

Morel's price set to mushroom

SPEAKER PACKAGE
MOREL
NOVA MKII
 ★★★★★
£ 499

FOR
 Tidy, cutesy, well made; convincing stage; good integration and detail

AGAINST
 Centre channel is fighting a losing battle; price is 'fluid'

VERDICT
 No shortage of rivals, but the Morel is a diverting and individual alternative. Best act fast, though

THE JOURNALIST AND philosopher H L Mencken suggested that no-one ever went broke underestimating people's intelligence. He might have added that making smaller what people already wanted was a smart business move – but he didn't. So it falls to us to make the observation: reduce, reduce, reduce.

Customers want cinema speaker packages that offer proper performance and, very often, they want them to be small. The smaller the better.

Israeli manufacturer Morel recognises as much, and isn't too proud to pander. This Nova II package represents the latest result of its quest for a quart's-worth of performance from pint-pot speakers.

The Nova II package consists of five identical Li-I speakers, and a

The SoundSub 9 may look like a bin lid but its clever design means it can be sited more or less anywhere

SoundSub 9 subwoofer. Those neat SoundStands shown in the picture are a cost option. The tiny spherical speakers (just 110mm in diameter) somehow manage to house an 85mm driver and 12mm tweeter. They're well-finished, with sturdy articulation joints for precision positioning, and feel substantial and well made in the hand.

The subwoofer looks like a highly stylised dustbin lid: 510mm in diameter, but just 145mm deep, it's more than a little reminiscent of Linn's 120 subwoofer (except the Linn sub costs more than this entire system). It's a flexible design, as well-finished as the satellites, that can be wall-mounted, stood up on three supplied feet, or laid flat on its back.

Great detail and soundstage

Positioning speakers as small as these isn't difficult – in fact, only the necessarily small binding posts (with their correspondingly small apertures for speaker cable) might cause any delay in setting up and getting the system running. And you're limited to running the Nova II on slimline cable.

The Morel package requires the indulgence of a lengthy running-in period, but once thoroughly warmed, it rewards you handsomely with a presentation of fine, fluid articulation.

Playing *Kingdom of Heaven*, the Morel quickly establishes a wide soundstage and confidently sites and steers effects around it. There's good detail, appreciable space between disparate elements on the soundstage and fine, finessed integration between the satellite speakers and the subwoofer. Dynamically and tonally, the Nova II is effortlessly adept – sudden changes of pace, tempo or volume present no real problems.

In fact, there's only one area where the Morel warrants criticism – but it's fundamental. The centre channel speaker, which is responsible for handling the vast majority of dialogue, is an identical design to

"The Nova II requires a long running-in period but, once thoroughly warmed, rewards with a sound of fine articulation"

its four Li-I siblings, and can too easily become subsumed into the presentation as a whole. The undoubted benefits of unity of appearance are more than outweighed by the drawbacks: voices have an undeniable quality of FM radio about them. Distinct they certainly are, but voices carry too much air around them and lack the full-bodied 'from-the-diaphragm' authority that a bigger, dedicated centre channel could more easily bring to bear. The centre device is a hard-working speaker in every cinema set-up and, in this instance, needs greater gravity and influence than the Li-I provides.

This is an appealing package overall, with much to recommend it. It's a cut above the norm where fit and finish are concerned, and a glance at the pricing info in the panel could make it compelling.

ALSO CONSIDER ?

WHARFEDALE
DIAMOND 9 HCP
 ★★★★★
 £500

Awards 2005
 No looker, but an Award in 2004, and again in 2005 tells the story: the Wharfedale package is very accomplished

MISSION
M30 CINEMA
 ★★★★★

£480
 April 2004
 Bigger than the Morel, but not actually big, the Mission is a dynamic, subtle performer: top value for money

TECH SPECS

SYSTEM MAX POWER 100w
LOWEST SENSITIVITY 87 db/w/m
LOWEST IMP 6 ohms
DIMENSIONS (SATELLITES)
 11cm diameter
DIMENSIONS (SUBWOOFER)
 15 x 51 cm diameter
BIWIRE No
FINISHES Black, white, silver



KNOW HOW PRICING

IN A PECULIAR and attention-grabbing reversal of standard business practice, the Morel Nova MkII hits the market priced at £499 until the end of 2005. In the New Year, the price actually rises to £699. This takes the Nova mkII away from the competition suggested in the review and into an entirely more difficult scrap with bigger boys. Iconic systems like KEF's KHT2005.2 (recently reduced to £600) and Mordaunt-Short's Genie (pictured) constitute a far sterner test. We reckon the MkII just about clings on to its four-star recommendation at its new price. We'll be looking again, we promise.

Mordaunt-Short's Genie package is lying in wait for the Morel when the price is right

