



ACE OF BASS?

Our trade-focused reviewer Richard Stevenson gets up close and personal with the powerful Perlisten D8is: is it love?

Spoiler alert: the Perlisten D8is is the best subwoofer I have reviewed in 25 years as an audio reviewer. Just when I thought my age suggested I was past 'raving', this sub has brought out my inner raver, journalistically and in the listening room.

There are premium subwoofers that fill space with epic levels of LF. There are subwoofers that deliver nuanced, detailed bass output, enhancing the overall spectrum for music and movies. And then there are subwoofers that successfully solve problems. The D8is is all three.

Yes, it carries a price tag that will make even seasoned integrators pause, but spend time with it in a real installation context, and the logic becomes clear. This is not simply a premium subwoofer. It is a design-led, system-level LF solution for high-performance cinema and mixed-media rooms where space, aesthetics and acoustic authority all matter equally. Isn't that precisely the brief from pretty much every high-end client you have ever worked for?

The defining USP of the D8is is obvious the moment you see it in the flesh. Instead of the familiar cubic monolith that demands floor space and can muck up the finely crafted décor, Perlisten has created a tall, shallow, upright enclosure intended to sit against a wall. At just 24cm deep, it's asking to be slotted behind an easy fabric wall, free-standing or mounted on the wall using the supplied hardware. At 103kg, the latter will present its own challenges!

Standing approximately 114cm tall and 51cm wide, the cabinet is all-metal with trim and parts machined to perfection. As an ex-engineer, I find the industrial design, machined components and anodised satin back finish frankly beautiful. Yet it is just as easily hidden behind a Laura Ashley fabric wall for clients with more delicate visual tastes.



The unit's solo connection is a pair of push-post speaker terminals, which is possibly the only part of the entire package that isn't engineered to the nth degree. The chunky gold-plated binding posts as fitted to the accompanying outboard amplifier would have been nicer if a little less practical. The 'is' in D8is denotes Perlisten's in-wall and system-focused design philosophy, and part of that is separating the amplifier from the enclosure.

The electronics are housed separately in a 2U-high rack-mountable enclosure with a 2.8in touchscreen for basic setup. For integrators, this means that heat stays in the rack, not behind a fabric wall, service access becomes straightforward and firmware updates and DSP control are centralised. The core processor is high-spec, featuring an ARM Cortex-M4 with a TI 48-bit DSP module. You get line-level and balanced XLR stereo inputs and outputs, should you wish to daisy-chain more D8is (??!), and an AES/2 output. Maximum rated output is 3,000W or 3kW RMS, which itself just makes me want to say 'mwa ha ha ha' like a Bond villain.

Inside the monster subwoofer is eight – yes, eight – 215mm (8.5in) long-throw drivers with carbon-fibre cones and magnet assemblies that could probably levitate a small car. They are arranged in two banks of four facing the same direction but electrically wired in push/pull configuration. That creates the most significant air pressure between the two banks, which exits the monolithic cabinet through the long frontal grille. In sheer square inches of cone area, the design is equivalent to a single 24in driver – all without suffering the array of issues incurred in getting a cone that large to be light, stiff and remain piston-like under high load.

We spoke to Erik Wiederholtz, the CTO at Perlisten Audio, to get an inside track on

the design philosophy because after a few days of testing, the D8is was really baking my noodle. Erik noted that the multiple smaller drivers in force-cancelling configuration spread mechanical stresses, reduce distortion and maintain piston-like behaviour at extreme excursion levels. Ergo, it is capable of delivering the super-fast transient response of smaller drivers in a push-pull design, alongside the bass depth and SPL output of a 24in. 'Mwa ha ha ha', for the second time.

CLIMB ON BOARD

The onboard DSP is fairly comprehensive with several presets and a manual parametric system. Honestly, in an installation specifying an £18k subwoofer, there will undoubtedly be some high-end EQ system in the mix, so I can't really critique its lack of on-board EQ automation here either. The app is equally straightforward and user-friendly, with presets, limiters and fine-grain controls, and a big, bold volume control/display.





So how did this unique, expensive, up-against-the-wall subwoofer sound in a real-world installation? Performance is absolutely mind-blowingly good. The LF attack and punch are among the tightest I have ever heard, the depth and extension is sub-sub bass, the articulation of distinct notes and frequencies is truly amazing, and the max SPL is something I could not even get close to... for fear of structural damage to the listening room.

For cinema, the dynamic punch is ferocious. Explosions hit with physical authority, yet never blur into one-note thuds. Low-frequency effects dig astonishingly deep, delivering infrasonic weight you feel in your chest rather than simply hear. At the same time, there is an uncanny sense of control. Even at extreme levels, the D8is sounds composed, almost effortless.

For music, the achievement is arguably even greater. Bass lines are textured, pitch-accurate and rhythmically locked in. Kick drums have snap and body. Double bass has wood, string and air, and detailing across the LF spectrum is sublime. The D8is worked equally well with three different brands and sizes of speakers I tested it with and it integrated seamlessly rather than announcing itself as a separate entity.

It delivers immense energy with up-tempo tracks, and my 'best of progressive techno' mixtape gave it a serious workout. It's so addictive that you keep reaching for 'just one more track' while tactfully avoiding calls from UK distributor Karma AV asking for their sample back. OK, the last bit may be just me.

And all this from a design that takes up virtually no floor space, doesn't need to be moved around to hit the perfect spot and can be hidden behind a 6in-deep fabric wall and/or hung on the wall. You don't even need to do rear-panel upside-down acrobatics to set it up, as that is all handled in the rack by the outboard amp/DSP. In 25 years of reviewing, only a handful of audio products have genuinely re-engineered my perception of the category, and the D8is has redefined what I thought was even possible from a subwoofer.

THE BUSINESS CASE

From a business perspective, the D8is opens many doors. In rooms where clients or their IDs previously rejected large subs on aesthetic grounds, this becomes an easy upsell. In high-end cinemas where two or three premium subs might normally be specified to achieve output and uniformity, a single D8is could potentially do the job alone.

In very large rooms, I would still advocate multiple subs for modal control, but in spaces where the alternative would be two or three large boxes, the D8is is a very compelling story. One enclosure, one mounting location and one small visual compromise at worst, even if you can't slot it behind a fabric wall. Less disruption, less cabinetry, less negotiation with architects. The price suddenly makes sense.

The Perlisten D8is is a truly unique product that simplifies design conversations while simultaneously elevating the upper end of audio performance. Now that is a rare beast indeed.