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Above Wharfedale's new Dovedale speakers in walnut wood veneer

Wharfedale's Heritage Series Peaks with Dovedale

Britain's most famous speaker brand exploits its rich history to re-engineer another 20th-century classic, the redoubtable Dovedale – proudly designed, engineered and made in the UK

Cambridgeshire, England – Wharfedale's great history as a maker of loudspeakers stretches back to 1932 – a quarter of a century before the introduction of stereo sound to consumers. In the 91 years since, the company has delivered many innovations that have since become commonplace, such as marrying separate bass and treble units to make the first two-way speaker system; most speakers are still designed this way today. Year after year, decade after decade, Wharfedale created some of Britain's best-loved loudspeakers, many of which are considered among the finest of their era.

Today, Wharfedale celebrates its past with the Heritage Series – a range of classic stereo speakers from the 1960s and 1970s, re-engineered for the modern age. This range sits alongside the company's latest highly acclaimed designs, such as the Diamond 12 Series, EVO4 Series and Elysian Series, offering an enticing choice for discerning music lovers with a penchant for vintage style. And yet Wharfedale is not simply cloning past glories; instead, it applies the latest techniques and technologies to ensure the build quality, finish and performance of these classic designs is greatly enhanced, whilst remaining faithful to the spirit of the originals.

The first speakers to join the Heritage line were the Denton 80 and Denton 85, launched to celebrate Wharfedale's 80th and 85th anniversaries. Then followed the hugely popular Linton – a speaker that has fuelled the popularity of revived and re-engineered vintage speakers more than any other. Now, Wharfedale is ready to unleash the Dovedale, the biggest and best Heritage Series speaker yet.

Named after a valley in England's Peak District, the first Dovedale speaker launched in 1965 as an updated version of Wharfedale's W2 model. It was originally a two-way design but was later adapted to a three-way with separate bass, midrange and treble drivers. There were several versions of the Dovedale during the 1960s and '70s, but perhaps the most fondly remembered is the Dovedale 3, which arrived in 1971 – a speaker renowned for its rich, open and effortless sound quality.

The re-engineered Dovedale takes inspiration from the Dovedale 3 and corresponding Unit 5 build-at-home kit. The new speaker's cabinet is a touch taller, a little wider and considerably deeper than the standard production Dovedale 3, but similar in size to the largest home constructors' version, and its proportions will be recognisable to anyone familiar with its forebear. At the time, the Dovedale was not considered a particularly large speaker, but by modern standards it has a substantial physical presence. Its width, in particular, signifies its vintage heritage, but speaker cabinets were broad for a reason – to incorporate larger bass units and therefore shift more air.



Left The new Dovedale is inspired by 1971's much-loved Dovedale 3, yet every element has been redesigned and engineered to a much higher level

The drive units

The 10in (25cm) bass and 5in (13cm) midrange drivers incorporate cones made from woven Kevlar – an exceptionally strong and stiff synthetic fibre discovered in the same year as the original Dovedale's release and not used for loudspeaker diaphragms until a decade later. The midrange unit is housed in its own internal enclosure, ensuring its performance is unsullied by vibrations from the bass driver, and

the use of woven Kevlar for both units ensures a seamless handover, aided by a crossover design that marries the output of each driver perfectly.

The 25mm fabric-dome treble unit with a ceramic magnet, featured throughout Wharfedale's Heritage Series, has been further improved by incorporating a rear chamber, damped to absorb the output from the back of the dome. This also has the advantage of reducing the resonant frequency of the treble unit to well below the crossover region, allowing full treble detail and harmonics to be revealed without affecting the smoothness of the high-frequency performance.

The midrange and bass cabinet enclosures are both critically damped using a carefully calculated combination of acoustic foam and long hair fibre. This allows the midrange unit to achieve a smooth response down to the upper bass region, enabling an accurate slope to be calculated for the crossover to the bass unit. The latter is itself able, in the damped and ported enclosure, to reach an impressive depth of 25Hz, with clean articulation of bass instruments throughout the whole bass range.



Left The bass driver and offset midrange and treble units fully utilise the size of the new Dovedale's front baffle

The crossover

The electrical crossover between the drive units is of vital importance in a loudspeaker as it not only divides up the frequencies between bass, midrange and treble but also blends the outputs of the drivers into a seamless musical presentation. The crossover components have been chosen for their revealing and transparent character and have been laid out on twin PCBs with careful spacing to avoid electromagnetic interference.

The crossover slopes and the shape of the power response of the new Dovedale has been refined by extensive listening tests using a wide variety of music to make sure that the speaker is simply a conduit between the performers and the listener. As a result, the speaker reveals a lively and transparent level

of reproduction that suits all styles of music at whatever power level you choose. In addition, the impedance characteristic is kind to amplifiers, being a smooth and relatively non-reactive 6 Ohm load with a minimum of 3.6 Ohms. Together with a high sensitivity of 89dB for 1 Watt input, an excellent sonic performance at room-filling volume levels is assured with a wide range of amplifiers.

The cabinet

All Wharfedale's Heritage Series cabinets use a combination of woods to scatter panel resonances rather than having a single, audibly obvious resonant frequency. The same is true of the Dovedale, but Wharfedale has taken its cabinet construction to another level. An inner layer of high-density particle board is bonded to an outer layer of MDF by an inter-layer of high-damping glue; specially chosen figured-grain, real-wood veneers are applied to all surfaces, hand-polished and lacquered to a satin finish. Every pair of Dovedale speakers is matched with extreme care, the standard of finish and attention to detail ensuring their furniture-quality status.



Left Details such as the Wharfedale badge are faithful to the vintage Dovedale 3, but the new version's hefty cabinet is much more impressively engineered and finished

Critical analysis of the performance of each cabinet surface has resulted in the application of precision shaped and positioned internal bracing. This ensures that cabinet resonances are controlled to well below the level of the music signal, allowing you to hear through to the recording without coloration intruding on your listening enjoyment.

Both the midrange unit and treble unit are offset on the front baffle to scatter reflections from the cabinet edges and provide superior focus of the stereo image, and the speakers are provided in handed pairs so that sonic images in the stereo sound field are always accurately placed. The speakers have been fine-tuned acoustically through hundreds of hours of listening tests with all manner of music to ensure the cabinet, crossover and drive units work together coherently and seamlessly.

Speakers of the original Dovedale's vintage were intended to be listened to with the grilles on. This is not always the case with contemporary speakers, but the new Dovedale stays faithful to its classic heritage and has been designed to perform optimally with its protective grilles attached. Removing the grilles will result in a sound that is brighter but less smooth.

The floor stands

Wharfedale has designed a pair of floor stands to match the new Dovedale, with an open frame made of carbon steel and furniture-grade glass inserts at the top and bottom. All but one of the uprights are filled with damping material – the other allows for cable management – with four large stainless-steel spikes at the base. The stand ensures each speaker is positioned at the correct height, as well as reducing bass/floor interactions and providing stable and torsionally rigid support. The package is completed by a set of stainless-steel spike seats and a pair of handling gloves.



Left The Dovedale's dedicated floor stand matches the speaker's exemplary engineering to perfection

Made in the UK

Like many British audio brands, manufacturing of Wharfedale speakers moved to East Asia towards the end of the last century – essential to maintain retail prices at the level the market demanded – while design functions such as R&D and industrial design remained in the UK.

Last year, Wharfedale's parent company IAG unveiled a new 'Made in the UK' initiative to enable the manufacturing of specific products to be brought back to the UK without skyrocketing costs. IAG has expanded its facilities at its base in Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire, incorporating key manufacturing, assembly and finishing processes for specially selected products in addition to the R&D function already located there. A 9,000ft² production facility has been added to the existing building, including a new anechoic chamber, making a total of 25,000ft² of office, lab and manufacturing space.

The first loudspeaker to benefit from this new facility is the highly acclaimed new version of the classic 770 from Mission, Wharfedale's sister brand, and the next is the new Dovedale. This is the first Wharfedale speaker to be officially Made in Britain for many years – a true celebration of British loudspeaker design and manufacturing, as befits Wharfedale's top-of-the-line Heritage model.

A personal journey

Peter Comeau, Wharfedale's Director of Acoustic Design, describes how the new Dovedale project was the culmination of a personal journey that began in the early 1970s:

“I was in my teens when I first built a pair of Dovedales from a kit supplied by Wharfedale that allowed home builders to provide their own cabinets to house the drive units, crossover and internal damping. Naturally, I built the larger 66 litre version, and they remained my favourite loudspeakers for many years, drawing envious comments from friends and acquaintances who heard them. So, you could say that the new Dovedale is a labour of love, looking back to the past and bringing a much-loved speaker to life again, fully re-engineered to meet and exceed contemporary standards.

“At the time the original Dovedale was launched it was not considered a large loudspeaker; most hi-fi enthusiasts realised that a substantial cabinet size was needed to generate a deep and efficient bass performance, and the laws of physics haven’t changed. To achieve good bass extension *and* high sensitivity, it is most sensible to use a large bass unit in a large cabinet volume that is precisely matched to it. The baffle size – the width and height of the cabinet – contributes to speaker sensitivity and affects the accuracy of the transition through bass and midrange.

“To re-imagine the three-way Dovedale for the modern era, we considered the way the original looked and sounded – all the things that listeners loved about it at the time – and redesigned every element to elevate performance whilst remaining faithful to the spirit of the original. We built new drive units, designed an ideally proportioned cabinet to match the drivers, married them with a new crossover and perfected the cabinet’s acoustic performance inside and out. The result is a loudspeaker that exudes vintage style with a high-quality wood veneered finish and a sound that delivers deep, controlled bass, realistic, room-filling scale and captivating musical expression.”

Price and availability

Manufacturing of the new Heritage-edition Wharfedale Dovedale is now under way, in limited quantities to serve the most discerning of music lovers. The first pairs will be available to purchase in March, finished in walnut veneer, at an RRP of £5,500 per pair including the matching floor stands. The speakers and stands are also available separately, at £5,000 per pair and £800 per pair respectively.



Left Wharfedale's new Dovedale is the epitome of contemporary engineering inspired by classic design and impeccable British heritage



Specifications	Wharfedale Dovedale (2023 model)
Speaker type	Three-way standmount
Enclosure type	Bass reflex (twin rear-firing ports)
Treble driver	25mm fabric dome
Midrange driver	135mm woven Kevlar cone
Bass driver	250mm woven Kevlar cone
Sensitivity (2.8V @ 1m)	89dB
Nominal impedance	6 Ohms
Recommended amp power	25-250W
Frequency response (+/-3dB)	36Hz-20kHz
Bass extension (-6dB)	25Hz
Crossover frequencies	560Hz and 2.9kHz
Cabinet volume	8.6L (midrange); 64.7L (main)
Speaker dimensions (HxWxD)	660x370x417mm
Weight (each speaker)	26.2kg
Stand dimensions (HxWxD)	370x370x417mm
Weight (each stand)	9.6kg

W H A R F E D A L E

British loudspeakers have always enjoyed an excellent reputation around the world, and Wharfedale is perhaps the most famous brand of all. Stretching back to 1932, when Wharfedale's founder Gilbert Briggs built his first speaker in the cellar of his Yorkshire home, Wharfedale has been responsible for some of the most important loudspeakers ever produced, introducing many techniques and technologies that became commonplace such as the two-way loudspeaker (invented in 1945) and the use of ceramic magnets (pioneered in 1962). Now in its 91st year, Wharfedale continues its quest to deliver excellent sound quality and value for money with a wide range of class-leading speakers, from the latest iteration of the famous Diamond line – the classic entry point to high-fidelity sound – to the flagship Elysian Series.

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