

Heretic Audio Huron 3SV loudspeakers

by Nicholas Ripley

Note Audio, the company behind Heretic Audio, also runs a shop in Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire called Deco Audio. Deco Audio is one of those rare audio stores that supplies extremely high performance single-ended triode amplification, and is one of those equally exceptionally rare stores that listens and puts together systems based on sound quality rather than profit margins or manufacturer decree. As a result, Note Audio was able to spot a distinct gap in a niche market; the need for a high-sensitivity, triode-friendly floorstanders that gave good bass from low output amps, and that didn't cost a fortune. The Huron 3 and Huron 3SV is the result, although why 'Huron' (an indigenous tribe in North America, and the second largest of the Great Lakes), and what happened to '1' and '2' is shrouded in mystery.

The first thought was this five-driver loudspeaker was a three-way design, but four of those five drivers are a virtual line array of 170mm doped paper cone mid-woofers (with rubber surrounds) used in unison, alongside the 25mm soft dome tweeter in a deep horn waveguide. So, in fact it's a two-way design (more accurately a two-and-three-halves way design). Heretic Audio has gone for a simple second-order crossover network, albeit with high-grade film capacitors and oversized air-core inductors to give it a 12dB per octave slope and, although the crossover point itself is not publically stated in Heretic's literature, in fact it is in the lower presence region (specifically, 2.7kHz) and just outside the all-important midrange where vocal articulation reigns supreme.

We got the 3SV edition, which stands for Silver Version. How this differs from the standard version is the use of Heretic's own cotton-covered pure silver wiring, closer pair matching of drivers, and the replacement of ferrofluid with a larger damping chamber in the tweeter and a lot more visco-elastic damping in the cabinet. And of course, those components in the crossover are of the highest specification.

The key to making a loudspeaker that works with almost anything is to make it efficient and a very easy impedance load. That second-order crossover network helps, in that it avoids evil phase angles and nasty low impedances across the frequency range, but even by these standards, the Huron 3SV is a benign load. It has a nine ohm nominal impedance and at its worst, the minimum impedance is only 7.5 ohms, which means it can be used with practically any amplifier without troubling it. Moreover, with a suggested sensitivity of 95dB/w/m, it won't have a problem playing at comfortable listening levels almost regardless of room size and amplifier power. Heretic goes on to suggest the Huron 3SV can cope with an unclipped load of 200W, which is not only impressive, but in a typical room, could be loud enough to be truly anti-social.



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▶ Huron 3SV’s low front port does help efficiency and bass response, but it also means the loudspeaker is easy to position. It can work surprisingly close to the rear wall (although anything closer than about 30-50cm from the back wall compromises soundstage width and especially depth), and is equally at home in free space. *Hi-Fi+* might stress the point at times, but the fact remains room sizes (especially those in the UK and some parts of Europe and Asia) are getting smaller, and our loudspeakers need to be more pragmatic with respect to placement and positioning. In these aspects, the Huron 3SV is a refreshing change, and far removed from the laser-guided precision installation demands of some of the more fussy ends of the loudspeaker catalogue. However, I’d suggest Heretic Audio possibly supplies the loudspeakers with foam bungs to fit in the ports, for those rooms where loudspeaker bass needs taming, or where listeners sit close enough to hear the port resonance at around 50Hz.

Heretic Audio suggests 200 hours of full run-in, but also claims the nasty bit is over and done with after 20 hours or so. We were somewhere between the two when testing commenced, and didn’t notice any significant tonal shifts in the performance over the test period. Contrary to sceptical dogma, this shake-down period does have an effect (especially with loudspeakers) and isn’t just there to either soften up the listener or put them outside the cooling-off period for returning goods. It is also worth noting that designs like the Huron 3SV that use ‘traditional’ materials (fabric instead of metal domes, doped paper instead of plastic cones, ferrite magnets instead of rare-earth metals, and rubber surrounds in place of sci-fi materials) can require some further running in if they are stored for long periods; I had a pair of Audio Note AN-E loudspeakers that sounded great, then I moved house and put them into storage for a couple of months and when they finally came back, they needed a prolonged running in a second time. I would assume the same applies here.

Audio Note AN-E loudspeakers are a perfect parallel here, because there is much that the Huron 3SV shares with that standmount design, tonally at least. Granted the Huron 3SV has more bass because of more bass drivers, and the original AN-E has now gone through myriad upgrades and enhancements, but the two have a lot in sonic common. Both have a sense of effortlessly natural presentation, which is very much at odds with both the ‘boom/tizz’ sound of many modern loudspeakers and the overly impressive soundstaging of others. Like the AN-E, the Huron 3SV loads the room in a way few conventional ‘cone and dome’ speakers ever manage to achieve. And ▶

- ▶ also like the AN-E, the Huron 3SV is effortlessly dynamic, which makes music sound like real music played by real musicians.

I found myself listening more to piano sonatas and string quartets than larger scale orchestral works, not because the Huron 3SV cannot handle larger orchestral works, but because its dynamic shading made Maurizio Pollini's piano all the more real [*Beethoven's Late Piano Sonatas*, DG], more like a real pianist playing. Note however, that this is a very different presentation to the kind of detail-oriented version of 'real' one might be used to from listening to Quad Electrostatics or BBC loudspeakers. That is more about resolution and spatial precision, where the Huron 3SV is about energy and solidity.

That line array of bass drivers helps bring some bottom-end heft to the sound, which helps carry a bass line better than many of the light and loose, high-sensitivity speakers in use today. I wouldn't call the bass of the Huron 3SV 'taut', but these things are relative, and anything taut enough to prevent Bruckner's Sixth Symphony [Sir Colin Davis, London Symphony Orchestra, LSO Live] from being tarred with its 'ugly duckling' brush, and bring out the bold harmony, almost early-Romantic-era beauty of the melody, and the drive of the low strings from the outset is more than good enough. But that's the key and core of the Huron 3SV; the presentation is melody and harmony, rather than transient response and 'inky silences'. I can well imagine that will prove off-putting to many who are more used to listening to music through loudspeakers than live, but the Huron 3SV is a fine example of the goals of the 'absolute sound' in so many respects. Paradoxically given that last observation, it's those instruments that are never heard unamplified that highlight what the Huron 3SV does well, although playing well-recorded rock [*'Heartbreaker'* on *Led Zeppelin II* 2014 Remaster, 24/96 download, Atlantic] shows just how much presence and energy this loudspeaker can put into a room.

High sensitivity is hard to do without a trade-off, and there's a temptation to think the trade-off in the Huron 3SV is going to be coloration. In fact, that's not 'quite' the case. The caveat is that, if you use these loudspeakers with something big, powerful, and possessed of a high damping factor (a big solid-state amplifier, in other words), the tonal balance can exhibit a 'shouty' quality in the upper midrange and top, at the same time becoming a touch dry and lean in the bass. However, I'm fairly sure Heretic Audio (and many supporters of tube amplifiers in general) would lay the blame at the amplifier itself, especially in the way solid-state amps sound across the midrange and treble. I'm not entirely in disagreement with this mindset, having experimented with SET amps, and I think that the loudspeaker works best in partnership with more tonally rich sounding valve designs rather than electronics that tend toward 'lean' and 'dry'.

The Heretic Audio Huron 3SV is not for everyone, but for those who need a good valve-amp friendly floorstander with excellent bass and truly no-nonsense appeal, you'd be hard pressed to better this loudspeaker. Check it out! +

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Type: Two-way, five-driver, floorstanding reflex speaker.

Driver complement: One 25mm soft dome tweeter in custom waveguide; four 170mm doped paper mid-bass drivers.

Crossover frequencies: not specified

Frequency response: 30Hz – 20kHz

Impedance: 9 Ohms nominal

Sensitivity: 95dB/W/m

Dimensions (HxWxD): 104x24x46cm

Weight: 25kg/each

Finishes: natural cherry, walnut, satin black or white as standard, high gloss black or white to order.

Price: £4,000 per pair (std finish), £4,500 per pair (high gloss black or white)

Manufacturer: Heretic Audio

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