

Potent Piegas

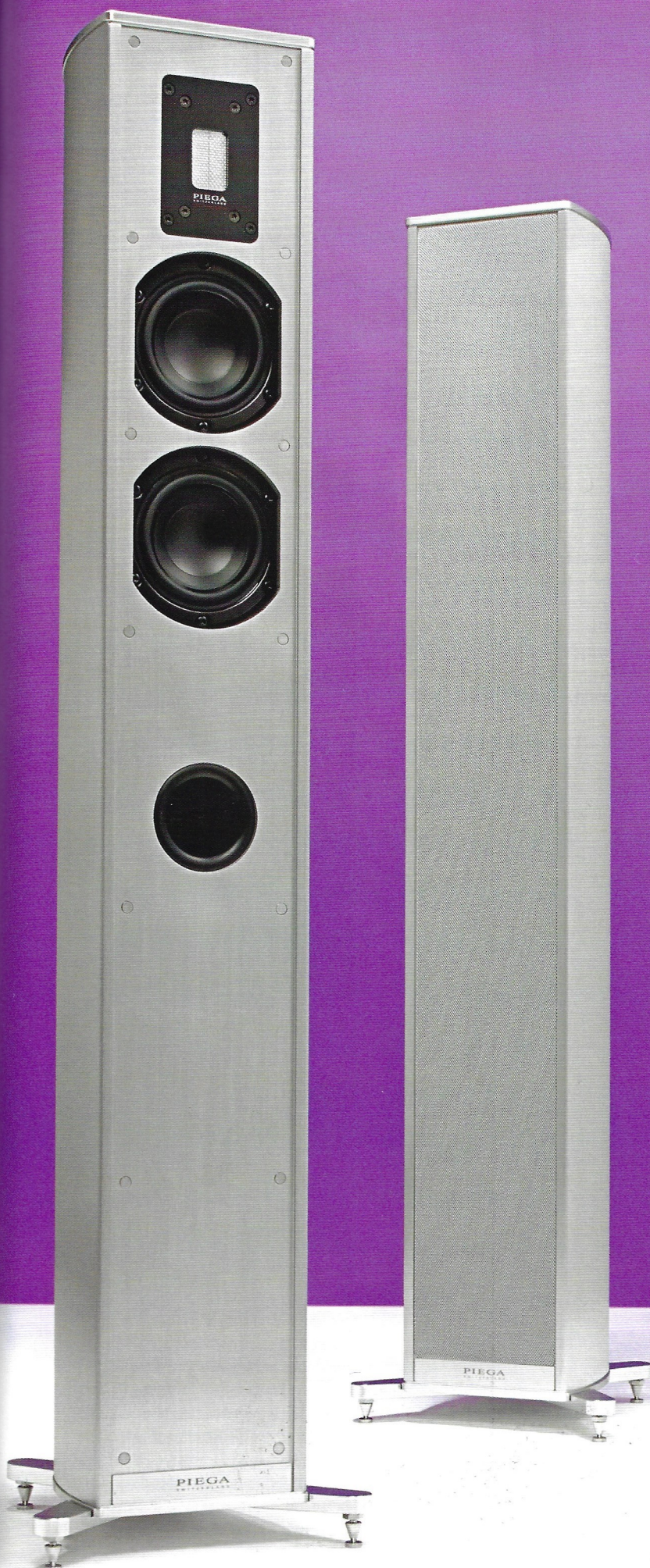
Swiss manufacturer Piega has debuted its first set of active wireless loudspeakers replete with ribbon tweeters. Jon Myles listens in.

Piega of Switzerland are making a concerted effort to re-enter the UK market. I first heard – and was mightily impressed with – their Classic 3.0 standmount (see Hi-Fi World review April 2017). Then came the £5100 Piega Premium 7.1 floorstander which brought a bigger soundstage, plus more power and detail to the equation.

The one thing they had in common was the use of immaculately machined aluminium cabinets and ribbon tweeters – true Swiss engineering.

Ribbon tweeters may very much be in vogue now, but Piega has been using them since 1986. They design and manufacture this unit in-house and are rightly proud of the fact.

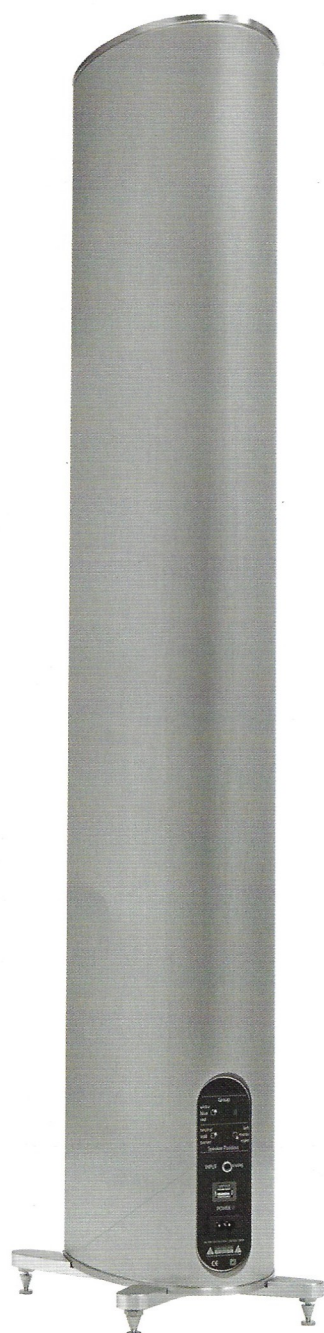
Where the Piega 501 Premium Wireless loudspeaker I am reviewing here differs from other models is it contains an 180 Watt amplifier, Bluetooth connectivity and the option of adding a Piega Connect box



to give analogue inputs and outputs, as well as coaxial and optical digital inputs. There's a standmount model and a larger floorstander as well.

The 501s are tall but slim, measuring 101cm x 16cm x 21cm (H/W/D). Outrigger feet provide stability. Prise off the grille and underneath there's a ribbon tweeter paired with two 120mm MDS drivers for the bass and midrange, as well as a front-firing port to augment the lower registers.

The cabinet is constructed from aluminium and curves towards the back in a C-shape to minimise standing waves. Priced at £3980 a



The slim aluminium C-shaped cabinet is anchored for stability by four sturdy out-rigger feet.



Bluetooth pairing as well as volume control are available from the top of the Control box.

pair they come at the lower end of Piegas's range. A disappointment is the Connect box is separate, adding £499 to the cost. It creates its own Mesh network, so stands apart from your home wi-fi network – useful if you have lots of other wireless devices operating at the same time.

Strangely missing is an app for smartphone or tablet to control the various functions; the loudspeakers prioritise Bluetooth above all else. So if you have a digital input into the Control box and hit Bluetooth on your computer, tablet or smartphone they will instantly take over. It seems a strange way of operating but that's the road Piegas has gone down. It will be interesting to see if they refine this in future.

Such criticisms aside, there is no doubt that the 501s are impressively built with a luxurious look and a narrow profile that will sit easily in any room.

To aid placement a toggle switch on the back tailors the sound via DSP for free standing, wall and corner positioning. Another toggle switch allows the user to assign each loudspeaker as either left or right channel or even put them into mono mode if required.

As to the positioning options, the effects are subtle but noticeable and worth experimenting with. Room dynamics, individual taste and your own ears will decide what suits you best.

Overall then these wireless loudspeakers are a fully featured package with svelte appearance and an air of quality. There's nothing to fault in terms of materials and construction.



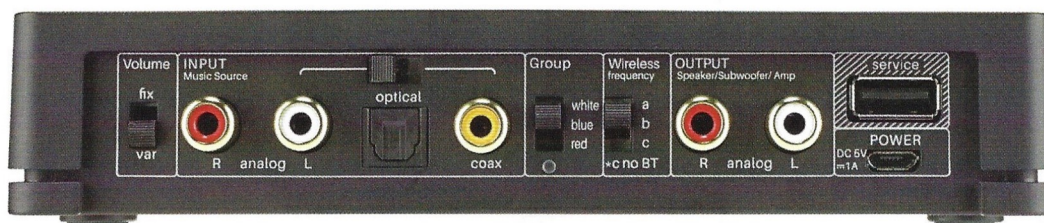
Toggle switches on the rear enable users to tailor the sound for the speaker position, or to be assigned to right or left channel, or mono mode. There is also an optional analogue input, via 3.5mm jack.

SOUND QUALITY

Siting the Piegas in our large listening room, with the toggle switch set to free standing, it was soon evident that these speakers work best firing straight down the room.

The ribbon tweeter is not dominant like those on others can be. Instead it integrates well with the mid-range/bass drivers, producing a balanced, smooth sound.

Playing a variety of tracks via



The (optional) Control box enables analogue and digital inputs, fixed or variable volume control as well as a choice of wireless frequencies.

Bluetooth from an iPhone X there was a CD-like quality to the sound. New Order's 'Touched By The Hand Of God' came across with excellent detail – air and space around the instruments was exceptional and Bernard Sumner's vocals floated into the room in a natural way. I would have liked a little more strength in the lower bass registers – I'm a bit of a bass head on this sort of track. However, those who value accuracy without boosting of bass or treble will instantly take to these wireless 501s.

Next I plugged an Astell&Kern AK120 high-resolution digital audio player into the Connect box via an optical cable and played through the entire 'Murder Ballads' collection by Nick Cave And The Bad Seeds in 24bit/96kHz resolution (the box will actually handle up to 192kHz).

Again reproduction was smooth and balanced with no part of the sonic spectrum over dominant. Kylie Minogue's vocals on 'Where The Wild Roses Grow' were breathlessly beautiful, making full use of the ribbon tweeter to produce a shimmering, deliciously delicate ambience. It was one that stood in stark contrast to Nick Cave's growling, evil vocals that give this track such visceral power.

The Piegas pulled this off as they are basically accurate in all respects. They are not the sonically flashiest loudspeakers you will come across, nor the most exciting at first listening. But they do everything else

so well they are the sort of wireless loudspeakers you could live with for years and never get tired of.

CONCLUSION

Piega has built a solid reputation for producing quality loudspeakers with sturdy aluminium cabinets. Its latest foray into the wireless world does nothing to dent that. A few minor niggles aside, these are loudspeakers that will appeal to those who enjoy their music replayed without any sense of bass or treble lift, suiting small to medium rooms where they will counteract room boom and sound coolly accurate, with delicious ribbon treble.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Frequency response of the Premium 501 measured flat from 35Hz to 16kHz our third-octave analysis of pink noise shows. Phase matching of the ribbon tweeter was good in the vertical plane and its dispersion wide too, in common with ribbons.

Output from the tweeter, from 2.5kHz upward, is smooth and peak free – the benefit of a ribbon – and Piega have kept output in check so the loudspeaker sounds neutral rather than bright.

They have stayed with this philosophy further down the scale where the Premium 501 stays fairly close to the 0dB datum. In consequence, low frequency output has not been raised to add body to the sound so again the Premium 501 retains accuracy. It reaches to a low 35Hz aided by the small port (red trace) before cutting off sharply, so is able to reproduce deep bass. However this is a loudspeaker for small-ish rooms, small bass units being unable to generate a lot of acoustic power so it is unlikely to sound bass heavy in any sense.

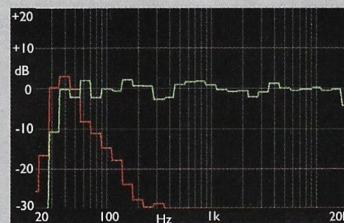
For rooms that boom, as small rooms can do with near-wall placement of a loudspeaker, a rear switch attenuates bass output below 150Hz

when set to the Wall position, our yellow trace shows. There is also a Corner position that introduces heavy bass cut, but corner placement is far from ideal for any hi-fi loudspeaker.

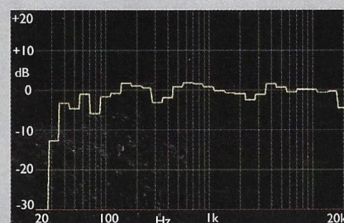
In all the Premium 501 is a well engineered and fundamentally accurate loudspeaker for small-ish rooms (below 16ft long) that offers ribbon treble quality plus deep bass. NK

FREQUENCY RESPONSE

Green - driver output
Red - port output



WALL RESPONSE



Piega's ribbon tweeters are designed and hand-built in-house for best integration with the two mid/bass drivers sitting below – something the company has majored on since its inception.

PIEGA PREMIUM WIRELESS 501 £3908



EXCELLENT - extremely capable

VERDICT

A fully-featured wireless floorstanding loudspeaker that is superbly constructed and has a natural, even sonic balance.

FOR

- wireless connectivity
- aluminium cabinet
- ribbon tweeter
- smooth sounding

AGAINST

- Connect box adds an extra £499 to the cost
- no dedicated app

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