

# Precious Metal

**Alloy coned mid/bass drivers make ALR Jordan's Classic 2 loudspeakers one of the most divine small boxes David Price has heard recently...**

**W**hat's the best way to design a small loudspeaker? Well, come on, that's a trick question, isn't it? Anyone who answers this quickly with a rigid prescription put most firmly and forcibly probably doesn't know one jot about the subject – as there's no textbook answer to this. But in the same way that there's no one single best way to lose weight (exercise, diet, sleep-

ing habits – and any combination thereof), so there is no one right way to do small loudspeakers. You've got so much constraining you that the answer becomes the most artful compromise of cabinet design, drive unit quality and crossover characteristics. Essentially then, speaker design is where science meets art – a clever software package and an 'A Level' physics book is only half the solution...

This pretty much describes

loudspeaker designer extraordinaire Karl Heinz Fink. Based in Essen, Germany, he has his own consultancy with a good number of staff and some very tasty computer modelling software. But this is only the start for KHF; it's his personal magic dust that achieves the finished result, and it's highly distinct. He develops or designs a wide range of loudspeakers for a large number of manufacturers across Europe, from Q Acoustics to Naim Audio, and all have his



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design DNA visible (or audible) in the finished product, and it's a very palatable sonic footprint. Think 'clean', 'warm', 'sweet', 'expansive' and 'musical' as your starter for ten; you'll never hear an ear-splitting, cranial laser etching Karl Heinz Fink speaker. And it is he who's been involved for a long time with ALR Jordan – the Classic 2s tested here have his dabs all over them!

A two way bass reflex design, they have a claimed frequency response of 45-30.000Hz [see MEASURED PERFORMANCE], with a 6 Ohm impedance and 80W continuous power handling. ALR Jordan recommend amplifiers between 25 and 150W, giving decent sound pressure levels from its quoted 88dB/W sensitivity. High frequencies are courtesy of a 25mm textile dome tweeter, married via a phase optimised Linkwitz Riley crossover network to a 140mm Ted Jordan metal coned mid/bass driver. They're nicely built and finished small speakers, available in a choice of

three real wood veneers. They feel solid at 5.3kg apiece and measure 170x300x260mm, making them an excellent size for small rooms. The rear panel sports a bass port and two pairs of loudspeakers sockets for biwiring. My only criticisms would be styling; the Classic 2s look so old fashioned that I predict they'll probably be back into fashion fairly soon! Oh, and the detachable grilles are decently enough made (even if their styling is straight out of the nineteen seventies, along with turtlenecks and Space Hoppers), but they do seem to take the treble level down a little – I'm sure Karl Heinz would recommend you take them off before serious listening.

### SOUND QUALITY

I do listen to lots of expensive speakers, and going back to budget ones can be a bit of shocker. All the more surprising then that the ALR Jordan Classic 2s didn't offend in the least; indeed quite the reverse; they were entertaining and charming in

equal measure. It's quite rare to hear a pair of small speakers that don't have some screaming bass or treble peak – I've heard a good few that practically take off into a low earth orbit when asked to reproduce that deep synth cadence leading into the bridge of Scritti Politti's 'Absolute' for example, their bass ports going positively bonkers. Not so these, which proved a study in even-handedness and intelligent sensibility. Indeed, they're about as far from a loudspeaker that's engineered for the showroom as I've heard anywhere near their price; clean, open, delicate, subtle and smooth from top to bottom, it proved hard to fault them at their price.

Propaganda's 'Dr Mabuse' on SACD was testament to their superlative balance; if there's an eighties digital synth-laden electro torture track that's going to set them off crashing and grating then this is it, but instead I was surprised to hear them handle this song with aplomb, at searchingly high volumes too. Most

arresting is their midband, which handled Claudia Brucken's voice brilliantly, making her icy, teutonic tones come across surprisingly smoothly and with great depth; she hung high above, and behind the loudspeakers in a wonderfully ethereal way. The opening crashing electronic noises can sometimes grate, but not this time; instead the Classic 2s shuffled into the groove and pushed the song, refusing to sound harsh whilst pushing out – gently and in due proportion – the mix's innermost secrets. Bass wasn't in any way overwhelming, but had just enough body to give weight to proceedings, and sounded decently snappy without perhaps being the tightest or tautest around. Treble was unerringly smooth and nicely detailed, even if in my particular system it didn't quite have the atmosphere and extension I'd have liked – too much time spent with ribbon tweeters or the NS1000M's beryllium units, methinks!



really rather smooth and crisp and delicate in an almost ribbon-like way.

Driven by a boiling hot Musical Fidelity AMS35i, almost too hot to touch on top, and having been whacked with serious amounts of power for hours on end, I found them really settling into their skins. Speakers with metal drive units always take time to get going (it's rather like waiting for your car to get off choke). Speakers that had, in their first hour of so, sounded just a little uptight and clinical, suddenly got into the groove like they'd been smoking jazz cigarettes instead of the regular variety available from a news agent near you. A Blue Note CD imprint of Lou Donaldson's 'Aligator Bogaloo' had the ALR Jordans partying like it was 1999, so to speak, with a wonderfully wide recorded acoustic, dropping back a good few feet more than when they'd first been teased into action, and an infectious groove. You'd never say these were out and out rockers, but suddenly their easy musicality began to win the day. The great thing about

them, I mused, was how they connected you right to the musical event but didn't distract you with tedious details of the recording and mastering, as many high end speakers do. They take you to the party, so to speak, without having to do the washing up afterwards!



**CONCLUSION**

At £800 the ALR Jordan Classic 2s are almost in a gang of one – there are precious few standmounting loudspeakers at this price that present such an open and musical sound without getting anywhere near harshness. They come in, do the job brilliantly and yet leave no blood on the carpet. With no nasty bass or treble peaks, high quality drive units intelligently married up and cabinets that don't really draw attention to themselves, it's hard to fault what they offer at the price. Maybe in absolute terms, I'd ask for a tauter and deeper bass, a tad more midband insight and a slightly more searching treble, but as I stated earlier, the Classic 2s know how to quit when they're ahead. Their genius lies in their ability to do what they're good at then quietly move on without drawing attention to their failings. That, surely, is the mark of a great speaker designer – and indeed a superb loudspeaker.

Moving to some good old unreconstructed prog rock music, and Egg's 'Seven is a Jolly Good Time' was no less enjoyable; that electric organ which dominates the song can grate on lesser speakers, as can the slightly nasal vocal tones, but not so with these little boxes. They sounded light, breezy, gently musical and endearing, and I was impressed with their rendition of the bass guitar, which was delightfully supple and tuneful. In absolute terms they were a little dynamically constricted at higher volumes, but this was never enough of an issue to limit their very obvious innate musicality, which was pure pleasure. They had a remarkable ability for making mistakes (as all loudspeakers conspicuously do, especially at under £1,000), yet hiding their tracks so gracefully and genteelly that you'd never notice. Even their tweeters, which I'd first worried were a little uncouth and veiled, seemed to blossom after they'd got some 'miles' underneath their belt, beginning to sound

**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

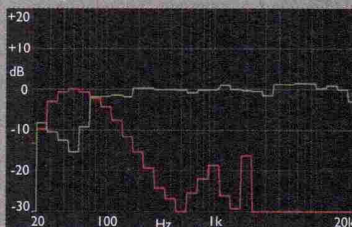
The Classic 2 measured almost flat across the audio band, our pink noise analysis shows. The tweeter exhibits a small plateau lift of 1dB so this loudspeaker will not sound dull, but as there is no sign of peaking in high frequency output, neither will it sound sharp or coloured. In fact, the absence of perturbations in the frequency response indicates an unusual absence of local resonances in the speaker and a resultant lack of colouration. Our decay analysis confirmed this view across the midband, although the tweeter does have some overhang at 4kHz and the bass/midrange also has a little delayed output below 400Hz. However, the bass unit is well damped and the cabinet is not at all 'hot', so there is no bass boominess and the Classic 2 should have very good bass quality. With a port tuned to 50Hz and of broad output +6dB above the drive unit at 80Hz, the port reaches down to 30Hz and will give the loudspeaker a good feeling of bass weight. What has to be borne in mind with the Classic 2 is that its flat frequency response will translate to an accurate delivery but this, by definition, will sound more sober than the inebriation of many designs (or perhaps their designers)!

Sensitivity was good at 86dB Sound

Pressure Level from one nominal Watt of input (2.8V) and as overall impedance measured 6.6 Ohms the Classic 2 is an easy enough load.

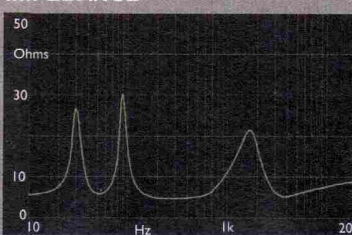
The ALR Jordan Classic 2 is neatly engineered all round. It is very accurate and bass well damped, so should suit near wall placement. NK

**FREQUENCY RESPONSE**



Green - driver output  
Red - port output

**IMPEDANCE**



**VERDICT** ●●●●●  
A couth, balanced, even-handed and well behaved standmounting loudspeaker, yet unerringly musical too. Don't let the run-of-the-mill looks fool you, this is a grand design.

**ALR JORDAN**  
**CLASSIC 2** £799  
Phonosophie  
☎ +44 (0)1730 261 924  
[www.uberphon.co.uk](http://www.uberphon.co.uk)

**FOR**  
- smooth, refined nature  
- even tonal balance  
- open soundstaging  
- satisfying musicality

**AGAINST**  
- pedestrian looks  
- slight bass looseness