LAB REPORT

▶ Pair-match is very close right across the band. Port here is tuned to 35Hz, well below the 'natural' 55Hz driver/box resonance.

▶ Sensitivity registers a very generous 91dB/W, and this is not too seriously compromised by the impedance, which is low but not exceptionally so, hovering around 5 ohms through much of the bass region, and again above 10kHz.

▶ With the port tuned to a low 35Hz, ultimate bass extension is pretty good. The overall in-room alignment is slightly dry: best suited to siting in free space – some wall reinforcement can be tolerated if necessary.

▶ The frequency balance is good up to 2kHz, if just a tad forward from 600Hz–1.3kHz. A presence dip, centred on 3.2kHz, is fairly obvious while the treble as a whole is a little restrained.

▶ **LAB CONCLUSION:** Good sensitivity, plus fine bass extension and alignment are combined with a fine overall balance, marred only by a rather obvious presence dip centred on 3.2kHz.

RECOMMENDED
HI·FI CHOICE
magazine

DRIVERS
SUPER-TWEETER: 19mm titanium-coated dome
TWEETER: 25mm metal alloy dome
WOOFER: 200mm cast frame with 150mm TPX cone

HARBETH SUPER HL5

☎ 01444 484371 ⊕ www.harbeth.com

EXCLUSIVE *It might look like the height of 1960s tech, but sonically it's top notch 2002*

Originally founded by the head of BBC Engineering Research, Dudley Harwood, along with wife Beth, Harbeth was acquired by Alan Shaw in the late 1980s and is currently celebrating its 25th anniversary in the speaker business.

The BBC heritage remains very much at the heart of Harbeth's activities, and is very evident in this Super HL5. It's the latest incarnation in a line that goes right back to the birth of the company, and indeed further still, to those original LS5/5-type compact monitors that the BBC developed during the 1960s, and which became immensely influential in the subsequent evolution of British hi-fi loudspeakers.

The Super HL5 doesn't quite follow the classic 5/5's 30x60x30cm size/shape, but its 32.5x64x31cm gets very close, and in consequence looks decidedly bulky and old-fashioned for a standmount today. Indeed, because of their bulk the 'standard' 60cm stand

isn't really appropriate here, so special 40cm Kudos S100s were used instead. Given its bulk, the Super HL5's total weight of 15kg is quite modest.

The enclosure is also unusual for its detachable front and back panels, and is covered on five sides (excluding the back) by good quality real wood veneer. There are three drive units, though this is at heart a two-way with an additional 19mm supertweeter which only comes into operation above 10kHz. The bass/midrange is handled by a cast frame eight-incher with a 150mm flared TPX cone, while the treble proper has a 25mm metal dome. The main driver is loaded by a front port, and twin terminals are fitted on the rear.

PERFORMANCE

Although the balance here is just a tad too restrained and laid back for true neutrality, in every other respect this is a remarkably involving and entertaining speaker, with superb overall coherence,

a considerable impression of scale and transparency quite unmatched by the others in this test group.

The generous main driver here seems to provide a dynamic freedom and tension not found with the smaller 6.5-inchers, and the much larger enclosure in turn seems to give that drive unit a better chance to 'breathe'. Not only is there greater dynamic freedom, but also superior dynamic tracking, inasmuch as the 'layering', in the way that instruments of different characters and loudness seemed to play together, seemed particularly convincing. Ditto the stereo soundstaging, which seemed well ordered with precise positioning and good depth perspectives.

The presence might be a little laid back, but the evenness through the bass and lower midband is particularly effective at creating just the right weight and authority, while remaining impressively free from thickening or heaviness. ◉

VERDICT

SOUND
★★★★★

EASE OF DRIVE
★★★★☆

BUILD
★★★★★

VALUE
★★★★☆

It might look bulky and old-fashioned, but this classic format monitor still shows its smaller brothers the way home sonically, combining authority and transparency with a good helping of neutrality.

CHECKLIST

CLOSE TO WALL	✗
WIDTH	32.5cm
HEIGHT	64cm
DEPTH	31cm
BI-WIRABLE	✓