



# Reeling in the years

The new Albany standmount serves as a timely reminder why KLH was once such a strong brand, says **David Price**

**F**ounded back in 1957 in Cambridge, Massachusetts, KLH is possibly one of the biggest loudspeaker brands you've never heard of. I recall its products being on sale in the UK in the late seventies, but have heard little from the brand since. This is amazing considering it claims to have once been the largest speaker maker in the world. It's certainly true that Henry Kloss, Malcolm S Low, and Josef Anton Hofmann's company has at times been a major global player with some special products such as the Model Nine, which KLH says is the first full-range electrostatic speaker. Changes have been afoot recently, with David Kelley, longtime Klipsch executive, taking over the helm in 2017 – and since then there has been

## In terms of rhythmic alacrity, bass grip and tonal balance Albany is top-tier

a concerted push to put the brand back on the map, starting with a US relaunch at CES 2018 and a UK reboot a year later. Walter Hegarty, the company's EU Account Manager, told me the latter is important for two reasons: "First, it's a mature market, less faddy than some newer markets and opinions and lessons learned here translate to other regions. Second, the UK has a healthy independent hi-fi sector, unlike many other countries where retail chains dominate audio, this means you can build a business with long-term relationships not just on the whims of chain buyers."

The new Albany is sold in Blighty by TBM Solution based in Dublin. Hegarty says this speaker is aimed at the post-MP3 generation. "These are now discovering just how amazing music can sound. That includes the returners who wandered down the

'had a family, everything went into storage and a little bit of me died in the process' road and are making the journey back." He adds that, "the resurrection of the turntable is also an influencer, too."

The company says that economies of scale mean this petite standmount gets to use drive units of a quality higher than is normally expected at this price. Being a two-way, these comprise the 135mm mid/bass driver which uses a woven Kevlar cone and a 25mm anodised aluminium tweeter with a brushed aluminium 'linear response' faceplate. Featuring a powder-coated diecast aluminium driver basket and an oversized magnet, the former crosses over to the latter at 2.4kHz.

The cabinet is said to be thicker than most small speakers, being made of 20mm-thick MDF with anti-resonance driver chambers and internal bracing. This is veneered with American walnut or there's the option of black oak. Magnetic grilles

### DETAILS

**PRODUCT**  
KLH Albany

**ORIGIN**  
USA/China

**TYPE**  
2-way standmount loudspeaker

**WEIGHT**  
5kg

**DIMENSIONS (WxHxD)**  
152 x 330 x 241mm

**FEATURES**

- 1x 25mm anodised aluminium dome tweeter
- 1x 135mm Kevlar mid/bass unit
- Quoted sensitivity: 92dB/1W/1m (8ohm)

**DISTRIBUTOR**  
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are supplied, of a custom honeycomb design and devoid of visible fasteners; this gives a nice clean look to the front baffle. Overall fit and finish is very good for the price and the cabinet has a satisfyingly dull 'thunk' when hit by a knuckle.

The claimed specifications for the Albany are impressive, and right on the edge of what you'd expect for such a compact standmount. KLH says it has a frequency response of 35Hz to 23kHz, sensitivity of 92dB and power handling of 200W; nominal impedance is put at 8ohm. It works best in my largish listening room on 24in stands, gently toed in and requires plenty of run-in time, giving my Arcam FMJ P49 power amp (HFC 409) no problems whatsoever.

### Sound quality

To my ears the new Albany is consistent with how I remember the brand, all those years ago. This is to say fast, fluid and fun with a light and musical feel. It certainly is not from the BBC monitor school of speakers, where everything is carefully measured, balanced and considered in presentation. Rather, this baby box just wants to have fun.

Musicality is what best defines its character. Playing classic progressive rock from Caravan in the shape of *Nine Feet Underground*, it jumps into the song's natural rhythm. It doesn't just work on showing the beautifully delicate hi-hat and snare drum work, but also delivers the highly processed lead electric guitar in a wonderfully moving way. This song has a great groove and the Albany goes all out to signpost it, giving the listener more

**Robust binding posts make bi-wiring possible**



rhythmic clues than you might expect from a speaker of this price.

The way it does this is by good quality drive units and relatively unobtrusive cabinets that seem largely devoid of overhang. The track's bass guitar line is handled in a taut yet tuneful manner that captures the way the notes start and stop; there's a sense of buoyancy to the sound where so often it can appear leaden and/or workmanlike. This translates across to all sorts of other types of music too. Simple Minds' *Someone Somewhere In Summertime* is a wonderfully dreamy, floaty eighties synth-pop piece and the little KLH goes straight for the rhythmic jugular. It sidles its way into the song, grabbing the all-important fundamentals – timing, instrumental syncopation and dynamics – and pushing them out at you so you can't fail to notice them.

Interestingly, however, it isn't especially bright or forward. Some loudspeakers sound exciting simply because they spray percussive upper midband or treble at the listener – you get lots of crashing cymbals, rim shots and the like – but the Albany proves relatively neutral tonally. The tweeter isn't half bad – at a price point when many really let the rest of the speaker down. Ride cymbals on the Simple Minds track have a decently metallic 'glint' to them, yet don't grate to the point that I have to worry about my fillings. It's interesting to hear Depeche Mode's *Get The Balance Right*, which is – paradoxically

– just a little bright when heard via the wrong loudspeaker. Yet its drum machine cymbal sound isn't too edgy, and the chiming synthesiser effects don't hurt one bit. At the same time, the KLH is again able to show off its lithe and articulate bass.

In terms of rhythmic alacrity, bass grip and tonal balance, this speaker is top-tier at its price – and it also proves good in other respects. Stereo imaging is decent, the Albany doing a respectable job of framing everything together nicely. You do, however, begin to notice its small size come into play here. For example, Isaac

### The Albany comes across as fast, fluid and fun with a light and musical feel

Hayes's *Café Regio's* is a lovely bit of early seventies soul/funk that was recorded at the Stax studio in Memphis. This had unique acoustics, thanks to it originally being a cinema with a sloping floor; the seats were removed, tape recorders installed, and the result was a wonderfully expansive feel. The KLH conveys all of this well, but you are still aware of its diminutive dimensions.

Detail rendition is impressive considering its cost; it doesn't so much throw it out at you as simply not get in the way too much, so you can peer into the recorded acoustic to take it all in – yet some other rivals do slightly better here. The



#### HOW IT COMPARES

Monitor Audio's £499 Silver 50 sounds bigger and more spacious and is able to take more power without compressing. It images at least as well, has better depth perspective and a deeper, more muscular bass. Yet it is not as much fun, sounding a little leaden with programme material that has a highly repetitive beat. The Albany sounds more fleet of foot and is a more lyrical music maker.

main limitation is one that is simply a function of its physical size and price, and this is also the reason for the biggest downside of this loudspeaker – its tendency to compress things at high volumes. At normal listening levels in average-sized listening rooms it's a highly dynamic and articulate speaker, but push the volume skywards and you begin to realise that the Albany is but a mere mortal and cannot move as much air as either you or it might like.

#### Conclusion

KLH's Albany is a most impressive budget standmount; its engaging and charming sound never stops being a pleasure to hear. As such it's well worth an audition if you're looking for something small that can punch well above its weight ●

#### IN SIGHT



- 1 25mm tweeter
- 2 Bi-wireable binding posts
- 3 135mm mid/bass driver

#### Hi-Fi Choice

##### OUR VERDICT

<b>SOUND QUALITY</b> ★★★★★	<b>LIKE:</b> Peppy, rhythmically engaging nature; refinement
<b>VALUE FOR MONEY</b> ★★★★★	<b>DISLIKE:</b> Compressed sound at higher volume levels
<b>BUILD QUALITY</b> ★★★★★	<b>WESAY:</b> Charming little standmount loudspeaker with fine sound
<b>EASE OF DRIVE</b> ★★★★★	

##### OVERALL

