



Richter plays its joker

+

Richter can lay claim to being one of Australia's oldest loudspeaker manufacturers, and the Harlequin one of its longest-running designs. The Harlequin name derives from the mischievous 'devil' or 'demon' character in French passion plays of the 16th century, though it is better recognised today with the chequered costume developed during Italy's subsequent *commedia dell'arte*. The name fits well among Richter's mystic speakers — the Wizards, the Merlins, and the outlying Thor, this last chosen for the presumably 'thunderous' subwoofer of the latest Series 6 line-up.

Equipment

As you can see from the photographs here, the Harlequin is an unusual design, a two-way, two-driver floorstanding loudspeaker. That's unusual because most two-way designs are in small cabinets that are intended to be placed on stands or on a shelf or side-table (and indeed Richter has just such a model in its range: the Merlin).

Yet floorstanding two-way speakers have many advantages over their smaller counterparts. Foremost among these is that the larger cabinet enables a more extended bass response than otherwise possible, because any given bass driver will always deliver

The Australian-designed Harlequin floorstanders prove they're no clowns.

SUMMARY

Richter Harlequin
stereo loudspeakers
Price: \$1899

- + Top-shelf sound
- + Outstanding value
- + Beautiful finishes
- No biwiring/biamping

more bass in a large enclosure than the same driver in a smaller one.

An important but less immediately obvious advantage of a floorstanding two-way design is that it means there's no need to buy a pair of stands, as there obviously is with a stand-mount design. And lest you underestimate the importance of this, we suggest you investigate the current retail price of a decent pair of loudspeaker stands!

There's also the look. It may just be us, but we think a floorstanding loudspeaker looks better in a typical lounge-room than a pair of small speakers on stands.

The 165mm bass/midrange driver in the Harlequin S6 is new for the 'Legend Series 6' of which it is part, also used in the larger Wizard S6, which has two of them in each cabinet. It's a brand-new driver for Richter, designed by Dr Martin Gosnell. Although the driver is 165mm, the Thiele/Small diameter is 128mm, which gives an effective cone area (Sd) of 129cm, which is slightly greater than that of the previous model Harlequin. Although the cone looks like polypropylene, looks can be deceiving, because it's actually made from a mixture of paper, hemp, kapok and wool. The blackness and gloss of the cone's surface is due to a sealant coating which ensures that the cone is not hygroscopic, so its performance will be uniform irrespective of humidity.

We must say that Richter has really tidied up the look of this driver, which is not only recessed into the front baffle but also has the periphery of its chassis neatly covered by a black rubber dress ring, so you can't see any of the bolts that secure it to the cabinet. As with other Series 6 models, this is the result of research by Richter which revealed, among other things, that many Australians like to

use speakers without grilles, but don't like looking at ugly bolts when they do so.

The tweeter is also a brand-new design for Richter, using a high-power neodymium magnet to drive the 25mm soft-fabric dome. Says Dr Gosnell: "it has lower distortion than the tweeter we previously used in the Harlequin, and also has a lower resonant frequency that gives us the desired phase characteristics and a frequency response that extends to beyond 30kHz."

We should note that because it's expensive for small loudspeaker manufacturers to design their own drivers and have them built, this self-same tweeter is also used in the Wizard and the Merlin models.

The new drivers meant that the Harlequin's crossover network was also re-designed, during which process Richter took the opportunity to upgrade the various components on the PCB, so this 'S6' version has high-quality acoustic polypropylene bipolar capacitors, high-power cermet wire-wound resistors, and both with air-cored and ferrite-cored inductors, with the former and latter cross-mounted to eliminate magnetic interaction.

The Harlequin is a bass-reflex design, with the port at the rear of the cabinet, for which Richter provides foam plugs that can be optionally used, as the company says in its brochure, "for even greater control of room and equipment variables". Although many manufacturers now supply 'bungs' that can be used to tune the bass response, those on the Harlequin work better than most when they are inserted, because of the greater volume of air inside the cabinet.

Just below the bass reflex port is a single pair of very high-quality gold-plated speaker terminals, both colour-coded and clearly marked with '+' and '-' identifiers. These,

too, are new for Richter, and they easily accommodate bare wire, pin connectors, spade connectors, ring connectors and banana plugs... the full gamut.

Also new for the Harlequin is the cabinet itself. Although the raw measurements don't really reflect it, the cabinet's walls are now not parallel, sloping inwards from being 221mm wide at the front to 210mm wide at the rear. This is presumably to ameliorate the creation of standing waves, but it also makes the cabinets appear less 'boxy' than a standard rectangular prism.

To complement this cabinet is a new 'Matte Black' cabinet finish that's textured on all sides except the baffle, which has a smoother, 'slicker' black finish. There's also the finish pictured in our lead image on the previous page, which Richter's owner, Brian Rodgers, calls 'New Walnut', this having had a wood-grained finish.

Irrespective of which finish works best for your décor, it will come with a black speaker grille that attaches magnetically, so if you choose not to use it, you won't see any unsightly grille fixings. Richter also puts its silver/black embossed logos on both the grille and the baffle underneath, partly to ensure brand recognition, but also because again, their research showed that people do like looking at badges.

The modern trend to make floorstanding speakers tall and narrow has implications for their stability, which can be a serious issue in households with pets or small children... or both! Richter has addressed this on the Harlequin by providing a pair of almost boomerang-shaped 'speaker stabilisers' that it says brings their stability up to furniture-industry standards. These



▲ RICHTER'S SERIES 6 AS IT STANDS — from left to middle the standmount Merlin, floorstanding Harlequin and Wizard, and Thor subwoofer.

stabilisers come included as standard with the Harlequin Series 6 speakers but they're also available separately (for \$249) because their clever design is such that they can be fitted to a wide range of floorstanding speakers made by manufacturers other than Richter. So if you already own a pair of floorstanding speakers with a topple factor that you find alarming, we'd encourage you to see if the Richter outrigger feet will fit them. The stabilisers come with spikes, spike protectors and rubber feet.

Performance

Yes it's a floorstander, and yes it has more bass than a standmount loudspeaker with an equivalently-sized bass/midrange driver, but size does count, so don't expect quite the bass extension and sheer 'thwack' that you'd get from, say, a pair of the larger Richter Wizards.

That said, you're going to be very pleased with the bass you will hear when you audition the Harlequins because it is tight, rhythmic, and has the type of slam and pace you'd only expect to find in a much larger and more expensive pair of speakers, plus its bass goes deeper than you're likely to need unless you're using them for the front channels of a home theatre system and need to hear movie sound effects. (In which case we'd suggest Richter's Thor 6 subwoofer would be the go to augment your home cinema sound system — perhaps using Merlins for rears.)

We fired up one of our favourite bass testers, which happens to be one of our favourite disco/funk tracks as well. We're talking *Act Like You Know* by Fat Larry's Band, on the album 'Break-Out'. (Larry really was fat too... which no doubt contributed to his death aged only 38, of a heart attack.) This track is notable not only for Larry's drumming, which really sizzles on this track, but for the fabulously fluid, inventive — and complex! — bass lines by Larry La Bes. If you're a gamer you may have heard this as part of the soundtrack CD to the 2002 video game 'Grand Theft Auto: Vice City'. Later on, when the boogie synth line kicks in and then the horns, you'll get to hear the Harlequins' great midrange delivery. But while you're waiting, listen to the depth of the skin sound on Larry's kick drum and the 'string' sound of La Bes' bass, as well as the way you can hear the attack on the bass strings distinct from the fundamental. Impressive stuff.

To listen to the midrange, we'd recommend Sarah McLaughlin's sad but beautiful song *Angel* which she wrote after the death of the Smashing Pumpkins' keyboard player Jonathan Melvoin. The Harlequins reveal McLaughlin's fragile voice to perfection, especially when she shifts register. You'll also

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Harlequin images: Wolfgang Eckert (Pixabay)

hear the sympathetic way the Richters handle the rather poorly recorded piano sound.

Can the Harlequins rock? You bet they can. We fired up the Rolling Stones' *Sympathy for the Devil* and cranked the volume as high as we dared. We love the sonic complexities of this song, the samba rhythm, the lyrics, the slow burn that climaxes with arguably the most significant lead break Keef's ever played. The scream of his guitar leapt from the Harlequins like a banshee, so clean yet so raw we were surprised even though we knew exactly when to expect it. The Richters delivered the totality of the sound-field from the mix and all the instruments with accuracy and precision throughout the entire track.

We found the Harlequins' highest frequencies a little forward in the mix, but also found that by leaving the grilles on and turning the speakers so that our listening position was a little off-axis, we easily reduced the highs and achieved our preferred sonic balance. We think being able to tune the high-frequency delivery this way is a definite advantage. If a speaker has too little treble, there's no way to fix it through positioning. But here, whatever midrange/treble balance you prefer to arrange for yourself, you will find that these Richters deliver beautifully crystalline treble that transmits the air around the highest notes.

Conclusion

Richter's Harlequins are outstandingly good speakers you should most definitely audition if you're seeking solid sound from relatively compact floorstanders, and of course you have the additional pleasure of buying Australian-designed speakers. We liked everything about them: sound quality, appearance, power-handling ability, and efficiency. We most particularly liked the price. +

SPECS

Richter Harlequins	\$1899
System type: floorstanding two-driver, two-way	
Cabinet alignment: bass reflex	
Tweeter: 25mm soft dome	
Bass/midrange: 1 × 165mm composite paper cone	
Frequency response: 31Hz–30kHz (–6dB)	
Sensitivity: 88.5dB SPL (2.83VRMS @ 1m)	
Nominal impedance: 6 ohms	
Minimum impedance: 4.6 ohms	
Finishes: Matte black, walnut	
Dimensions (hwd): 930 × 300 × 310mm	
Weight: 15.5kg	
Contact: Richter Audio	
Email: info@richter.com.au	
Web: www.richter.com.au	