

AV INFO

**PRODUCT:**  
Premium 7.1  
standmount/monitor  
speaker system

**POSITION:**  
S Series is Perlisten  
Audio's highest-  
spec range

**PEERS:**  
Paradigm Persona;  
KEF Reference Meta

The performance of some high-end speakers from a new US brand makes **Mark Craven** sit up and listen

# Smart looks, superior sound

With so many speaker brands competing in the home cinema/hi-fi markets, it can sometimes be hard to muster real enthusiasm when another one comes along. Yet Perlisten Audio, a new company from Wisconsin in the US, has arrived with a potent offering that immediately stands out.

It helps, of course, that Perlisten debuts with a fully-formed range of models that will suit system builders, including subwoofers and height/surround cabinets. And, yes, the fact its S Series loudspeakers are certified THX Dominus is notable too, even if the whole THX thing doesn't seem to be anywhere near as popular in the UK as it is in the US.

Most importantly, though, Perlisten Audio's speakers sound superb. Superb enough, perhaps, to make their price tags look not unreasonable.

Tested here is a 7.1 system comprising its S5m monitor speaker (£5,725 each), S7c centre (£5,725), S4s surrounds (£3,400 each) and D12s subwoofer (£3,600). The combined cost comes to around £34k – more if you opt for Perlisten's High Gloss Ebony finish (pictured, p61) for the L/C/R speakers instead of standard High Gloss Black or White.

That's a huge chunk of change but do note that, in S Series terms, we've tried to keep the pricing sensible. There are S7t floorstander models (£16,000 per pair) and larger subwoofers also available, should you want your soundfield to go bigger and deeper.

All S Series models feature the same driver, crossover and cabinet technologies, and it's when you start digging into these that you begin to understand their high-end status. For example, at the heart of the Perlisten 'story' is its patent-pending DPC (Directivity Pattern Control) array, found on every model. This combines a 28mm beryllium dome tweeter with a pair of same-size 'Textreme' thin-ply carbon diaphragm (TPCD) mid-range drivers. The tweeter is mounted at the centre of a waveguide, the two mids slightly overlapping its edge above and below. Extensive R&D, including acoustic modelling software, has been used to determine the shape of the waveguide,

plus the size and position of the three drivers, in order to deliver the preferred horizontal/vertical dispersion characteristics and manage interaction at the crossover point. Crafting the DPC, says Perlisten, took 18 months.

This array is flanked by a pair of 7in Textreme woofers in the S5m monitor (and four in the case of the S7c centre), while it sits above (or below, depending on orientation) a single 7in unit on the S4s. All the drivers are then mounted to a curved HDF baffle designed to limit cabinet diffractions, while the cabinets themselves are beautifully finished, rock-solid, and very pleasing on the eye.

Perlisten's D12s sub is the baby of the bunch below 15in and dual-driver models. Yet it adopts the same engineering principles and features the same app-based control and EQ platform. We'll be auditioning one of the larger units on a standalone basis in a future issue.

## Let's jump to it

Clock the price tag of this array, and the obvious R&D effort that's gone into these cabinets and drivers, and you'll rightly expect a standout performance. And that's exactly what you get, although perhaps with a bit of surprise that Perlisten's speakers and sub aren't all about brutal aggression.

As an example, the Etihad Towers fight scene/car jump stunt in *Fast & Furious 7* (4K Blu-ray) is delivered with a practically obscene amount of resolution, brawn and subtlety. Think of all the good things you want from loudspeakers – they're here.

When Michelle Rodriguez and Ronda Rousey start scrapping, every blow lands with a huge, thudding kick, and a wickedly fast, crisp edge. There's a beautiful blend of sharp high-end details and fat, rich bass, and while all this is going on the score is pouring out of all >

1. Perlisten's S4s is designed for use as a surround or height speaker

2. The S5m monitor has an internal Helmholtz resonator that can be left open (bass reflex mode) or sealed. It outputs via a side vent in the speaker's base

3. The DPC array combines a beryllium tweeter and two Textreme mid-range units within an acoustic waveguide



'Resolution, brawn and subtlety. Think of all the good things you want from loudspeakers – they're here'



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## REVIEWS

channels. It's large and musical with trombones, strings and drums sounding utterly convincing.

When the two fall over the balcony into the party below, the sub and speakers find another level of pure output. A tight wave of LFE surges through the room, and the rear and surround channels come alive with the gasps of startled party guests. In truth, I was a bit startled too.

But let's cut to the chase. Dom and Brian steal the Lykan Hypersport, which here has an engine sound that's the complete opposite of my Vauxhall Zafira. It squeals to a halt on a marble floor; the Perlisten system's sound decaying beautifully, leaving just the gentle purr of the engine. All hell then breaks loose when Jason Statham arrives, the soundmix awash with effects, yet the balance between the seven cabinets sounding spot on.

When our heroes drive out of the window (natch), the mix crescendos and the subwoofer lunges deep, but then we're in mid-air with nothing but the sound of air whistling past our ears. This is a wraparound effect – and a jaw-dropping moment – that this system absolutely nails, helped by the seamless, clear sound created by that DPC array in all corners.

### This is the moment

Although this scene left me feeling I had an understanding of the system's strengths, further discs revealed more.

*The Greatest Showman* (Blu-ray), and it's bassy DTS-HD MA track, brought the skill of the D12s sub, and the big-sounding nature of the speakers (I later ran the S5ms in stereo for music and their low-end depth and control was sublime) to the fore. You know the scene – a foot-stomping audience and Hugh Jackman's circus master warbling away. The bass weight of the D12s, its room-filling output and its ability to stop on a dime with no hint of overhang leaves me wondering how Perlisten's 15-inchers could better it. Meanwhile, Jackman's '...this is the moment you've been waiting for' punches clean through, the S7c centre proving a master of crisp, naturalistic-sounding dialogue.

In the film's quieter scenes, it's the smallscale stuff that leaves a big impression. The resolving power of these beryllium tweeters is something to hear, as is the system's delicate handling and positioning of the most minute of cues. And, again, it's the way this performance sounds so natural and effortless that's the real eye-opener.



## SPECIFICATIONS

### S5m

**DRIVE UNITS:** 1 x 28mm beryllium tweeter; 2 x 28mm Textreme mid-range; 2 x 7in Textreme woofers **ENCLOSURE:** Bass reflex/sealed **FREQ. RESP. (CLAIMED):** 35Hz-37kHz (reflex); 71Hz-37kHz (sealed) **SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 89.6dB **IMPEDANCE (CLAIMED):** 4ohm (nominal) **POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED):** 300W **DIMENSIONS:** 600(h) x 240(w) x 400(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 19kg

### S7c

**DRIVE UNITS:** 1 x 28mm tweeter; 2 x 28mm mid-range; 4 x 7in woofers **ENCLOSURE:** Sealed **FREQ. RESP. (CLAIMED):** 38Hz-37kHz **SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 92dB **IMPEDANCE (CLAIMED):** 4ohm (nominal) **POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED):** 600W **DIMENSIONS:** 240(h) x 960(w) x 400(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 33.5kg

### S4s

**DRIVE UNITS:** 1 x 28mm tweeter; 2 x 28mm mid-range; 1 x 6in woofer **ENCLOSURE:** Sealed **FREQ. RESP. (CLAIMED):** 39Hz-37kHz **SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 89.6dB **IMPEDANCE (CLAIMED):** 4ohm (nominal) **POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED):** 300W **DIMENSIONS:** 405(h) x 240(w) x 185(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 9.5kg

### D12s (subwoofer)

**DRIVE UNITS:** 1 x 12in carbon fibre woofer **ENCLOSURE:** Sealed **ONBOARD POWER (CLAIMED):** 1,500W ('short term' RMS) **FREQ. RESP.** 20Hz-289Hz (-6dB) **REMOTE CONTROL:** No. App/LCD touchscreen **DIMENSIONS:** 448(h) x 420(w) x 450(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 41kg **FEATURES:** XLR and RCA input/output; 10-band parametric EQ with three user presets; control/EQ app; 12V trigger; Auto-On; variable phase/crossover

## TESTED WITH



**FAST & FURIOUS 7:** The film that properly introduced Jason Statham's villain (now hero) Deckard Shaw features two particularly outrageous set-pieces, one featuring cars parachuting out of an airplane, the other the Etihad Towers heist – plus a surprisingly touching closing scene that pays tribute to actor Paul Walker.

Returning to bombast with *Bad Boys For Life* (4K BD), I became aware of how this flatbed system still seemed able to create a soundstage with notable height (perhaps helped by the S4s's slightly angled baffle when used as a surround model). At the beginning of the abandoned hotel lobby scene, as I sat surrounded by creaking doors and fluttering birds in a large, echoing space, I was reminded that you don't always need Atmos to create atmosphere...

## High-performance

There's nothing negative I can find to say about this Perlisten setup. Its sound is large and enveloping, thrillingly energetic and attacking when needed, yet capable of control, subtlety and glorious detail.

The good news for those not shopping at this premium level is that a more affordable R Series is incoming (still with the patent-pending DPC array), and you can build an S Series for less, making use of its bookshelf S4b models in place of the monitors. But for those preparing to invest in a high-end, high-performance array, these simply have to be auditioned ■

## HCC VERDICT



### Perlisten Audio S Series 7.1

→ £34,375 → [www.perlisten.com](http://www.perlisten.com)

**WE SAY:** A 7.1 system with the astonishing performance you'd expect given the price tag. The sound here is a dizzying mix of detail, power, scale, and immersion. Worth saving up for...



**4.** The D12s's 12in carbon fibre driver is powered by a 1.5kW amplifier

**5.** Perlisten's subwoofer app includes EQ presets for THX, 'small room' and 'large room'