

HEAVY WEIGHT ON DISCOUNT

With the new top model Divine the Kings of Budget XTZ sets a new standard, especially in terms of price/performance ratio. Despite the fact that a pair of speakers from Torup can now cost more than 4900 Euros.

What is considered a cheap speaker, and a price worthy speaker is not necessarily the same thing. Divine, which we review on these pages can hardly be considered cheap if judged by the price tag alone. But price worthy? Yes, that's the least we can call them! For XTZ with Olle Eliasson at the rudder the sales of their own speakers began almost a decade ago, when the web shop Fyndbörsen introduced a new line-up of products developed "at home", but produced in China. The concept of direct sales through the web shop allowed for low consumer prices, and as the speakers performed well XTZ quickly became a success that hardly anybody in Sweden might have missed.



Just like the equivalent Skoda in the car business, XTZ have lately focused more on developing more lush models, but still we a low price compared to the competition. Sky high finish, options for different kinds of room correction and drivers from well-renowned manufacturers usually characterizes XTZ speakers. But seen from the price tag point of view the brand from Halland has always been considered consumer friendly HiFi – regardless of model, until now. The segment XTZ is now entering for the first time cannot be considered anything less than High End, so this is a in contrast from previous models not a speaker for everybody. Looking at what you really get however, they are really cheap.

"The best speakers in the world for this money", XTZ promises on their website, which undoubtedly bumps up the expectations. As if they weren't already up there knowing my weakness for the previous top model 99.26P/10.18P...

With a match weight of 70 kgs a piece, a height of close to 1,3 meters and 60 cm's of depth, these are speakers that tend to be noticed. Both in good and bad ways. Because of the dimensions the Divines are perhaps not a first choice if your living room is less than 25 m². In order to land on your feet again, some simple calculations will reveal the reality: a suitable placement is about 1 meter from the back wall, which puts the fronts of the speakers about 1,5-1,6 meters into the room. Design wise, the Divines are mighty if you ask me. A scaled down TAD using some fantasy, or a Pioneer F-1 using less fantasy, just look at the back panel! The speakers are piano black, but also available in walnut veneer like our test pair, making the much more easy to keep clean.

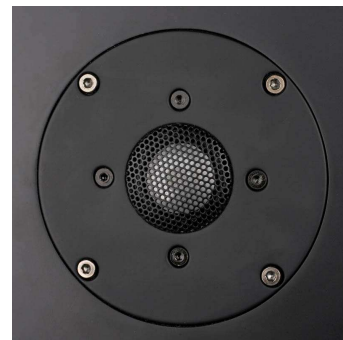
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The cabinet is built from 38 mm MDF, while the curved side walls use 1 cm less thickness, as the curved shape makes them naturally more stable than a plain sheet. The back wall is no less than 90 mm thick, which explains some of the weight involved. XTZ has on top of thickness included 7 internal bars to stabilize the construction. According to this year's trend of speakers standing on heavy fundamentals, also the Divines have a thick and stable foot. Even if the shape of the cabinet already makes the speakers super steady, the foot is hardly a disadvantage.

The armament in this three way construction is severe. We can start from the bottom, where the bass region is handled by two 10 inch drivers, the same SEAS Excel units used in 10.17P and the floor model 99.38. The driver has a phase plug and can stand lots of input power thanks to effective cooling. The bass drivers breath backwards supported by two reflex ports, which in good old XTZ fashion can be closed using foam bungs to optimize the character for the listening room. With the plugs inserted the speakers' transforms into less dominant in the lower regions, making the sound easier to handle in smaller rooms.

The midrange driver comes from classic brand Thiel & Partner (C173-T6-90) and is a well known unit from several more expensive competitors in the high end segment. According to XTZ the entire construction is developed around this precious driver. The working area in this construction is between 180 Hz – 2,5 kHz. The cone is ceramic, and the neodymium magnet makes it particularly powerful, with excellent response and speed. The two black dots seen on the cone is not just some design gimmick, but is there to optimize the damping of the driver. The midrange driver is housed in a V-shaped cavity inside the large speaker cabinet, and the shape is calculated for minimum resonance. The cavity is filled with a carefully selected blend of mineral- and synthetic wool.

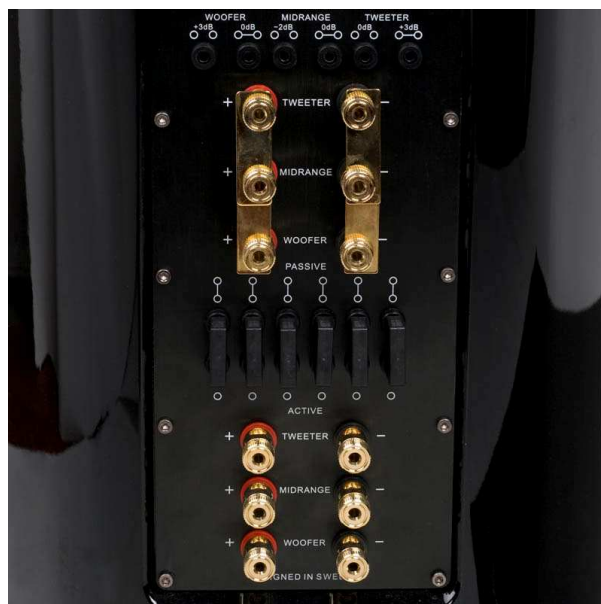
In the top we find a ceramic dome tweeter from Visaton. The main reason for choosing this driver was that the material offers superior transient properties and high resolution.



If the selection of drivers felt heavy, I'm even more impressed when it comes to the crossover filter. In their usual manner, XTZ has used more than just two pole screws for connecting the wire. The back panel houses a tri-wire setup, with links so you can choose to run the entire speaker from one amp, bi-amp, or why not tri-amp? Once you have connected the amps and listened, you can use the links above to adjust the drivers' output levels, thus adjusting the character for your listening room. Lots of efforts have been put into the filter components; using air wound coils and expensive MKP capacitors and MOX resistors. The solid core coils used all have high degrees of maximum magnetic saturation to avoid effects on other components in the filter causing poor sound.

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At the lower back you will find three connections that reveal some of what's to come. These connections are intended for completely active amp drive, and between the lines XTZ explain the development of an amp solution using active filters and DSP, similar to that used in the Sub Amp 1 DSP. This will provide top control and adaptation features for the Divines. We are eagerly waiting for this upgrade. Of course, you can already connect their Sub Amp 1 DSP to assist with driving the bass woofers, and together with the Room Analyzer system correct for standing waves caused by the room.



Yes, considering that the 10 inch drivers can be found in the previously be lauded (by me) passive subwoofers 10.17P, the massive bass power was not surprising, even if it's the most striking thing when the Divines are set up in a small room without their bass plugs. After some experimentation with placement about 1 m from the back wall and plugging on of the ports the character could be tuned close to neutral. Unfortunately plugging the ports may remove some of the joy of play in the bass region, so I would rather move the Divines into a larger room allowing them to breath more freely, alternatively use Sub Amp 1 DSP to cope with the room modes.

So, enough with whining. Basically it's a rotten thing complaining about bass issues, as they also troubles all other speakers about the same as the Divines as soon as we have a non ideal relation between room- and speaker size. The problem is that it's not much to complain about here.....

I can honestly say that I have a hard time finding any real drawbacks with the sound from the Divines. The sound stage is large in every direction, and the soundscape presented at that possesses a remarkable depth. All this at the same time as the speakers manage to present a presence of the recordings, still maintaining the calm to avoid listening fatigue.

These are some scary high resolution music reproducers, and that may demand some of the auxiliary equipment, not only to restrain the 10 inch bass drivers, but also because the ceramic drivers are not precisely aiding inferior recordings. On the contrary, I have to reward the Divines for not rejecting less perfect recordings like some other speakers do. Even an early Bob Marley-recording is well treated. The sound is mainly open and clear, without being experienced as anything but uncoloured and neutral. You have to be prepared that the ceramic drivers do take many (well invested) hours of playing in time.

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To get some perspective, we also listened to a similarly priced competitive model from another brand during this review just to compare. Despite considering this competitor as a reliable reference of good sound for the money, it had a hard time keeping up with the Divine!

The purpose for XTZ presenting the Divine is to show that it is possible to build a speaker using costly components without making it unrealistically expensive. There is no doubt this goal has been reached! This is a gruesomely competent and uncompromised speaker that has managed to convince both myself and the rest of the editorial staff that the world of high end sound should pay attention. The future options also suggest that Divine can grow with its task. Now we are just waiting for the new amps for fully active drive and DSP correction.

An Achilles heel is that Divine does not at all flirt with home cinema people. I can very well imagine that they would make excellent front speakers in a higher level multi channel system. Despite all positive thoughts and an impressive achievement I cannot stop being bothered about the Divines being too large for my own living room (18 mm²). Do I have to move now? A stand model or a scaled down version with the same drivers would be awesome, and a much simpler solution than changing my accommodation.

Together with decent enough electronics and a listening room larger than 25 mm² all I can say is go for it!

+Very price worthy construction
Large, powerful and extremely detailed sound

-Almost too cheap for their own good

= These are large and impressive speakers that suggest high expectations and deliver it too