



ALL ABOARD!

These two different system concepts at around € 600* with components by DALI and Denon provide an easy, and fine-sounding – entry into the world of Hi-Fi.

It has never been so easy to get a fully-fledged audiophile sound at home for relatively little money. Whether the focus is on analog, digital or both, the story's the same; the supply of affordable Hi-Fi systems is so extensive, and of such high quality, that the ambitious music lover can get great sound without breaking the bank. But wide options bring their own questions: is it worth

investing hard-earned savings in a modern Hi-Fi system able to handle streamed music, in an age when anyone can have access to a vast virtual music library via smartphones and tablet, anytime and anywhere? After all, even a halfway modern computer with a digital audio interface can provide this music via a corresponding digital cable in lossless CD quality (or better).

Or should the aspiring high-ender choose a classic Hi-Fi system with passive speakers and a separate amplifier and player? This traditional approach would ultimately have the enormous advantage that it would be possible to replace and upgrade individual components over time – part of the whole “sport” of the Hi-Fi game.

Whether classic or modern, these days compact dimensions are more or less a prerequisite, whether because the typical one-bedroom dorm room usually can only accommodate small speakers (along with a bed and a desk!), or due to a requirement that the system fits into the room without dominating the

*All prices listed are German retail prices incl. VAT valid at the time of evaluation.

visual appearance of the installation site. Whichever is the case, however, the new system should be beautiful, not a beast – ultimately, nobody wants to be ashamed when visitors come.

Virtually active all-rounder

Danish loudspeaker specialist DALI's Zensor 1 AX speakers are definite eye-candy: the walnut-look vinyl wrap covering the cabinets (they're also available in black or white) is attractive, and in harmony with the high-gloss black painted front baffle, and the finish is impressive, especially as a pair of these little speakers only costs € 600*.

The active 1 AX is based on the smallest model of the successful Zensor passive series and, together with its larger sister, Zensor 5 AX (launched simultaneously at € 1000*), it establishes a new product category for the 30+-year-old Danish brand, aimed mainly at a younger clientele looking for an uncomplicated solution. However, the 1 AX is powered, rather than fully active: the "brain", i.e. the amplifiers, the crossovers, the digital volume control and the inputs are all located in the left speaker, while the right speaker is a conventional passive Zensor 1, receiving its signal via the

speaker cables directly from its active twin.

The Danish speaker has both digital and analogue inputs, the latter via a 3.5mm mini-jack, and suitable for the line-out or headphone output from analogue players. The music is then digitized with a sampling frequency of 88 kHz for the digital volume control and amplification. For digital sources, an optical TOSLink input and Apt-X-enabled Bluetooth module (Apt-X sounds better than normal Bluetooth) are provided, the Bluetooth connection with a smartphone, for example, being very quick and easy.

Input selection is via a dedicated button on the back of the amplifying speaker or using the supplied remote control, with a multicolor LED on the front to show the currently selected input: yellow is for the optical input, green for the analog and blue fittingly for Bluetooth. The LED light can still be seen well even through the front grille.

When you take the grille off (it's fastened with plastic pins), you meet two old acquaintances: the same tweeter and mid/bass woofer speakers used in all the other Zensor models. The woofer uses a DALI-typical red-colored 13.3 cm cone made of a paper-wood fiber: this

is designed for increased rigidity, while the random arrangement of the different-sized wood fibers suppresses resonances on the membrane surface. A large surround, a long voice coil, a massive basket and two proper ferrite magnets indicate unequivocally that the woofer is optimized for dynamic, power and level.

A reflex tube venting to the rear tunes and enhances the bass, but if there's still not enough "low stuff" for you, a separate active subwoofer can be connected via dedicated RCA output on the back of the active speaker.

The tweeter uses a standard format soft dome, with a mounting plate designed to linearize its dispersion behavior at higher frequencies, thus promoting a more detailed picture. An oversized magnet ring and a particularly lightweight coil give the tweeter resilience and agility at low distortion (see also measurement laboratory), while DALI's design means the tweeter only starts working at a relatively high 2.9 kHz, which experience has shown results in slightly greater maximum volume.

True to this design, in the hearing test the DALI played loud and sounded completely effortless at high volumes. At more

*All prices listed are German retail prices incl. VAT valid at the time of evaluation.

Denon's RCD-M40 combines the properties of a very good CD player with those of an integrated amplifier. € 400* is the price the Japanese want – arigato, a good deal. ▼



practical levels the richly detailed and balanced sound is impressive, especially when listening in the near-field range: the treble is delightfully detailed, and conveyed the finest nuances, such as reverb and sound effects, perfectly. Julia Stones singing “Winter on the Weekend” (The Memory Machine) was bursting with sonic color and was clearly accentuated in every position.

These little Danish speakers handled even complex bass renderings (for example, Marcus Miller’s “Power”, on the album M2) effortlessly, resonated with confidence at an appropriate distance from the rear wall, and still sounded extremely precise and agile even at party levels.

Small, passive and simply ingenious

Similarly, Dali’s brand new Pico passive speaker benefits from some boundary reinforcement, not least because the bass tuning of this, the smallest compact speaker in the Zensor series, is optimized for operation directly on a wall.

First presented at the High End 2015 show in Munich, the Pico priced at an incredibly inexpensive €240* for a pair: again vinyl-wrapped (in black, white or walnut), its housing and the matt front baffle looks quite plain, but the speaker is perfectly finished and very presentable. That the only 23 cm high mini box hides a top-quality Zensor chassis is nothing but a small sensation. The same 25 mm tweeter used in the 1 AX is also present here, along with an 11.4 cm woofer with a paper-wood-fiber cone.

A crossover directly mounted on the cable terminal cleanly separates the signal between tweeter and woofer at two kilohertz: built from just seven components,



◀ The Denon has analog and digital connections for external players. You can also connect a subwoofer.

it follows Dali’s thinking that a spartanly built crossover can better convey impulse fidelity and dynamics.

After just one weekend of break-in, the Zensor Pico impressed with a phenomenal broad-spectrum sound, effortlessly delivering music. Driven by an immensely powerful Symphonic Line RG 10 amplifier, the Pico projected in the listening space a soundstage absolutely authentic in width, height and depth with “Mountain” from the grandiose soundtrack of the equally brilliant film “Interstellar”. With the bass kicking directly against a wall (or even better in a corner), the low end is both quite forceful and lively, and the Picos turned out to be completely attitude-free, extremely good-natured – and, even better, enjoyable with a much more modest amplifier, such as the Denon RCDM40.

Compact amp and CD player

Not surprisingly, then, the Denon proved an obvious partner for the little Zensor Pico speakers. Along with

the amplification, and priced at a pocket-friendly € 400* the midi-sized RCD-M40 also provides an excellent built-in CD drive, an easy to read display and even a fine-sounding 3.5mm headphone output. There’s a line input for analog players, two Toslink ports for digital sources, an FM antenna connection and a front USB port complete its list of features. The USB port will play not just data-reduced MP3 files but even high-bit files in FLAC format from a memory stick or a small hard disk, while Apple users may be pleased to know that the amp also accepts digital music from iDevices such as iPhone or iPod via USB.

Fans of the classic compact disc will get their money’s worth here; the built-in CD drive sounding tidy, dynamic and extremely colorful – so much so that the tester was even happy to its slightly longer read time between inserting a disc and playback starting. The digital player followed on its heels – here the amp sounded multifaceted and expressive, while the user-friendly display made it easy to navigate through the folders.

As mentioned above, the Denon also has sufficient power – more than enough, in fact, to drive smaller speakers such as the Zensor Pico. Combined with the DALIs, it presented a well-balanced, clearly-structured and dynamic sound, making this Japanese-Danish system well suited as an entry into the hi-fi hobby.

Alexandros Mitropoulos



◀ The entire “brain” of the Zensor 1 AX is in the active speaker. The passive counterpart receives its signals via cable.

Contact: DALI Loudspeakers
 Phone: +45 9672 1155
www.dali-speakers.com

*All prices listed are German retail prices incl. VAT valid at the time of evaluation.

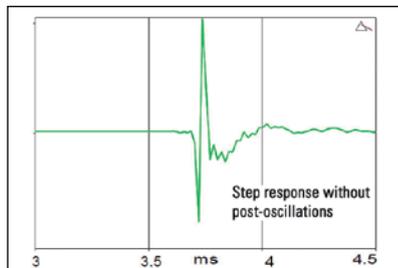
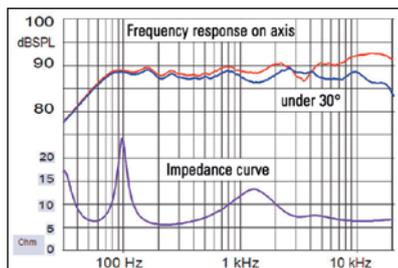
DALI ZENSOR 1 AX



About € 600* for the pair
 Warranty: 2 years
 Dimensions: 16.2 x 27.4 x 24 cm (WxHxD)

The Zensor 1 AX impressed from the first minute! It plays completely effortlessly and is suitable for long, stress-free listening sessions.

MEASUREMENT RESULTS



Level at 200mV Input	89.5 dB SPL
Lower cut-off frequency (-3 dB)	55 Hz
Distortion factor at 63 / 3k / 10k Hz	1 / 0.3 / 0.1%
Power consumption (idle)	<2 Watt

LABORATORY COMMENTS

The DALI Zensor 1 AX has a balanced, wide-band frequency response, its bass only starting to decay from 80 Hz downwards. The midrange has exemplary linearity, and while a marginal increase in high frequency is noticeable on-axis, this disappears completely when measured laterally. There's negligible distortion, concentrated on low frequencies.

FEATURES

Connections: 3.5 mm jack, digital optical, Apt-X Bluetooth
Features: Cover, remote control, power cable, connection cables

STEREO-TEST

SOUND QUALITY **50%**
 PRICE/PERFORMANCE
 ★★★★★ ☆
EXCELLENT

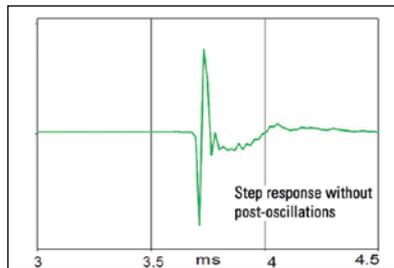
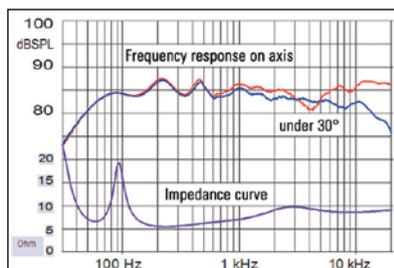
DALI ZENSOR PICO



About € 240* for the pair
 Warranty: 5 years
 Dimensions: 14.1 x 23 x 19.6 cm (WxHxD)

The Pico is the real surprise of this test. Despite its compact dimensions and the low price, it sounds great. However, installation close to walls and a decent amplifier are required. Then it is a price-performance winner!

MEASUREMENT RESULTS



Nominal Impedance	4 Ω
Minimum impedance	5 Ω at 230 Hertz
Maximum impedance	18 Ω at 92 Hertz
Sound pressure level (2.83 V/1 m)	86.5 dB SPL
Performance for 94 dB (1 m)	9.5 W
Lower cut-off frequency (-3 dB)	64 Hertz
Distortion factor at 63 / 3k / 10k Hz	1.0 0.3 0.1%

LABORATORY COMMENTS

The Zensor Pico is designed for installation close to a wall, as is clear from the bass response: when properly installed, the slight waviness in the upper bass should not be noticeable. The axially measured narrowband decay at 4 kHz could be a phase cancellation, because it disappears when measured laterally, and in general, the Pico thrives when fed high-quality recordings.

STEREO-TEST

SOUND QUALITY **69%**
 PRICE/PERFORMANCE
 ★★★★★
OUTSTANDING

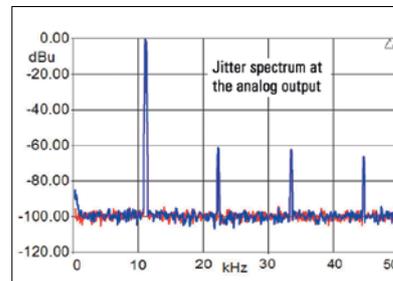
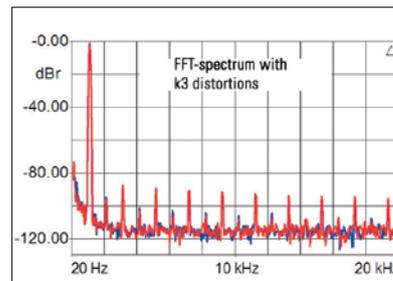
DENON RCD-M40



About € 400*
 Dimensions: 21 x 12 x 32 cm (WxHxD)
 Warranty: 2 years
 Contact: D&M
 Phone: +492157/12080
 www.denon.com

The CD drive sounds neat, the performance of the amps is sufficient for compact speakers, and the design is timeless.

MEASUREMENT RESULTS



Continuous power to 8 4 Ohm	2 x 22.5 – wats
Pulse power to 8 ohms	2 x 28.3 wats
Distortion factor at 5 watts	0.004%
Intermodulation at 5 watts	0.008%
Damping factor at 8 ohms	90
Distortion factor at 400 Hz,	-60 dB 1.0%
Signal-to-noise ratio from CD at 5 watts, digital 0	86.8 dB
Upper cut-off frequency	> 80 kHz
CD reading time	9 s
Total power consumption: Network standby off on	<2 14 W

FEATURES

Display, remote control, headphone output, CD player, antenna input, two optical digital inputs, analog cinch input, front USB input

STEREO-TEST

SOUND QUALITY **51%**
 PRICE/PERFORMANCE
 ★★★★★
OUTSTANDING

*All prices listed are German retail prices incl. VAT valid at the time of evaluation.