



Pure Pleasure

The Harbeth P3ESR is classy and sophisticated, not only in its looks but also in its sound. Like good scotch, it does not hit you instantly, but gradually grows on you over time.

It is simply amazing how one speaker can change or sometimes even decide the course of an entire generation's approach and attitude towards loudspeakers and what is expected from it. One speaker that will always be in the list of trendsetters for speaker design is the BBC LS3/5A speaker—a legendary speaker that has achieved the 'Classic' status. The Harbeth P3ESR that we got bore a striking resemblance to the BBC speakers and we were off on a nostalgic journey.

OUT OF THE BOX

If you are not acquainted with compact bookshelf manufacturing then we suggest get prepared to see some boxy designs with no jazzy frills. The Harbeth P3ESR follows the same but with a slight twist—the shiny veneer for the cabinet. Clad in a lustrous mahogany veneer look, the speakers are eye candy if you dig simple minimalist designs. While initially it did not excite us immediately the simple and straightforward look gradually grew on us as we spent more and

more time with the speakers. Also, like most yesteryear speakers, one can blindly vouch for the build quality of the Harbeth P3ESR as well. The compact structure packs in a substantial amount of weight and the corresponding sturdiness is quite satisfactory.

TECHNOLOGY

We lay more emphasis on 'yesteryear' because the legacy that the P3ESR carries dates two decades back to 1993 when the first edition of the speaker was called P3.

The P3ESR follows the same design with some changes on account of technical innovations and gradual advancements. The P3ESR employs a 0.75" ferrofluid-cooled aluminum-dome tweeter, protected by a mesh screen for the high frequency zone. For the mid-bass they have a 5" plastic-cone woofer, mounted on the front baffle. The mid-bass driver employs Harbeth's proprietary and patented Radial2 material, which is also used in their more expensive designs. Radial2 is said to be a thermally stable, low mass and a low energy storage composite polymer that offers more clarity and better low-level resolution than polypropylene, which was used in the earlier versions of the P3ESR.

The front baffle that holds the mid-bass driver on a die-cast chassis is also clad in the same veneer that is used for the rest of the cabinet. Another trademark of the P3ESR (or for that matter any speaker based on the BBC LS3) is the complex crossover network, which, in this case, is made up of five inductors, ten capacitors, and three resistors. As from our experience, lesser the number of components in a speaker better is its performance. But the BBC design has always proved to be an exception, and we hope the P3ESR also does the same.

PERFORMANCE

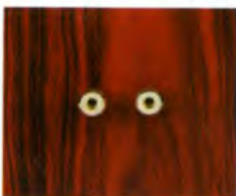
The Harbeth P3ESRs come with the grilles on and the manufacturer suggests that you listen to them just as it is. It is not that you cannot remove the grille, but you need a special tool to do that and so to avoid any unfair judgment we decided to review the speakers with the grilles on. For the placement, we tried to abide by the guidelines that the manufacturer preferred i.e. toeing in and keeping a safe margin of around two feet from either sides of the wall. The distance between the two speakers was eight feet. So as we repeated on, we could not help but repeatedly compare the sound of the Harbeth P3ESRs to the earlier iterations of the BBC LS3 that we had a chance to audition only to realise that the P3ESRs were fresher and more palpable as compared to any speaker.

Knowing the BBC LS3 sound, we were expecting a slightly tizzy sound with a slight hint of grain

and coarse texture, but the P3ESR was as smooth as silk, which made the overall tone absolutely easy on the ears and perfectly balanced. We started off with the music of Hans Theessink and the P3ESR managed to put up a distinctive performance that was clean, resolute and most importantly very entertaining. The soundstage, though not very expansive, had a sense of airiness to it, which lent depth both front and back as well as in the horizontal plain. The thing with compact bookshelf speakers is that it becomes very easy for them to disappear within the soundstage and the Harbeth P3ESRs seem to be making the most out of it. With minimalist recordings like that of Hans Theessink, Patricia Barber, Lorrina McKennet, the speakers were a delight. The main reason for this high entertainment quotient was the illustrative mid-range response of the speaker, which made the vocals sound full bodied and extremely eloquent.

Later, as we moved on to Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan's 'Night Song', once again the P3ESR impressed us big time with its immaculate mid-range, which had the power to convert an otherwise regular listening session into a very personal and an intimate one. Such was the finesse of the delicious mid-range of the speakers. The lower end was a tad amiss in terms of depth and punch, particularly on some genres like electronica and new age rock, which we feel is a given considering the compact size of the speaker and the relatively lower sensitivity of the speaker. But having said that, we were happy to see the P3ESR render all the relevant information in terms of timing and balance (even in the lower end), which helped the speakers sound complete and resolute.

Sumit Bhoale



Specification

DESIGN 2-way
DRIVERS 1x0.75" Ferro-cooled Tweeter With HexGrille, 1x4.5" Harbeth Radial Mid-bass
FREQUENCY RESPONSE 75Hz-20KHz
NOMINAL IMPEDANCE 6Ω
POWER HANDLING 50W
SENSITIVITY 83.5dB
WEIGHT 6.3kg
DIMENSIONS



Harbeth P3ESR

PRICE	₹ 1,97,340
WARRANTY	5 Years
CATEGORY	Bookshelf Speakers
AESTHETICS	★★★★☆
BUILD	★★★★★
AUDIO	★★★★☆
EASE OF USE	★★★★★
VFM	★★★★☆

WHAT SAY AV?

We have always believed that hi-end audio is a complex venture with its own perks and anomalies, and the Harbeth P3ESR is a perfect example to prove this. The speaker is perfect, but only if you are patient enough to develop a liking for it. The strong point of the speaker is the upper expressive mid-range, which gradually casts a spell on you. But the keyword here is 'gradually', it is not a speaker that you fall for immediately, the moment you see it. The price tag of around Rs 2 lakh can only be justified if you eventually get the hang of it.

OVERALL ★★★★★
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