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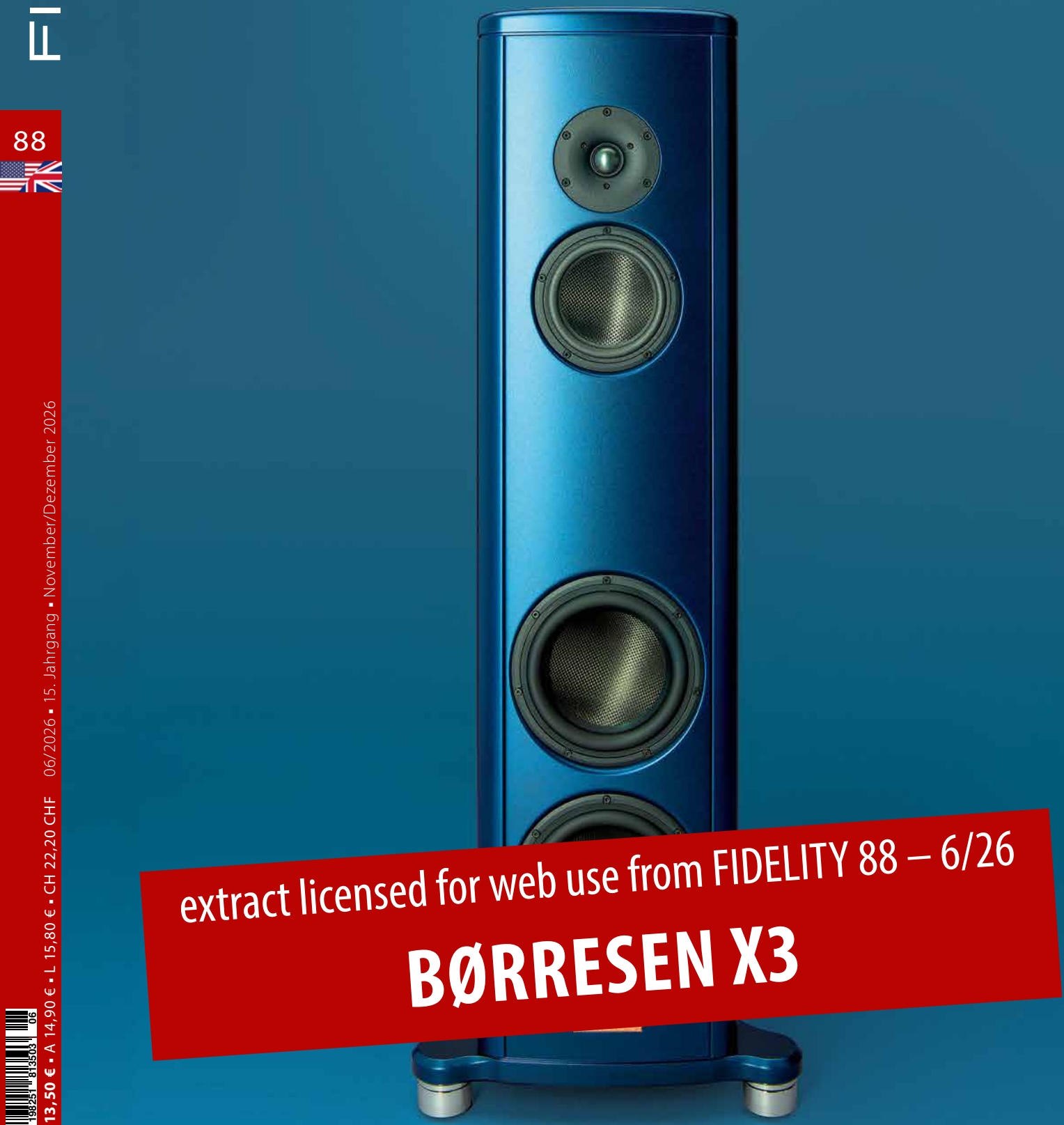

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BØRRESEN X3

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Børresen X3

INCREASING RETURNS

By Sebastian Polcyn. Photography: Maximilian Merk

Before we begin, we must review the Pareto principle: 20% of the effort yields 80% of the results. Børresen put in 40% of the effort, and now we're questioning our understanding of mathematics.



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— Some manufacturers never cease to baffle me. Cynics might argue that all Class D amplifiers are made equal. That is a difficult claim to refute on technical grounds, after all there are only a handful of module manufacturers out there. Therefore, more or less the same components end up inside every power amp. Then, along comes Audio Group Denmark. They use Pascal modules in its Aavik amplifiers, just like many others, yet build everything around those in their very own way — from fundamentals such as the power supply, to exotic wizardry like the mysterious Tesla coils. The result is a range of amplifiers whose sound is impossible to mistake.

Moreover, Michael Børresen's loudspeakers puzzle me because most of them don't contain any inexplicable miracle components that would set them apart from the competition. And yet if you walked blindfolded into a room where a Børresen is playing, chances are you could correctly identify it. Could this just be a matter of voicing? The frequency response may not be ruler-flat, but it's decidedly balanced overall. In listening tests, I can never point to a frequency range that is significantly overemphasized or subdued. If there's any voicing at play, then it's done very judiciously. In fact, the hand of their designer is consistently revealed by the combination of effortless transparency and a distinctive vibrancy in tonal colors.

But there's something else I struggle to grasp: Børresen uses a wide range of proprietary technologies in its speakers, as do many other manufacturers, but deploys them across the entire price range with remarkably few modifications. Granted, the spider web zirconium driver baskets and specialized features such as the M-series' series-connected crossover are reserved for the upper tiers. But the driver diaphragms, with their checkerboard-pattern carbon-fiber layers surrounding a hexagonal aramid-fiber core, are identical from the diminutive Axxess L3 all the way up to the flagship models costing 100 to 200 times as much. Thus I wonder: just how much better could a €600,000 reference speaker possibly sound than a €5,000 entry-level model?

This truly hit home when the Børresen X3 arrived at our offices for review. Ever since my colleague Knuth Zensen reviewed the Axxess L3 – coming in at half the price of the X3 – and found it to be quite a bargain, that little speaker has been a permanent fixture in our listening room. It has helped us put electronics – sometimes considerably more expensive ones – through their paces. Its balanced character and high resolution make it ideal for the job. So when I unpacked the X3, my immediate reaction was eager anticipation, but doubt quickly seeped into my mind.

First off, you notice the appearance and build quality of the X3, which are in a league of their own when compared to its stylish, neatly assembled but deliberately plain little sibling. The X3 sports a superb high-gloss finish, with black side panels and a perfectly seamless central section in exposed carbon fiber. This isn't a design that, as countless brochures claim, "blends seamlessly into any living space." This machine begs the eye to linger. ▸

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Congratulations, it's a Børresen: The woofers' carbon-fiber cones with their checkerboard-pattern are found throughout the brand's entire speaker lineup, as is the planar-magnetic tweeter. The middle section of the cabinet, finished in exposed carbon fiber, is a true eye-catcher. The distinctive outrigger feet are another notable feature and are compatible with the various equipment feet made by Børresen's sister brand, Ansuz.



The narrow rear panel, with its numerous bass-reflex ports, is typical of Børresen. They are necessary to provide sufficient total port area within the limited space available. The slightly smaller opening below the upper two ports is a vent for the tweeter, which is designed to prevent compression effects.

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My skepticism was triggered when I had to look quite hard to find any tangible engineering differences. One obvious distinction is the cabinet, which is somewhat larger and nearly twice as heavy. Hidden inside is the crossover, fitted with substantially more expensive components but not fundamentally different. The three woofers are identical, arranged and wired in exactly the same way: the second driver from the bottom takes over where the tweeter leaves off and plays all the way down, while the other two reinforce its deep bass output. A notable feature is the motor system of the nominal five-inch drivers, which uses not one but two copper rings to linearize magnetic flux and ease the amplifier's job. On the other hand, the high-frequency planar driver is different. The X3 uses the same diaphragm found in every Børresen loudspeaker (you're beginning to see the pattern). The tweeter's motor system has been scaled back when compared with the top models, but that's not necessarily a bad thing. Rather than compromising sound quality, Børresen has simply used a less generously sized magnet system, which reduces sensitivity from a sensational 94 dB to 89 dB, nearly halving the sound pressure level. Even so, the tweeter is still 1 dB more sensitive than the loudspeaker as a whole — so that's not a problem.

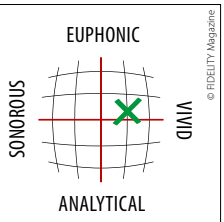
So it would be easy to dismiss the Børresen X3 as a tweaked and dressed-up Axxess L3 that costs twice as much. Therefore, I deliberately lowered my expectations somewhat during the break-in period. The speakers spent the next few days playing away in the closed listening room while I worked away in the office until I figured they were ready. I settled onto the couch in the sweet spot, and immediately experienced the Børresen effect.

The X3 doesn't just sound a little better, and I can't explain how it's possible. The physical evidence suggests incremental improvements over the L3, yet in a direct comparison, the Børresen X3 laughs in the face of the law of diminishing returns. It delivers a performance that leaves me needing a moment to collect myself.

And I hadn't even put on anything particularly spectacular. I just wanted to ease into things with "Do You Wanna" by Nana Yamato (Yoake Mae). Its laid-back lo-fi pop, featuring a muffled, dense bass drum that sounds suspiciously like an 808, an unapologetically excessive amount of reverb in the mix, and a slightly dark undertone running beneath the otherwise gently meandering tune. From the start, I'm astonished by the sensitivity of the X3 as it traces the kick drum texture, while allowing the endless reverb tails of the little background percussion effects all the time in the world to fade out. The track is warm and enveloping, and it sounds exactly as I've come to expect from these Danish speakers: floating freely in a spacious soundstage, utterly transparent – except, of course, where the recording deliberately closes itself off.

Enough with laid back. Next is "Tohogd" by Canadian duo Angine de Poitrine (Vol. 1), and I turn to the X3's rhythmic abilities. These microtonal experimental rockers are known for many things, not least their superb sense of timing, which the Børresens translate into an irresistible physical impulse ▸

Taken on its own, the **Børresen X3** sounds like a typical Børresen. But pit it head-to-head with virtually any competitor, and it rises well above its price class.



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CHALLENGING =
INTUITIVE =

A component is 100% intuitive if you can exploit its potential to the full intuitively.



In the X3, the planar tweeter sits inside a square waveguide. Apart from a scaled-back magnet system, it is essentially identical in design to the tweeters used in Børresen's most expensive models. In this case, the cost-cutting measures don't affect sound quality, only sensitivity – which remains more than adequate.

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that drives my legs to movement right on cue. A welcome counterpoint to Nana Yamato's endless reverb is the muted snare of drummer Klek de Poitrine. I clearly follow how the drumheads are damped into nothingness almost instantaneously after each strike, leaving room on the soundstage for the wild guitar and bass experiments that Khn de Poitrine coaxes from his instrument with an arsenal of loopers and effects.

Unlike the deliberately synthetic production of "Do You Wanna," "Tohogd" is a skillfully captured rock recording without any pop-oriented sound-design gimmicks. Above all, the X3's tonal neutrality becomes apparent in the drums. This may sound odd, but the sonic coloration introduced by audio equipment sometimes becomes especially noticeable with sounds that have no obvious voice, such as percussion.

Yet I must hear a voice. For this, I cue up Bic Runga's "Things Behind The Sun" from her album Close Your Eyes. It's a full-bodied analog recording, with the New Zealand singer close to the microphone. Her voice moves through beautifully warm and dense, entirely in keeping with her timbre, and exemplary in its tonal accuracy. The slight sibilance in the recording isn't concealed by the tweeter, either. Every hiss and whisper reaches my ears completely unfiltered – not enough to become irritating, but enough to be noticeable. In short, this is exactly as I know the recording.

Of course, you can attach all sorts of technical explanations to this superior performance. A substantially heavier cabinet, presumably stiffer and better damped, can only benefit bass performance. Although the tweeter doesn't come into play until around 2.5 kHz, it primarily handles the upper harmonics. This makes it a key contributor to accurate timbral reproduction. Moreover, better crossover components always benefit every frequency range. Even so, I am astonished by the gap opened up by Børresen X3 between itself and its little sibling – especially given that the latter is hardly a slouch. One thing is clear: in its price class, the Børresen X3 must rank among the best-sounding loudspeakers on the market. ▪

Loudspeaker | Børresen X3 | Concept: Dynamic 2.5-way floorstanding loudspeaker **| Drivers:** 1 × RP89 planar magnetic tweeter, 1 × 5-inch DCC5 midwoofer, 2 × 5-inch DCC5 woofers **| Sensitivity (1 W/1 m):** 88 dB **| Frequency response:** 35 Hz–50 kHz **| Impedance:** 4 Ω **| Features:** Carbon-fiber-reinforced cabinet, 6 bass-reflex ports, plinth design compatible with Ansuz equipment feet **| Finish:** High-gloss black or white with exposed-carbon-fiber center section **| Dimensions (W/H/D):** 34.5/129/61 cm **| Weight:** 55 kg **| Warranty:** 2 years **| Price per pair:** Approximately €10,000

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