



Piega's Ace loudspeaker range has gone active wireless. **Steve Withers** swaps cables for WiSA

Welcome to a wireless world

Launched in 1986, Swiss loudspeaker brand Piega has a penchant for aluminium enclosures, ribbon tweeters, and the kind of meticulous handcrafted engineering you'd expect from a nation best known for its precision timepieces. And its Ace series ticks off all these boxes.

The range sits towards the lower end of Piega's catalogue, although it's not strictly the entry point, which is reserved for the Classic series. Passive Ace speakers debuted around a year ago (see *HCC* #326), but now there's a wireless upgrade adding two important features – integrated amplification and support for the WiSA transmission standard.

The benefits of active speakers are fairly well known, but in case you're wondering they naturally negate the need for a separate amplifier, making installation and setup easier. Furthermore, the crossovers are optimised, minimal wiring produces less resistance or distortion, and the integrated power modules are designed to specifically match the speaker's drivers, which should lead to a better overall performance.

But what about WiSA? Rather than a dodgy rock band from the 1990s, this is a transmission standard developed by the Wireless Speaker and Audio Association – a multi-member organisation co-founded by Silicon Image and Summit Wireless. Its headline tricks are low latency, rapid synchronisation, and support for up to eight 24-bit/96kHz channels simultaneously. This makes it ideal for multichannel audio, with the Ace series capable of creating a 7.1-channel system.

Poetry in Motion

The Ace Wireless range is composed of three speakers: the floorstanding Ace 50; the compact Ace 30; and the Ace Centre. All of them use extruded aluminium cabinets, upgraded midrange and bass drivers, a revised version of Piega's Air Motion Transformer (AMT) ribbon tweeter, and a sophisticated DSP system capable of handling up to 24-bit/192kHz high-res audio.

The Ace 50 is a thin and elegant three-way tower featuring an AMT tweeter, a 4.75in midrange driver, and four 4.75in woofers – all powered by 200W of built-in grunt. The Ace 30 is a more compact bookshelf loudspeaker that uses a two-way design of AMT tweeter

and 4.75in bass/mid driver combined with 100W of juice, while the Ace Centre also includes 100W but has two bass/mid drivers, one either side of the ribbon tweeter.

The build quality of the speakers is exceptional, with the solid aluminium construction and stylish curved cabinets catching the eye. These Ace Wireless models look and feel high-end, while their relatively svelte proportions make them easy to position around the room (or under the TV, as in the case of the Centre).

There's a choice of three smart finishes: sand-blasted natural aluminium with a grey fabric grille; anodised black with a black metal grille; and high-gloss white with a white metal grille. All are striking, but the black and white finishes carry a slight price premium of £50.

Are you receiving me?

Go for the aluminium finish, and the Ace 50 TX costs £2,090, while the RX version is £1,900 a speaker. The Ace 30 TX will set you back £1,090, and the RX version retails for £900. The Ace Centre is only available as an RX option at £990.

If you're wondering why there are two versions of the Ace 50 and 30, the TX is a transmitter, and the RX is a

AV INFO

PRODUCT: Wireless and active 5.1 speaker system

POSITION: Near entry-level in Piega's range, below the Premium Wireless models

PEERS: System Audio Legend Silverback

1. Okay, there really should be mains power cables here...

2. All Piega's Ace speakers, including the two-way Ace 30, come in white, aluminium or black



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receiver. Which of these you choose depends on the type of setup you're considering, but basically the TX model sends lossless hi-res audio wirelessly to its RX sibling.

For this reason the TX speakers include Wi-Fi, using an external antenna, WiSA, DLNA and Bluetooth 4.2, plus Ethernet, HDMI eARC, optical and coaxial S/PDIF and analogue stereo connections. The RX models offer Wi-Fi, WiSA, an analogue mono input and audio in/out through balanced audio via RJ45 connectors. Both versions have switchable wireless functionality, a boundary gain compensation switch, and a USB firmware/service port.

For a simple stereo configuration you'll need one of each, with the TX speaker acting as the main hub and wirelessly transmitting the other channel to the RX speaker. For this reason the TX speakers not only have that HDMI eARC connector, but also support for Spotify Connect, Google Chromecast, and Roon.

However, when it comes to multichannel you only use RX designated speakers that receive the surround sound signal for each channel from a WiSA-certified source (including the £200 SoundSend hub, which I used) or WiSA-enabled TV (LG is an adopter of the technology).

This might all sound rather complicated by I found Piega's Ace system ridiculously easy to setup. All you need to do is follow the instructions on your WiSA TV or hub, and all the speakers pair automatically.

For this audition I was using two Ace 50 RX floorstanders, a pair of Ace 30 RX speakers, an Ace Centre RX, and a Piega Sub Medium in a 5.1 configuration, although you could add two more speakers for a full 7.1-channel system if you have the budget and desire.

The Sub Medium is a dual-driver model with a pair of 8in woofers, and something of a looker. It has an attractive cylinder/plinth stand design, aluminium construction (natch), and the same choice of finishes as the Ace speakers. It also supports WiSA, allowing it to pair seamlessly with the other units in the system. Pricing is £1,750 or £1,950, depending on the finish.

Socket to 'em

Before we move on to performance, let's address the elephant in the room: while this system is wireless, it's not wire-less. Since we're dealing with active speakers, you'll need to plug each one into a power socket. In the case of a 7.1 system that's seven speakers, one sub, and possibly a WiSA source, making a total of nine plugs – that's a lot of sockets for the average room.

However, assuming you can find enough sockets to plug everything in, you'll be rewarded with a system that feels responsive and cohesive. The use of identical tweeters and



drivers throughout ensures a tonal balance, while the sub delivers a solid foundation of bass thanks to its twin woofer design, allowing it to dig deeper than its relatively *bijou* appearance would suggest (although the rated frequency response of 18Hz is probably optimistic).

This ability to project a larger presence than you'd expect extends to all the speakers in this range, with the Ace 50 in particular making great use of its three-way design to anchor a solid soundstage at the front of the room. These speakers might be slim and stylish, but they deliver plenty of scale, while the Class D amplification ensures there's sufficient headroom.

There's an effortless charm to these speakers, combined with a smoothness and sense of precise detail coming from those AMT tweeters. Listening to the new 5.1 mix of Pink Floyd's *Animals* reveals all the subtleties in this 45-year-old recording, from the angry vocals of *Dogs*, to the squealing sound effects at the start of *Pigs*, to Gilmour's masterful attacking guitar work in *Sheep*. Through the entire album, the Ace system produces a clean and focused delivery.

Fluid fashion

The mid-range is crystal clear, while the higher frequencies are free of any sibilance or brittleness, meaning the overall presentation never feels strained and is always composed. There's an undeniable musicality,

but the bass is also well-controlled, in part because the floorstanders are able to dig deep themselves, but also because the entire system hands over to the subwoofer in a fluid fashion.

This low-end prowess is perfectly demonstrated with the Blu-ray of *Free Fire*, where the protracted shootout that takes up most of the film's running time is handled with aplomb. Or should that be a bomb? The heavy machine-



gun fire benefits from a powerful percussive hit that punctuates each discharge, while the integrated soundfield sends ricochets wildly around the room, and envelops you in booming echoes. The centre speaker delivers the dialogue with a focused clarity, while the ribbon tweeters precisely pick out the tinkle of shell casings falling to the warehouse floor.

I'll admit to being initially sceptical about the WiSA transmission standard's ability to create a robust multichannel system free of any latency, but during testing

'The mid-range is crystal clear, while the higher frequencies are free of any sibilance or brittleness'

the Ace speakers didn't put a foot wrong. The soundstage was solid, the placement and steering of effects was flawless, and the bass was perfectly integrated. There were no dropouts or loss of connection, so at no point was I aware of the system actually being wireless.

Power pushers

The active nature of the speakers also plays its part, giving the delivery a dynamic quality, with plenty of sonic snap. This Ace system doesn't have the unruly swagger of larger speakers and more powerful amps, but there's a polished maturity to the performance that will please fans of more subtle and complex soundtracks.

Amazon's new Tolkien show *The Rings of Power* has a budget equal to the GDP of a small country, and this is evidenced by one of the best soundtracks ever to grace a TV series. While Piega's 5.1 system can't take full advantage of the show's Dolby Atmos mix, it still gives an excellent account of itself.

The opening prologue of the first episode manages to move from a detailed voiceover to the subtle sounds of children playing by a river, followed by the roar of fire-breathing dragons, and a battle that rages during a thunderstorm. The Piega speakers pick out all of the layered sound effects with skill, producing a grown-up sense of delivery and an accomplished performance.

As the series progresses, there's plenty of audio highlights that give the Ace system the chance to shine, from the cavernous dwarven halls of Moria, to the rustic ramblings of the Harfoots. The sixth episode is a standout, with a full-on battle followed by a pyroclastic cloud that this system handles with a combination of verve and scale. Audio highs are projected with a silky smoothness to rival the best milk chocolate. The result is a detailed soundscape that perfectly recreates the rich sonic textures of Middle Earth, and renders them in a balanced, controlled and often energetic fashion.

Piega's Ace speakers are therefore undoubtedly a class act, but there's no denying this 5.1 system is an expensive



proposition. For the price you could buy a seriously good package of AV receiver and traditional wired passive speakers, plus you'd have the added benefit of room correction and decoding of object-based audio formats.

Ace's high

Here you're paying a premium for some admittedly gorgeous and

well-made speakers with wireless connectivity, and thanks to its employment of the WiSA standard, setup and operation are hassle-free. So if a lifestyle-friendly and cable-free installation is important to you, and you've got access to plenty of power sockets, you'll be rewarded with an ace speaker system that sounds as stylish as it looks ■

SPECIFICATIONS

Ace 50 RX
DRIVE UNITS: 1 x AMT (Air Motion Transformer) tweeter; 1 x 4.75in MDS mid-range; 4 x 4.75in MDS woofers **ENCLOSURE:** Sealed **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 30Hz-25kHz **ONBOARD POWER (CLAIMED):** 200W **DIMENSIONS (INCL. PEDESTAL):** 250(w) x 1,050(h) x 250(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 14kg **FEATURES:** WiSA enabled; boundary gain compensation; 24-bit/192kHz; analogue audio in/out

Ace Centre RX
DRIVE UNITS: 1 x AMT (Air Motion Transformer) tweeter; 2 x 4.75in MDS bass/mid drivers **ENCLOSURE:** Sealed **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 35Hz-25kHz **ONBOARD POWER (CLAIMED):** 100W **DIMENSIONS:** 484(w) x 252(h) x 274(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 5kg **FEATURES:** WiSA enabled; boundary gain compensation; 24-bit/192kHz; analogue audio in/out

Ace 30 RX
DRIVE UNITS: 1 x AMT (Air Motion Transformer) tweeter; 1 x 4.75in MDS bass/mid driver **ENCLOSURE:** Sealed **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 35Hz-25kHz **ONBOARD POWER (CLAIMED):** 100W **DIMENSIONS:** 160(w) x 220(h) x 140(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 3.4kg **FEATURES:** WiSA enabled; boundary gain compensation; 24-bit/192kHz; analogue audio in/out

Sub Medium
DRIVE UNITS: 2 x 8in woofers **ENCLOSURE:** Sealed **ONBOARD POWER (CLAIMED):** 240W **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 18-160Hz **REMOTE CONTROL:** No **DIMENSIONS:** 465(w) x 270(h) x 230(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 17.5kg **FEATURES:** Wireless option (WiSA-enabled); RCA and RJ45 inputs and outputs; level control; 50-160Hz crossover; 180-degree phase switch; high pass filter

TESTED WITH



FREE FIRE: This '70s-set action drama directed by Ben Wheatley depicts an arms sale gone disastrously wrong and the subsequent massive shootout. The Blu-ray offers a powerful 5.1 mix that gives each weapon its own sonic signature, while the cavernous location keeps the rears alive with echoes and ricochets.

3. For a multichannel system, RX (receiver) cabinets are used – all feature three-stage boundary gain compensation

4. Piega's speakers are hand-built at its Zurich plant

5. The cylindrical Sub Medium features dual 8in bass drivers

HCC VERDICT ★★★★★

Piega Ace Wireless 5.1
 → £8,340 → www.piega.ch

WE SAY: This classy if pricey wireless system is easy to setup and sounds great, with a cohesive soundstage and polished delivery that's free of any latency... as well as any cables.