



Bellissimo!

The dream is that Italian speakers sound as good as they look. **David Vivian** thinks the new Aviator Ghibli gets as close as any

A standmount speaker with thick, rounded, age-dried Italian walnut cheeks elegantly book-ending a baffle dressed in a coating that resembles fine rain leather, the Chario Aviator Ghibli is impossibly gorgeous. There isn't a pointy cabinet corner in sight. As premium speakers go, Italian supermodels like the Chario have snapped the bonds of mere stereotype (unavoidable pun) to become arguably hi-fi's best-looking cliché.

Sonus faber, Diapason, Franco Serblin and Rosso Fiorentino to name just a few, they all appear to be at it, trading shamelessly on Italianate as a touchstone for ineffable style, exotic materials and sumptuous luxury – elements just as integral to the country's fashion, furniture and automotive industries. Whatever your

take on this – eschewing variations on an MDF box for speakers that are more like exquisitely hand-crafted musical instruments oozing heritage cues – it invariably excites preconceptions about sound quality. Although exterior style and realised sound are largely separate, I imagine

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anything approaching cool, bright and breezy would be such a shuddering psychological disconnect, potential customers seduced by the lush Latin aesthetic, well, they wouldn't be potential customers anymore.

DETAILS
PRODUCT
Chario
Aviator Ghibli
ORIGIN
Italy
TYPE
2-way standmount
loudspeaker
WEIGHT
8kg each
DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
180 x 400 x 270mm
FEATURES
● 38mm silk dome
tweeter with
waveguide
● 130mm
mid/bass driver
● Quoted sensitivity:
87dB/1W/1m (8ohm)
DISTRIBUTOR
RAD UK
WEBSITE
chariohifi.com
raduk.co.uk

This is why up-market Italian speakers tend to share a sonic profile that, in its basic parameters at least, is warm, rich and smooth, complimenting the luxury expressed by the cabinetry and mirroring the performance of the tube amps they are frequently partnered with.

Two engineers at the University of Milan – Carlo 'Charlie' Vincenzetto and Mario Marcello Murace – founded their speaker company in 1975 and called it Chario, a convenient splicing of their first names, well Carlo's go-by anyway. Rather than produce yet another by-the-numbers flavour of rosy tonal cosiness, they were more interested in exploring how speakers marshal the air around them and how the human body perceives the result.

Right away, there are points of difference, the large, treated silk dome tweeter and its waveguide sitting below the 130mm mid/bass driver and looking more like a small dome midrange. In a way, it is. Made-in house like the mid/bass driver, the under-hung tweeter isn't that unusual in configuration, but its size (38mm) and low 1,270Hz crossover point are. Chario's reasoning is that human hearing is relatively insensitive to phase distortion between 800Hz and

1,500Hz, but above 1,500Hz, the situation flips and it becomes the most sensitive, hence the jumbo tweeter and low crossover. Chario talks of the "tonal cohesion" between the two drivers.

The Aviator Ghibli is a ported design – in this case firing downwards from the base. Usually, with this kind of porting, there's an integral plinth panel beneath to fix the boundary distance and thus optimally tune the port's output. Not so here. It's either £4,130 with the dedicated stand – a heavy baseplate and four very tall, spindly metal pillars on which the speaker rests, effectively removing any boundary for the port. Or, alternatively, with cone-style feet screwed into the base fixings and the speaker placed on a hard surface, the boundary is about an inch away. Suffice to say, it makes a difference – which I'll come to in a moment.

Sound quality

The throughput of new speakers for review in my smaller listening room is constantly busy, supplemented by those I know well and pull out of storage for reference purposes. Among those and keeping everything honest is Falcon Acoustics' Gold Badge LS3/5a (HFC 470), which pretty much set the standard for midband realism and imaging. The review newbies have invariably all sat in a relatable spectrum that reaches either side of the Falcon, making it easier to get some sort of early handle on the worth of their sonic chops.



The stand is suitably stylish and a worthy sonic addition



If you're happy to push the budget slightly, there are some interesting alternatives. **OePhi's Transcendence 2 (HFC 514)** could hardly provide a bigger contrast, majoring on transparency, timing and thrills. **Audio Physic's Spark 6** and **Fyne Audio's F1-8 (HFC 496 and 473)** plough their own paths technically and stylistically and their ability to blend standmount and floorstander strengths are rare assets. Other options worth adding to your shortlist include **KEF's Reference 1** and **Audiovector's R1 Arreté (HFC 414 and 520)**. All are great performers with huge insight.

That doesn't work with the Aviator Ghibli. Even considering Italian speaker makers' penchant for gently warmed-up naturalism and rose-tinted perspectives, the Chario is unlike any speakers of recent acquaintance or, indeed, any I can recall, with reserves of smoothness, suavity and charm so deep it'll make George Clooney blush. Its fatigue factor is so low, marathon listening sessions might conceivably never end.

All good, then? Up to a point and somewhat contingent on what you think a standmount speaker should sound like. We can dispense with familiar hi-fi descriptors such as explicit detail, crystalline clarity, mid-forward balance, pacey drive and attack. If you think that's a good thing and have never seen ear-to-ear with horn designs, the comfortably furnished Chario wheelhouse will be

The Chario bestrides the line between art and science with admirable assurance

an enticing destination. That isn't to say the Ghibli can't thrash, rock and dub, just that it sounds a bit posh – like Jacob Rees-Mogg reciting Eminem's *I'm Back*.

Brilliantly produced, keyboard-led jazz fusion of the Jeff Lorber persuasion, on the other hand, has seldom sounded better. A Tidal stream of *Spanish Joint* from his latest album, *Elevate*, has lashings of colour, texture and unshowy inner detail. Rhythmically lucid and surefooted, it keys into Lorber's mid-tempo funk securely with solid, well-shaped bass free from the all-too-common presence hump, but delivering impressive weight and extension.

Switching to Joni Mitchell and *Shades Of Scarlet Conquering* from *The Hissing Of Summer Lawns* on original pressing vinyl, midband ambience is beautifully rendered and the massed string tone simply exquisite. Although this track has never been a shining example of the recording arts, Joni's vocal has a real sense of flesh-and-blood presence seldom realised by most standmount speakers in my experience. Nor does the multi-layered complexity of Pat Metheny's *Imaginary Day* present any problems for the Ghibli, the track sounding effortlessly coherent and all-of-a-piece yet just as easy to pick apart. The speaker's powers of separation and discrimination don't at first seem exceptional, but it's



more that they're achieved with real finesse and expressed within a truly spacious soundstage.

I must mention that all these impressions are noted with the Ghiblis on their tall stands, relieving the downward-firing port of any nearby boundary bass reinforcement. With them wearing the supplied cone feet and placed on my regular 24in Slate Audio stands, bass is thicker, slower and less textural but rears up short of being bloated. I prefer the Ghibli's output on the dedicated stands but, if they can't be accommodated, the 'bookshelf' option by no means trashes the design's myriad talents, adding still more body and heft to the sound.

Conclusion

Achingly Italian, the Aviator Ghibli standmount speaker bestrides the line between art and science with admirable assurance. Fans of hard rock and associated genres may feel the need to look elsewhere for their kicks but, for everything else, the baby Chario Aviator sounds sweet, natural and rather fabulous ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★
BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★
EASE OF DRIVE ★★★★★

LIKE: A work of art that sounds just as lovely as it looks; build and finish
DISLIKE: Needs the lofty matching stands to sound its best
WE SAY: Great sound and beautiful appearance – the best of both worlds

OVERALL

★★★★★