

It's a gas



The Helium 410 is Amphion's smallest speaker, but as **Ed Selley** discovers it still packs a punch

The premise of an advert, inviting you to listen to a speaker with the volume turned down, might not be the most obvious way of selling it to a wider audience. For Amphion however, there is a reason for this unusual approach. The entire range is designed to offer excellent intelligibility and clarity even at very low volumes.

The Helium series is the entry-level offering in the range and the 410 is the smallest speaker in the group. The two-way bookshelf is only 260mm tall and, although relatively deep, the overall dimensions are very compact. Despite this, Amphion claims that the key features of the brand are all present and correct.

One-inch wonder

The Helium 410 makes use of a one-inch titanium tweeter and a 4.5-inch paper mid bass driver. The tweeter sits in a recessed conical waveguide, which is an Amphion trademark, to assist in producing a more believable three-dimensional image. In turn, this is supposed to reduce the amount of electrical correction required to keep phase perfect. A small rear port aids bass response, but Amphion only quotes a +/- 3dB figure for the 410 down to 60Hz, so technically, this is not going to be the most seismic of performers.

White sheen

Aesthetically, the 410 is a break from the wood-finished boxes that are usually found from the competition. The cabinet is finished in a white-sheen effect with black detailing version available. The drivers are fitted with removable metal grilles, which auger well for their long-term survival. The fit and finish is also excellent and it feels extremely solid with a sturdy, non-resonant cabinet.

There is no escaping the fact that £599 buys any number of significantly larger speakers than the 410, but very few we have seen recently are as well built. Whether you value this over the larger size (and as a result, deeper

bass) that other designs will offer will depend on listening room size and preferences.

In terms of placement, the 410 is simplicity itself: we obtained best results on dedicated stands set about 100mm away from the rear wall. Using the Helium on shelves and tabletops still gave strong results and this is one of the most unfussy speaker's we've ever encountered.

In terms of nearfield listening in computer or desktop systems, the 410 is extremely flexible and coupled with its small size makes it an excellent choice in this role. The 86dB/w sensitivity is a little low, but an amplifier of reasonable power ought to have no trouble with it.

Uncommonly clear

The attention that Amphion has devoted to the waveguide and time-alignment is rewarded with an uncommonly clear performance. The 410 has excellent clarity with voices and instruments, that makes even very complex pieces simple to follow. This also makes it a satisfying performer at lower listening levels.

The timing and pace of the speaker is also impressive. It's unfazed by even the fastest of material and rarely fails to get the toes tapping. This is partly a reflection on the fact that there is less deep bass to slow proceedings down, but what bass is present is fast and tuneful. Perhaps, the Amphion is forced to give ground to larger designs in terms of outright extension, but it doesn't give up without a fight.

Satisfying listen

If you can accommodate a larger speaker, the very compact size of the Helium and with it, the limitations to bass extension may not appeal. But if you have less room and are looking for a speaker that will work in confined spaces and still provide a satisfying listen at lower volume levels, then the 410 makes a great deal more sense. This is a well-built and exactly thought out speaker, that has much to recommend it. ●



DETAILS

PRODUCT:
Amphion Helium 410

ORIGIN:
Finland

TYPE:
Two-way standmount loudspeaker

WEIGHT:
3.5kg

DIMENSIONS:
(WxHxD)
132x259x220mm

FEATURES:
• One-inch Titanium tweeter
• 4.5-inch paper mid-bass driver
• Interchangeable coloured grilles

DISTRIBUTION:
Amphion Audio Europe

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amphion.fi/en

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY

★★★★★

LIKE: Exceptional clarity and timing, with a solid build

VALUE FOR MONEY

★★★★☆

DISLIKE: Limited bass extension and it's not cheap

BUILD QUALITY

★★★★★

WE SAY: A clever design with many likeable attributes and great flexibility

EASE OF DRIVE

★★★★☆

OVERALL

★★★★★