



Blade Runner

With metal foil in its treble transducers rather than conventional cloth domes, Robson's Regis are futuristic in design, yet conventional in appearance. Noel Keywood finds it an alluring combination...

Robson's Regis is a compact, liftable but solidly built loudspeaker that will fit most rooms easily and blend in well. But it is a quality design graced with a ribbon tweeter of exceptional ability, I found. For this you pay a price: £2,500 no less. This is identical to that of Monitor Audio's PL100 I see, another compact quality design sporting a ribbon tweeter. The two are the same, but character wise could hardly be more different as well!

The Regis is a stand mounter, one that sits firmly due to its 9kg weight. Getting the Regis onto its stand is hardly a problem all the same since it is a manageable 42cm high, 20cm wide and 32cm deep. The rear face carries a port, as this is a bass reflex design, plus a set of (single wire) input terminals. Solid wood top and bottom plates contribute to the sense of solidity and with the machined front name plate finish was superb.

The ribbon tweeter has a long diaphragm, but it still works from a high 4kHz upward our measurements show, like most ribbons, so most of the audio band is handled by the 152mm polypropylene coned bass/midrange driver in truth. Yet the sonic contribution of the ribbon is very obvious all the same, I found – and welcome!

Ribbons commonly don't reach down far enough to match a bass/mid driver and they're also insensitive, making the whole 'speaker insensitive – and both difficulties affected the Regis I found. The upside is that ribbon drivers deliver wonderfully pure, sweet and insightful treble, properties the Regis delighted in.

Our samples were run in for 48 hours and driven mostly by our Musical Fidelity AMS50 power amplifier, via a Creek OBH-22 passive preamp from an Electrocompaniet ECDI DAC. Our Icon Audio MB845 MkII was used also, and a Leema Pulse III, but in this case I felt the big Class A AMS50 was the best partner, even though it ran out of Watts at one point (more later).

SOUND QUALITY

Like any ribbon treble unit that of the Regis is smooth, sweet, detailed and tonally even. Kept in good balance with the bass/midrange unit by Robson, the result is a loudspeaker that comes across as free of the added sheen and apparent speed that metal cone loudspeakers have. The Regis is gentle, full and even a little warm in its nature, and quite different to most commercial loudspeakers on

the market today in being so. There's no extra light on the upper midband, no peaky treble nor anything to add 'character' – and this makes for a loudspeaker 'quieter' than the herd and especially a highly tuned loudspeaker like a Monitor Audio PL100 – say – with its treated alloy cones and forward ribbon tweeter. The Regis represents another, quite contrary approach.

Vocals were a little warmed by the gap between upper midrange and the ribbon unit and there was a feeling of loss from the less than perfect cohesion between the bass/midrange unit and the ribbon: this

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was responsible for the 'warmth' in the sound. Yet the Regis is deliciously detailed; I was transfixed by the gentle but sonorous ring of a cymbal being hit in Angelique Kidjo's 'Bitchifi'; I could tell it was planished brass and it rang out in its own space on the sound stage. Each strike was instantaneous too, starting in a way that defies dome tweeters, whilst the decay was clearly illuminated. The Regis has treble detail to die for. What you get so uniquely here is real detail, swathes of it, with absolutely no emphasis or colour' just a smooth sweet stream of activity that is easy to listen to hours on end.

Renee Fleming was a little back on the sound stage singing 'Quando me n'vo' from Puccini's 'La Boheme' and there was again a little sense of warmth that comes from loss due to that dip in the response, but you'd not easily notice this. It's a sin of omission, rather than addition and would have flown beneath my aural radar were it not for the fact that I consistently use the same test tracks in loudspeaker reviews and the Regis played things differently to much of what I review. Fleming's sustained high at the end of 'Signore, ascolta!' was strong yet gloriously pure, flowing from the loudspeakers with an easy clarity that would have any opera lover drooling.

Whilst the Regis comes across

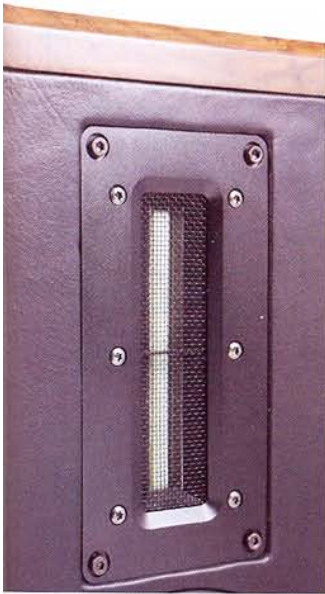
as warm and even a little tubby in its upper bass, and also possessed of a little boxiness, lower bass lines were taut and powerful. I was surprised at this, in view of cabinet size. The strong walking bass lines on Angelique Kidjo's 'Fifa' album punched out nicely and I rate the Regis highly when it comes to both bass power and control.

Our measurements suggest good bass tuning and in use the Regis worked surprisingly well in this area. Lows from Lady Gaga's 'Monster' swirled around the room, their threatening presence underpinning Gaga's spoken parts, the Regis

sounding both firm and strong here, with plenty of depth too. But as 'Monster' got into its stride and I turned volume up, as I always do with this track to see how a loudspeaker hangs together at high volume, the Regis started to sound a little thick.



then some coarseness suggested our Musical Fidelity AMS50 was reaching its limit and clipping. Sure enough hanging a voltmeter onto its outputs showed the insensitive Regis was gobbling volts; I saw 20V (50W and



CONCLUSION

Above all the Regis is a smooth, easy and warm sounding loudspeaker to sit in front of. It simply encourages long term listening and for this alone I thought it a lovely design. Too many modern loudspeakers are 'in yer face' attention seekers whose presence, after a short while, can become irritating. These Robsons are the opposite: they soothe a listener, yet impress at the same time. Much of this comes down to the speed and cleanliness of the ribbon driver; rimshots on The Stranglers 'Always the Sun' were lightning fast for example, but naturally so, not forced. Largely because the Robsons handle strings so well and image superbly, Classical music was a delight to listen to.

The Regis is not perfect; it is characterful and Robson haven't solved the thorny problem of getting a bass midrange unit to seamlessly match a ribbon driver. Yet this hardly seemed an issue with much of the music I played. With some exceptions: Gaga sounded a little muffled; enunciation wasn't as specific as it should have been and intelligibility suffered. At the same time this

small blemish helped give the Regis an easy aural demeanour that made for relaxed listening. So this is a loudspeaker that must be auditioned first; it isn't perhaps for everyone. For most of the time and in most ways I thought it was lovely and I thoroughly enjoyed listening to its great abilities.



well into clip) come up at one point, far higher than the 5V (3W) or so I normally see at high volume with an 88-90dB sensitive loudspeaker. I swapped to our Leema Pulse III for a high level session and the Regis held together well enough, although they aren't ideal for very high volume Rock.

With 'Monster' there was a notable softening of Gaga's enunciation; at times the Regis sounded a little overly warm and bland; Gaga spits her words out and the Regis noticeably softened this delivery. Yet the stage was wide, it was deep and the performance came over as powerful, as it should.

Spinning Nigel Kennedy playing Vivaldi's 'Spring' from 'The Four Seasons' saw the Regis ascend to a realm inhabited by few modern loudspeakers, courtesy of its ribbon drive unit. Its insight into Nigel's violin was peerless, strings were clearly separated and had their own discernible character, instead of being painted in by the loudspeaker. The lack of fizz, sizzle and other roughening effects was remarkable; the ribbon was utter class here and streets ahead of other loudspeakers. I was more than impressed in fact: the sound stage was wide and open, extending beyond the cabinets, and individual sections of the backing English Chamber Orchestra were outlined with precision. With both violin and orchestra the Regis romped away from most other loudspeakers, sounding sweet as a nut, natural in balance and very engaging in delivery.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

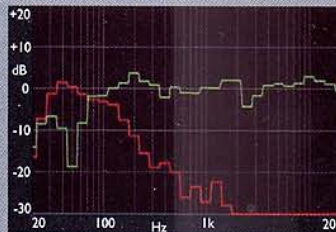
The Regis has a basically flat response trend across the audio band, our analysis shows. Output from the ribbon tweeter matches that of the bass/midrange unit in terms of level, so this is not a loudspeaker with emphasised treble and a bright balance to its sound. It does look as if the ribbon reaches down no lower than 4kHz, like most ribbons, and the bass/midrange unit struggles to get past 2kHz, creating a large dip in the response curve between these frequencies. This will add warmth at least and lessen detail, although the peak from 1.5kHz-2kHz will likely disguise this by adding emphasis a little lower down. This aberration apart however, the Regis looks to be a tonally accurate loudspeaker with smooth ribbon treble and a fairly even bass midrange region. The peak in output at 200Hz is caused by an internal resonance (standing wave) that is clearly visible in a decay spectrum (not shown) as an overhang and may colour/warm the upper bass a little.

Port output (red trace) is broad, showing the port adds a lot of acoustic damping to the bass unit, and this is indeed reflected in the impedance curve. Port output measured +4dB above the bass unit at 80Hz (this is not shown in the graph) and the port reaches down to 30Hz - a low value for such a small cabinet. However, the drawback is very low sensitivity of just 81.5dB from one nominal watt of

input, meaning powerful amplifiers of 60W or more are needed to go loud. Our impedance curve barely gets below 10 Ohms; the bass unit had a 7 Ohm DCR and overall impedance measured 12 Ohms, no less, an unusually high value.

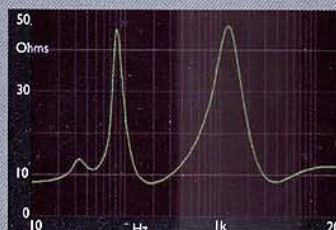
The Regis is a compact, wide bandwidth loudspeaker with few blemishes. However, it is fundamentally accurate and offers quality results from a compact design, albeit demanding high power amplifiers. NK

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



Green - driver output
Red - port output

IMPEDANCE



VERDICT

A smooth, mild mannered loudspeaker with lightning fast transients and delicious treble. A great listen.

ROBSON REGIS £2,500

Robson Acoustics

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www.robsonacoustics.co.uk

FOR

- evenly balanced
- fast, pure treble
- precision sound stage

AGAINST

- soft midband
- needs power