The revitalized Revolver brand has made quite a splash since its reemergence. Their range of highly regarded budget loudspeakers have recently been joined by an elegant turntable, echoing the company's original name and roots. But standing astride these worthy and definitely high-value offerings we find the Cygnis loudspeaker, an ambitious three-way floorstander with a price tag of £8000. That's quite a leap in anybody's language - especially when your point of departure is built on low-cost two-ways.

We first covered the Cygnis back in Issue 54 where it's fair to say that they met with a mixed reception. Time and further experience have allowed us to gain a better understanding of both the speaker and its specific demands when it comes to set-up, mainly centering on the low-frequencies and their integration with the rest of the range. Indeed, looking at the Cygnis it's hard to ignore the uncomfortably large area of front baffle between the midrange driver in its curved housing and the low-slung 10" bass unit. What quickly becomes apparent is that it's all too easy to mimic that separation in the sonic performance if you don't get things just right.

My first mistake was to employ a set of the generally reliable Symposium Rollerblocks in place of the speaker's own substantial spikes complete with large, conical bosses. Motivated by fears for my wooden floor, this dropped the speaker a minimum of 25mm nearer to the floor, and in this instance, that's critical. You see, Revolver have chosen 2pi loading for the bass driver, meaning that it receives reinforcement from both the baffle and the floor boundary. Alter the relationship to the floor and you start to interfere with the bass weighting and voicing and in this case the results can be ruinous. What's more, interfere with the bass and you affect the entire range, but particularly the treble timing. Partly to offset sensitivity to placement relative to the back wall, designer Mike Jewitt has sensibly chosen a distributed port for the bass enclosure, exiting through...
the gap between the cabinet and base. Even so, the Cygnis will deliver disproportionate rewards for care spent on positioning. Fortunately it's a one-time chore and once it's right, it's right, the speaker finally delivering the sort of performance it's fair to expect at this elevate price level.

The rest of the speaker shows similarly innovative thinking and attention to detail. Standing waves. It's also physically isolated from the main cabinet on shallow spacers. The results are heard in the speed, transparency and clarity of the speaker's mid-band.

The drivers are all in-house designs featuring double magnet assemblies. The 26mm aluminium dome might seem somewhat dated but it has been carefully executed with considerable care paid to the damping of rear reflections. The midrange is delivered by a 130mm woven fibre-glass cone built onto a substantial cast chassis. Bass is delivered by a 254mm paper coned driver housed in its own 50 litre enclosure, the cabinet built from 25mm MDF throughout and heavily braced. The three-way crossover is constructed from quality components and wired up with decent cable. It also enjoys its own isolated enclosure to minimize mechanical interference, while the bi-wire terminals arrive bridged with excellent Chord Co. links.

The end result is a system offering a bandwidth of 45Hz – 22kHz +3db, with -6dB points at 30Hz and 30kHz, a sensitivity of 91dB and a nominal 8 Ohm load. In fact, the minimum impedance is 4.3 Ohms, but the characteristic is non-reactive, making the speaker easier to drive than that number suggests. I got excellent results with both the Almaro and VAS valve mono-blocs, the latter boasting a mere 40 Watts, and once carefully positioned the Cygnis seems remarkably accommodating of partnering products – which isn't to say that it's without preferences. I'll leave the appearance to personal opinion (avoiding any of the cruelly obvious "swing-bin" jokes) but the grilles have really got to go, at least as far as listening goes. Replacing them for protective purposes is hardly a chore, but I simply dispensed with them altogether. The Cygnis needed minimal toe-in to achieve image focus and leveling them was considerably eased by the accessibility of the spikes.

Despite running them with a range of excellent solid-state amps, there's no escaping the fact that these speakers really come to life with a good thermionic design doing the driving. Their virtues of clarity and uncumbered separation can leave
music sounding a little exposed and harmonically threadbare if the amplifier has any leanings in that direction. The fruitful weight and warmth of a really good, traditional push-pull valve amp delivers just the mix of energetic shove in the hind-quarters and flesh on the bones that really brings the music to life. The VAS Citation Sound mono-blocks did a sterling job, but there was no ignoring the extra sheer urge, energy and enthusiasm that simply leapt forth once the Almarro’s 100 or so watts was hooked up to the speaker terminals.

The almost prototypical simplicity of the drum, bass and guitar opening to Bill Malonee and the Vigilantes Of Love’s ‘Goes Without Saying’ has the energy, agility and drive that characterize a really tight piece, but driven by the Almarro the Cygnis deliver the track with a rollicking, seemingly unstoppable sense of presence and momentum, filling the stage with the three instruments. Yet later, in the quieter moments of a track like ‘Solar System’, with its more measured, reflective mood, there’s no missing the plaintive sense of loss in the vocal, the poignancy of the deceptively simple melody — or the way it builds in density and complexity across the track. The joyous romp of ‘Hard Luck & Heart Attack’ is full of life and humour, preceded by the beautifully realized balance of the ballad ‘Nothing Like A Train’. This isn’t the uncontrolled enthusiasm of a boisterous, clumsy puppy. This is a sense of energy, carefully applied — serving the music in all its forms.

Nor is it limited to rock and pop. The recent EMI Classics release of Purcell’s Music For Queen Mary is full of joy and colour in the ‘Birthday Song...’ the speakers disappearing into a faithfully captured King’s College Chapel acoustic, space around and above the choir and Academy of Ancient Music, the side and rear walls clearly defined. Later, the progress of the funereal drum processional is clear, defined as much by the instrument’s changing relationship with the acoustic as by its shifting location. The distance to the drummer, the shifting balance of direct and reflected sound is fascinating and beautifully unravelled by the Cygnis, the speaker easily allowing you to separate the actual beats and the multiple reflections. Likewise, that special quality that defines the sound of a boy treble as opposed to a female soprano is clearly apparent.

In many ways it’s the latter disc that tells us more about this Revolver speaker and the demands it places on partnering equipment. Indeed, if ever a speaker brought home the folly of considering a speaker in isolation from its driving amp, this is it. The wonderfully, entertainingly obvious attributes of the Vigilantes certainly tell us just what sort of amp you want, but it’s the Purcell which will tell you why. The Cygnis requires both care and respect: care in set-up and positioning, respect when it comes to its capabilities, for this is a genuinely transparent and high-resolution device. There’s a lucid clarity to its presentation, a lightness of balance that on the one hand delivers detail and separation, underpinned by a deeper bass that you expect from the box, but on the other can tip over into coldness, even an almost glossy leanness if provoked. The good news is, that with resolution to burn you can afford to trade some in against the body and presence an amplifier can supply, a combination that makes the best of both. Hence the success of the Almarro, with its enthusiastic energy and drive; listen to this amp with the Cygnis and that’s what you’ll hear. But never forget that it’s the speaker that’s letting you hear it. Likewise, the Hovland RADIA delivers a crisper, more focused and transparent sound, which offers its own appeal and definitely plays to the speaker’s midrange agility. So it’s not that you can’t use a solid-state amp, but I wouldn’t want to go any leaner in balance than the Hovland’s sweetness...

The Cygnis may lack the harmonic accuracy and development of some competing designs, offering instead a combination of coherent bandwidth and clearly defined musical detail, but it wears its heart well and truly on its sleeve. That means that you can hear all too clearly just what the driving amp is doing — and when you’ve got it right. With the flood of high-value valve amps currently hitting the market, Revolver couldn’t have timed things better. Purists might argue that it’s a case of two wrongs making a right; those who listen and like the result won’t be bothered. Revolver’s Cygnis is both adventurous and different; get it right and it’s very right indeed.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Type: Three-way, divided cabinet, reflex loaded loudspeaker

Driver Complement: 1x 25mm aluminium dome HF
1x 130mm woven fibre-glass MF
1x 254mm doped paper LF

Sensitivity: 91 dB

Impedance: 8 Ohms (4.3 minimum)

Bandwidth: 45Hz – 22kHz ±3dB
30Hz – 30kHz ±6dB

Dimensions (WxHxD): 310 x 1000 x 350mm

Weight: 35kg ea.

Price: £8000

Manufacturer:
The Acoustic Partnership LLP
Tel. (44) 07700 470047
Net. www.revolversaudio.co.uk