Hi-Fi Choice RECOMMENDED

Depth charge

Mark Craven raves about Perlisten's latest room-friendly sub – ideal for boosting bass without rearranging the furniture

Following its arrival in 2021, Perlisten has established its reputation as a subwoofer manufacturer of big-boned, high-ticket models, but what about users looking for something more discreet and affordable?

In another world, Perlisten might have had the R8s in its lineup from day one. As it is, I wouldn't be surprised if this recent addition to the US brand's junior R series ends up becoming its best-selling subwoofer. Not only is it easier to accommodate than the rest of Perlisten's range, it's diminutive for a sub in general. It looks smart too, if a little nondescript, with the same mix of curved front baffle and right-angled main cabinet used elsewhere in the Perlisten stable. Add in the shiny company logo, top-mounted LCD display and lack of any grille (available as an optional extra), and the 'mini me' impression is complete. One minor difference remains, however: the R8s is currently the only Perlisten sub offered in Black or White finishes.

The single drive unit is 215mm, the smallest on any of the company's subs. Front-facing, it features a glass-fibre cone framed by a half-roll surround and is backed by a motor system with multi-layered spider to optimise linear excursion. As usual, Perlisten pairs this with Class D amplification, rated at 500W (RMS), and a bespoke 48-bit DSP platform to optimise performance.

The rear panel has an IEC mains socket, 12V trigger and USB service ports with in/outputs on both unbalanced RCA and balanced XLR. Adjustments are driven either through that top-panel display or Perlisten's Bluetooth app. The latter is the most comprehensive option and includes multiband parametric EQ adjustment, level, crossover, phase, *etc*.

Sound quality

It doesn't take more than a little manual calibration to discover this sub's strengths. Used in 2.1-channel setups with DALI's SONIK 9 floorstanders and B&W's 705 S2 Signature standmounts, the compact Perlisten is brilliant at filling in the low octaves. The extra depth transforms the two-way 705 S2s, in particular, giving rise to a genuine full-range performance, but even the more deep-reaching DALI towers enjoy greater bass slam and control.

The moody, lengthy, low-frequency throbs that kick off the *Winter Soldier* theme from Henry Jackson's soundtrack for *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* showcase the R8s' extension. Yes, bigger subs will play deeper, but there's still a scale-setting reach that you might not expect given the modest driver/cabinet size.

Better yet is the control and punch on offer when Jackman unleashes a barrage of drums and samples. The R8s latches onto every bass element, delivering them with speed, attack and definition. There's no suggestion of unwanted bloom or bloat.

A more ethereal quality is in evidence playing The Quireboys' *Whippin' Boy*, the sub bringing not only welcome weight to the bass guitar and drums, but expanding the track's big reverberant acoustic. Meanwhile, orchestral strings and timpani during the 2025 Boston Symphony Orchestra/Yo-Yo Ma recording of Shostakovich's *Cello Concertos* sound rich and robust.

The modern electro pop of Billie Eilish's *Lunch* or Shelby Lynne's *Just A Little Lovin'* are rendered big and bold by Perlisten's bijou bassmaker.

Conclusion

Small enough to make the idea of a subwoofer system doable, Perlisten's R8s scores brownie points right out of the box. But this is no exercise in form ruining function – the same controlled, impactful performance witnessed on the brand's bigger models can be found here and the trade-off in ultimate depth and output that comes with this sub's size is unlikely to concern its target audience ●

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Perlisten R8s

ORIGIN
USA

TYPE
Active subwoofer

WEIGHT
14.4kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
270 x 298 x 290mm

FEATURES
- 215mm glass-fibre driver with 500W Class D amplification
- App control with parametric EQ presets
- Inputs: RCA; XLR

DISTRIBUTOR
Karma AV

WEBSITE
perlistenaudio.com
karma-av.co.uk

Hi-Fi Choice OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY ★★★★½
VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★
BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★
FEATURES ★★★★½

LIKE: Tight, detailed sound; compact size makes it a fit for any system; slick control and setup via app

DISLIKE: Bigger subs sound, well, bigger

WE SAY: Perlisten's dinky R8s offers all the fun of a subwoofer without the fuss

OVERALL ★★★★½