely not the case back when Richter made its first speakers in the 1980s, so we're delighted to mark the change. And secondly because in this case there is certainly no sonic, design or value penalty for buying Australian. According to Richter's design brief, the Merlin S6 speakers were to deliver an "engaging, musical and inspiring" sound quality. And in that regard they score three out of three. 🇺🇸

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- Great sound
- Good efficiency
- Outstanding quality
- No bi-wiring available

Price: \$1100

Type: 2-way bass reflex bookshelf
Drivers: 25mm soft-dome tweeter, 165mm composite paper cone mid/bass
Sensitivity: 88dB/W/m
Nominal impedance: 6 ohms
Dimensions (whd): 291 x 320 x 289 with grille
Weight: 7.3kg

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