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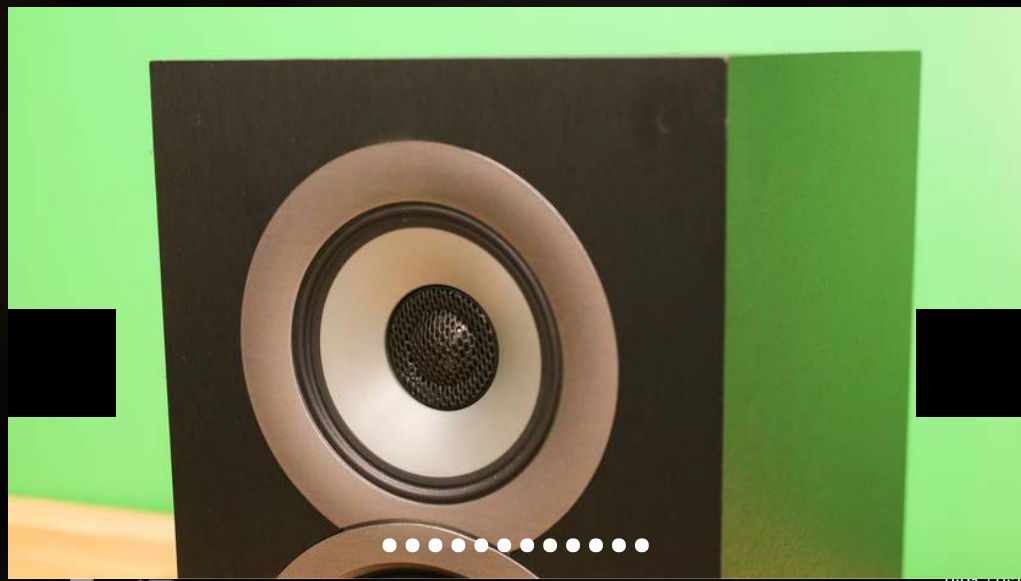
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ELAC Uni-Fi UB5 review:

ELAC Uni-Fi UB5 speakers belt out insanely good sound for the money

By: Ty Pendlebury, Steve Guttenberg / Reviewed: May 16, 2016



\$499.00

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CNET EDITORS' RATING

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ELAC Debut B6

THE GOOD / The ELAC Uni-Fi UB5 loudspeakers offer the best performance of any speaker we've seen for the money. They deliver deep, tight bass; an effortless midrange and sweet highs. The soundstage is wide and unexpectedly deep.

THE BAD / The speakers' vinyl finish isn't all that durable. Low sensitivity and low impedance mean they may require an expensive, high-quality amplifier to sound their best.

THE BOTTOM LINE / Paired with high-quality components, the ELAC Uni-Fi UB5 sounds much better than you have any right to expect from a speaker of this size





Pioneer Elite SP-FBS73-LR

and price.



Yamaha YAS-203



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The hype surrounding speaker designer Andrew Jones' newest creation was deafening.

The saying goes that everyone who saw the Sex Pistols' first gig started a successful band. It seemed to me that everyone who heard Jones' ELAC prototypes -- including ourselves -- wrote a tweet or post or article saying how the new speakers blew them away. The UB5s promised the sonic world that they could rock, they imaged like crazy, and they would be damned affordable.

I can now report that they do indeed live up to the buzz. For \$500, here is a speaker that offers a true three-way design, a compact form factor and true high-fidelity performance. The ELACs produce a stereo image like nothing else at the price, and bass response is superlative. These speakers are both poet laureates and mustachioed headbangers.

The only minor caveat to our recommendation of the ELAC is that the cosmetics could use some work. The design is "love it or hate it", and this isn't helped by a vinyl wrap which is not as resilient as that on other speakers.

Between \$500 and \$1,000 you'll find a lot of performance bookshelf speakers vying for your attention, but on pure value-for-money terms, none we've heard can hold a candle to the the ELAC UB5. The company is clearly on a roll, and based on the showing of the UB5 we're looking forward to hearing the other announced models in the Uni-Fi line such as the floorstanding UF5 (\$999) in the near future.

UK and Australian availability and pricing isn't yet announced but according to reports the UB5 will get a slightly modified design in those countries (including a different, more expensive finish). Current exchange rates convert to £342 or AU\$689.

Design





Sarah Tew/CNET

In the past few years, the true revolution in audio hasn't been the resurgence of vinyl -- which actually never went away -- but instead it's been that "true hi fi" has finally become something most people can afford. Andrew Jones, first at Pioneer and now at ELAC, has been at the forefront of this movement, and the Uni-Fi UB5 is the clearest statement yet of his intent.

Given that the fundamental design is eerily similar to Jones' earlier, similarly priced [Pioneer SP-EBS73-LR](#) it's no surprise that the two sound alike. And as with the less-expensive [ELAC Debut](#), most of the money goes on performance, not on pretty doo-dads. The UB5 is an MDF box -- albeit a much better braced one than before -- which measures roughly 8 inches across, 13 inches high and 11 inches deep.

elac-uni-fi-ub5-13.jpg



The ELAC Uni-Fi UB5 offers a true, three-way design in a compact, affordable loudspeaker.

Sarah Tew/CNET

The star of the Uni-Fi's design is the concentric driver: it consists of a 1-inch soft dome surrounded by a 4-inch aluminum cone. This driver is paired with a 5.25-inch aluminum cone, and the design is rear-ported. As a result, keeping the cabinet at least three feet away from walls will help to contain boominess -- however unlike the competitive [B&W 685s](#), there aren't any foam bungs to contain bass response.

elac-uni-fi-ub5-12.jpg



The vinyl finish isn't very durable

Sarah Tew/CNET

The Uni-Fi is covered in the currently chic "brushed vinyl," and while it looks pretty suave, this material is actually a bit of a problem. We've seen other speakers covered in it -- from both ELAC and Klipsch -- and the material in many cases has either started to warp or lift at the corners. There is one caveat though: we move speakers around a lot and so some of this is from handling in a busy testing studio. That said, even the wrap on one of the UB5 speakers we received had a small ding in the finish at the edge straight out of the box.

In response, Andrew Jones says the model we received wasn't new, but had been used for demonstration purposes previously. In addition, Digital Audio Review reports that the brushed finish will only be used in the US -- the UK (and possibly Australia) will be **getting a painted finish instead** for a slightly higher price. We have reached out to ELAC for confirmation and pricing.

The older, more traditional "wood vinyl" is much harder-wearing, and a speaker featuring this finish would be the preferable option if they are going to be in a high-traffic area.

Sound quality

Here in the CNET listening room and hooked up to our **NAD C 356BEE** stereo integrated amplifier, the Uni-Fi UB5 made a powerful first impression.

The bass went deeper than a speaker armed with just a single 5.25-inch aluminum-cone woofer has any right to. Using a tone generator we explored the Uni-Fi UB5's deep bass extension, first at 50 hertz, then we lowered the frequency down to 40Hz and the Uni-Fi UB5's output dropped, just a bit. We continued down to 30 Hz and the Uni-Fi UB5's output dropped a few more decibels, but those very deep bass frequencies were still very present! That's simply superb on a speaker this size. Mind you, this was in the 14-by-17-foot CNET listening room, larger rooms will soak up more bass energy.

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Ty Pendlebury /

Ty Pendlebury reviews televisions in CNET's New York office. He originally hails from CNET Australia. Ty's interests include gaming, indie music, hi-fi, streaming media, movies, literature, and cycling. [See full bio](#)



Steve Guttenberg /

Ex-movie theater projectionist Steve Guttenberg has also worked as a high-end audio salesman, and as a record producer. Steve currently reviews audio products for CNET and works as a freelance writer for Home Theater, Inner Fidelity, Tone Audio, and Stereophile. [See full bio](#)

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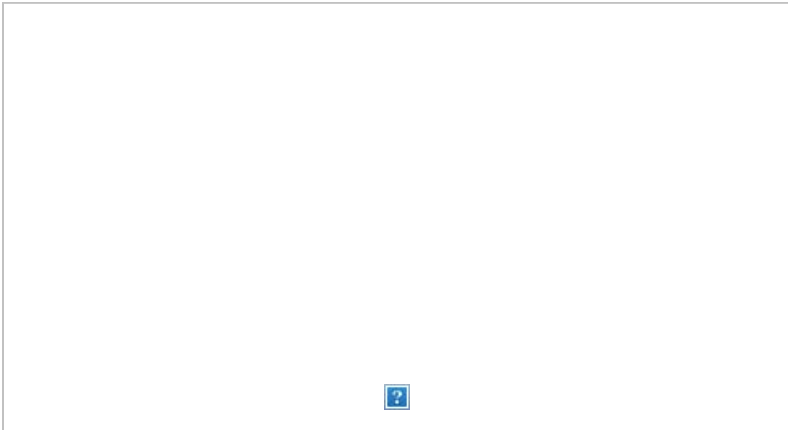
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