

Audiovector SR1 Avantgarde Arreté loudspeakers

by Alan Sircom

The unique upgrade path offered by Copenhagen-based speaker maker Audiovector is absolutely great, but in reality many buyers don't need to take advantage of the scheme. People, it seems, largely buy either the entry-level Super or the top Avantgarde Arrete version of any specific model – rarely the 'tweeners'. So, in looking at a specific model in the SR range, it stands to reason that the best models to check are the extremes of the range.

When it comes to the SR1 standmount, the logical place to start is at the SR1 Super; it's an entry point to the SR range, so why not use the entry point of the entry level speaker? In fact, the reverse is true, too. The SR1 Avantgarde Arreté is the pinnacle of Audiovector standmount technology – if you like what Audiovector does and either like standmounts or have no space for floorstanders, this is as good as it gets.

Audiovector also recently changed its S-series from Si to SR series. Launched at the end of 2014, the changes between the lines are more evolutionary than revolutionary, with improvements to materials, crossover, and cabinet construction techniques. But this is academic for the Audiovector S or Si owner, because the best thing about this SR series is it's available to any Audiovector S-series user from the last 10 or so years. Practically everything in an Audiovector S1 or Si1 loudspeaker can be brought up to date, even to the point of changing the finish of the loudspeaker should you wish. Basically, unless you have a loudspeaker cabinet so fundamentally damaged that it is uneconomic to repair, you can insert your old S-series speaker, upgrade everything, and walk out with an essentially new loudspeaker. But, if you have a S1 Super or Si1 Super, upgrading it to a SR1 Super isn't – and shouldn't be – an option. Instead, if you have one of these models and fancy a spot of upgrading, go for the Avantgarde Arreté instead; you'll not regret it.

The SR1 in all its guises is a two-way rear-ported standmount, using a non-parallel tapered back design, to minimise internal standing waves. The tweeter (with rear-radiating air flow designed for good soundstaging) is coupled ▶





▶ with a 152mm Carbon Composite bass driver. Along the way from Super to Avantgarde Arreté, the SR goes through three different tweeters, culminating in the Audiovector-built AMT ribbon design, a ‘no energy’ mass loading of the front baffle and the rear plate, a revised and cryogenic-treated 4th order Linkwitz Riley crossover, and even shock absorbers built into the bracing. The net result of these changes is a loudspeaker that returns a frequency response from 45Hz-23kHz in the Super, to 39Hz-54kHz in the Avantgarde Arreté. Focusing on the frequency response on its own, however, only shows a fraction of what the SR1 can do in its Avantgarde Arreté guise can do.

This is a loudspeaker that demands ‘good’ from its partners. Good stands (Audiovector’s own are ideal), good cables (ditto), good electronics, and a good installation. The natural partner for Audiovector is Naim Audio – because for the longest time the company was Naim’s Danish distributor – but this is not a mandatory mix, and I’ve heard Audiovector sound extremely good with Arcam, Devialet, Gryphon, Primare, and more. Both the specs of the loudspeaker and the listening suggest the matching process is more down to quality of electronics than sheer muscle power, although the SR1 can handle its fair share of brute force, too, should the

need arise. I used the SR1 with both the Naim SuperUniti and the excellent Moon ACE one-box do it all amplifier (more on that in the next issue). There is also a Discreet version, with its own hub and active loudspeakers; we’ve tested Audiovector Discreet active loudspeakers before and find them excellent, but went with the passive standmounts for the purposes of this test.

Installation is fairly straightforward, and the usual ‘equilateral triangle, with a slight toe-in’ rules apply. But it’s here where Audiovector begins to show what it can be capable of. Just place them in the room as a ‘first fit’ as described and you’ll get good sound from them. Take time to install them with great care and attention, in particular making sure the distance from the side walls, rear wall, height and overall level are just right, and you go from ‘good’ sound to ‘stunning’ sound. This level of precision installation is usually the preserve of loudspeakers with impressive five-figure price tags; at this level, high precision installation is still a good thing, but the rewards are relatively minor. Not with the SR1 Avantgarde Arreté – it isn’t the kind of loudspeaker that will bite you in the qualities if the installation isn’t perfect, but if you think they sound good out of the box, just wait until you spend a few hours getting them just right! ▶

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► I know that it's a misappropriation of the acronym, but 'SR' in the Audiovector SR1 Avantgarde Arreté could well stand for 'speedy response'. These loudspeakers have an extremely quick transient response; play complex drum and cymbal patterns (forget the audiophile drum records, I'm talking quick-fire Gene Krupa or Bernard Purdie, or Clyde Stubblefield's playing on James Brown's 'The Funky Drummer') and the SR1 reacts so quickly you forget there's a speaker in the way. It just sounds like a drummer. It's clean, too: you can quickly move from dirty (in a good way) funk to extremely cerebral Mozart piano concertos [*Mozart: Great Piano Concertos*, Ashkenazy, Philharmonia Orchestra, Decca] and the SR1 Avantgarde Arreté shifts genres without turning a hair.

I think you can best describe the SR1 Avantgarde Arreté's performance as being possessed of an absence of compression. This tends not to be an immediate identifier – most will initially like it for its fidelity, its natural way of dealing with percussion and bass notes, and that sheer speed of delivery. But these all ultimately conjoin into one extraordinarily uncompressed sound. You tend not to notice this 'whole' because you are too busy enjoying the improved aspect of sound you focus upon, be it detail, soundstage, dynamic range, micro-dynamic subtlety, vocal articulation... what have you. However, over the course of a few hours, you begin to notice that those other aspects of a performance that don't immediately grab you have been subtly improved, too. Pretty soon you begin to realise that the sound is just more free, and less compressed, than most standmount loudspeakers.

Perhaps the most obvious signifier of quality in the Audiovector SR1 Avantgarde Arreté's performance is you tend to notice different recordings more than limitations in performance. Move from a recording made in Studio 2 of Abbey Road to one made in Capitol Studios and you will easily hear the change in environment. You'll also start to realise why some people highly prize LPs with the words 'A Porky Prime Cut' scribed into the run-out groove. This might sound like an oxymoron, but different albums should sound different to one another, and many pieces of audio equipment gloss over this fact, making instead a possibly beautiful but ultimately artificial sound. The Audiovector doesn't do that at all, it allows the listener to skip over the audiophile artifice and get right at the music, which is supposedly what it's all about.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Type: Ported two-way standmount loudspeaker
Drive units: 1× Audiovector-produced AMT 'Avantgarde' folded ribbon tweeter, 1× 152mm carbon composite mid-woofer
Frequency Response: 39Hz-52kHz (-6dB)
Sensitivity: 87.5dB
Nominal impedance: 8Ω
Crossover point: 2.8kHz
Maximum power handling: 200W
Finish: eight, including matt and gloss white and black, four piano gloss wood veneers
Dimensions (W×H×D): 19×37×28cm
Weight: 12kg each
Price: £2,760 per pair (+£250 for custom finishes)

Manufactured by: Audiovector
URL: www.audiovector.com
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OK, let's put this into some perspective. This is a two-way standmount loudspeaker. It is not a full-range design, and it probably won't fill a concert hall with sound – for that you need more cabinet volume and drive unit surface area. The SR1 Avantgarde Arreté doesn't change or even bend the laws of physics. However, they do sound bigger than their cabinets would suggest, and although it's a ported design, you won't hear the port playing along unless you have a point to prove... and a stethoscope. Also, if your habits involve being hugely ambulatory during your listening sessions, the AMT tweeter design is best suited for sit-and-listen types: it has good horizontal dispersion, but the vertical component isn't as wide as a dome tweeter (that being said, angling the loudspeaker upwards slightly does redress the balance).

I'm really, really impressed by the Audiovector SR1 Avantgarde Arreté. They do so many things right, and so little wrong, that you could easily put a '1' in front of the price and people would still stand by its sound. They are materially, tonally, physically, and most significantly financially different from my Wilson Duette IIs, but the Audiovector is the first standmount loudspeaker priced considerably below those Wilsons that gave them a serious challenge. That's how good the SR1 Avantgarde Arreté can be. Highly recommended – you bet! +