



FOCUSED ON THE FUTURE

After the successful XEO series, Dynaudio is now getting serious with its activation program. The Focus 600 XD is the top model of a completely new, sophisticated series, designed to offer much more than just excellent sound.

Distinctively Dynaudio: If you know anything about speakers, you know that these speakers are from the Danish specialist. Their classic 'no-frills' Scandinavian design and the typical „MSP“ (Magnesium Silicate Polymer) driver cones for lightness, stiffness and low resonance, plus soft-dome tweeter, all combine to make them almost unmistakable.

However, look at them through Danish eyes, and you see more than just speakers: Focus represents the „new HiFi-systems“, the argument being that all you need is a digital signal source – although analog is also possible – for perfect reproduction. You see, the Focus XD range already has amplification on board, including a pre-amp, so you can adjust the volume using the included remote control, which can also be used to turn the speakers on and off.

Even at first glance, it's clear these speakers are unusual, as is made clear by a narrow display integrated in the inner lateral bezel. Usually this shows only a small blue or red dot depending on whether the Dynaudios are on or in standby, but while changing level, the volume is indicated by a growing or decreasing chain of little white dots. In practice, handling our active Focus speakers was completely problem-free.

During set-up one sets a switch in the back of each speaker to designate one as „master“, the other as „slave“, which follows its master. Oh, the inequality: it's curious that these common – if archaic – terms for the device hierarchy have not long since fallen victim to political correctness. In any case, the master is connected to the source and the slave speaker then follows its instructions.

They are usually connected with coax digital cables, but in the less common case of analog hook-up each active speaker needs to receive its respective channel. For digital connection,

KEY WORD
PWM amp:
 In „pulse width modulation“ the pulse width corresponds to the volume. Often incorrectly called „digital amp“. It is a switching amp.

The smaller models of the Focus XD series are called 400 and 200 (about 7950/4950 Euro/pair) and come with basically the same technology.



▲ Connection panel with many operating options identifies the Focus 600 XD as active speaker. There is a socket each for digital and analog signals.



as stated, it is sufficient to establish contact with the master, which in turn supplies the slave. If you wish, you can also lay a digital line between the two speakers, although this isn't required to ensure proper function.

New chassis & PWM amps

We let the Focus 600 XD play for entire nights during the breaking-in process without getting even one „crash“ – not even with high-bitrate 24 Bit/192kHz material, which is often prone to such tribulations in wireless systems.

If you believe the Danes – and after all they make great play of their truthfulness – the XD speakers are much more than just the familiar Focus types with the addition of integrated amps. The bass has been reworked for active operation, with longer voice coils and greater throw designed for even lower distortion and greater linearity, while each of

the four drivers is fed by its own 150 Watt power amp.

In fact, by its own 150W PWM „digital“ amp, meaning that incoming bit streams – analog input signals are immediately digitized to the 24/192 format for further processing – are converted in the power amp using tried and tested TI chips. They are fed with the PCM signal (Pulse Code Modulation) and convert it into PWM (Pulse Width Modulation) in a complex process, and the

Electronic module overall is an exemplar of high-tech and compact integration. Our measurement technician whistled in approval when he saw it: „You hardly ever get to see something put together so cleverly, even by studio technicians.“

One drawback of **PWM amps** is that they can tend toward phase shifts and high frequency attenuation depending on speaker impedance. However, the Focus 600 XD avoids this problem, since the driver parameters in the closed system are known and the power amps tuned to them, One of the reasons the Danes say: „We can do things here which would not be possible with passive speakers.“ This also includes the strict limitation of the working range of the speakers and the wide bass reproduction, with steep roll-offs not a problem in the digital domain

KEY WORD

XEO hub:

Using the emission station of the smaller XEOs – always connected to wireless – one can set up a multi-room solution with the Focus XD.



Hard to believe but true: the electronics part provides complete signal processing and four 150 Watt power amps in a very compact form.

since Dynaudio has always used flat six-decibel filters in its passive models to prevent phase shifts.

The entire signal management is DSP-controlled, and presents update possibilities, in case of future improvements, via the USB slot. In fact, just as soon as we got the Focus 600 XD into our studio, the first software update arrived, Dynaudio sending it to us via e-mail. We loaded the file onto an empty stick, turned the speakers off, plugged in the USB, turned the speaker back on and the light dots signaled that it was instantly updated.

After this it can happen that the speakers stand there helplessly with their red LEDs blinking, “meaning they have slipped into the XEO mode“, explains product manager Roland Hoffmann, „and are looking for their hub“. In fact, the Focus XD speakers can be fed without cable. Press the „Direct In“ key of the IR transmitters for two seconds and the master accepts the digital cable again.

Sounds „awake“ even at low volumes

To be honest, at first I was cautious: Dynaudio builds first-class passive speakers, especially in this ambitious price class, so why active ones now, and with switchable power amps? Can that be a good thing?

Yes, and how! Initially, our test pair (standing on solid metal feet with removable spikes) was a bit brittle and unwieldy in the bass as it had not yet been broken in but after just one night of playing – see

above – it became so loose, dynamic, and smooth that all our concerns went out the window. The Focus 600 XD put on a show to render moot all questions about the point of a high-priced active design.

The emphatically straightforward, clear, audiophile presentation doesn’t use the kind of theatrical tricks for which the speakers from Skanderborg are famous; instead the Focus 600 XD adds new freshness, a lively dynamic kick to the usual well-groomed sound. You might wonder whether this is the „next generation“ of the Dynaudio sound?



THE CONVENTIONAL POWER BASE: CONTOUR S5.4

Whatever you connect, It’s difficult to top the performance of the Focus 600 XD in a conventional manner!“ This is Dynaudio’s confident claim, and by „conventional“ it means passive speakers plus external amp.

Well, we’ll see about that. We set up the Danish Contour S5.4, which serves as our working speaker since its test in STEREO 5/03 – and is still both up to date and to our ears one of the best Dynaudio speakers of all time, still available at about € 8000 a pair.

We hooked up the floorstanding

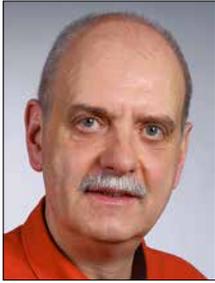
speakers (a lot bigger than the Focus 600 XD) to our top reference pre/power amp by Accoustic Arts, also used the Streamer ES – via its analog outputs – , connecting power amp and speakers with In-Akustik’s LS-1603 cable. Total price for the system without source is approx. € 25,000.

We started with the 24/192 version of „We’ll Be Together Again“ by the Jimmy Cobb Quartet. Just having listened to it on the Focus 600 XD, we felt that the reproduction was also large, loose, and colorful, but at the same time also a bit more „comfortable“ as well as slightly

dragging compared to the fleet-footed timing of the active speaker, as if the song was playing a tad slower. The bass was a bit fuller; but the Focus was more defined and agile.

Definitely just as much fun, considering that the Contour S5.4 was very spacious – but it was clear to everyone that the previous performance was still a bit more refined and smooth. And – „shhhh...oot“ – even in terms of atmosphere the feathery 600 XD with its many nuances is ahead by a short nose. Regular speakers are on notice, not just the „standard“ Dynaudios.

COMMENTS



MATTHIAS BÖDE
Editor for special tasks

The Dynaudio professional segment makes up only just about ten percent of the total sales but it brings a lot of technological competence into the house. The Danes developed the clever electronics for the „Focus XD“ series in-house and without the Chinese high-tech giant GoerTek which took over Dynaudio recently. Good work!

It banged the short drum attacks in „Attempo“ by the Antonio Forcione Quartet (STEREO Hörtest-CD VII) into listeners’ ears in a manner as seamless as it was vehement, and did so at every volume level: the active speakers sound extremely „awake“ even at low volumes and offer full bass lines which are easy to follow as well as a solidity to the spatial representation.

This is as important in the choral piece „Mitt Hjerte Alltid Vanker“ on the same disc, with its natural voices: having ripped the sound through the room just seconds before, the Dynaudios now suddenly played coy and skillfully lured the singer from the edge of the stage and let her waft by like a warm summer breeze. This is the way it has to be if this beautiful song is to unfold its emotional potential and enthralling magic.

As an alternative to wireless, which had proved problem-free, we also laid a cable connection between the two Focus 600 XDs, and the blue and red lights blinked together to indicate readiness. As it turned out, the music was now by nuances more homogenous and tonally rich without

sacrificing finesse or spaciousness: by comparison via wireless it sounded a bit „lighter“ and less secure.

In the end, we felt the cabled version had the edge: that said, we needed it anyway since the maximum data rate per wireless is limited to 24/96, and we wanted to hear the full resolution of our 24/192 files from the two Focus speakers..

In either case, however, the new Focus 600 XD is a shining example of expression and precision. „You will have a hard time finding more open and precise-sounding speakers“, Hoffmann prophesized, and he was right: the proof was provided by pieces from our Hörtest-Edition III produced with Chesky Records, which we played from Accoustic Arts’ StreamerES via its coaxial digital output to the active Dynaudios in various resolutions – from 320 Kbit MP3s to the CD standard of 16 Bit/44.1 kHz up to 24/96 and then 24/192.

A speaker for the high-bit era

In fact, few other speakers or systems have demonstrated the distance between the formats in terms of airiness, three-dimensionality, and detail as clearly as did these speakers. In „We’ll Be Together Again“, the musicians of the Jimmy Cobb Quartet were better defined with each increase in data rate, the cymbals shimmering longer, and in CC Coletti’s turbulent „Rock And Roll“, the band interacted with increasing precision and the natural recording room became more and more „hearable“.

The Focus 600 XD convinced us across the board. It’s a great design and transfers Dynaudio’s sound philosophy into the new HiFi era: thanks to competent active technology all you need is – preferably – a digital source. It’s much more than „just“ a speaker; it’s a real competitor for classical system concepts.

Matthias Böde

You can turn down the bass if the speakers are placed close to the wall or corners (I.). The highs can be adjusted by +/- 1 decibel to adjust for room acoustics. The set includes a remote control.

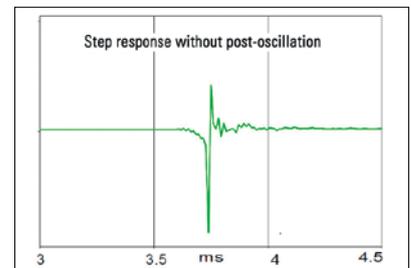
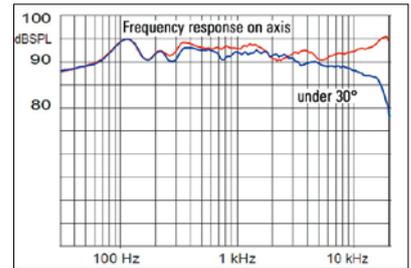


DYNAUDIO FOCUS 600 XD

Pair for €9,950 (in silky matte black, white, or walnut / rosewood veneer)
Dimensions: 21.5x113x31 cm (WxHxD)
Warranty: 3/8 years (electr./chassis)
Contact: Dynaudio International
Phone: +49 4108/41800
www.dynaudio.de

Plain on the outside, the top model in the active series turns out to be a first-class „speaker system“ for which you only need a source. If you calculate how much this save you in other components, you realize just how cost-effective the Focus 600 XD actually is.

MEASUREMENT RESULTS



Lower cutoff frequency (-3 dB) <30 Hertz

LAB COMMENTS

While the frequency response seems a bit ragged, especially in the range below 1 kHz, it is very balanced. If you draw a line through it, there are hardly any deviations of more than +/- 2 decibel. In our measurement, all controls and switches were set to linear. The height increase to (red) and drop outside the axis (blue) is striking. We turned the speakers to the outside shoulder of the central listener (generally recommendable) and obtained a very natural reproduction. One hint at the outstanding precision of the Focus 600 XD is provided by the precise step response with basically no post-oscillation at all. With a passive speaker this precision is basically impossible.

STEREO - TEST

SOUND QUALITY	98%
PRICE/PERFORMANCE	
★ ★ ★ ★ ★	
OUTSTANDING	