

A Very Intriguing Newcomer

THE FICION F200SE

By Jeff Dorgay

Just when you think you've seen everything, something new and exciting catches your interest. When I was wandering the halls a few months ago at the VSAC show here in my hometown of Vancouver, Washington (five minutes from Downtown Portland, Oregon for those of you that have no idea where Vancouver is) I wasn't seeing much that caught my eye until I walked in the room where these understated little speakers were playing. While we never give "best sound of show" awards, these speakers were easily the most intriguing thing I heard at the VSAC show. I took a business card and filed it away for good measure. A month later when Robert Stephens, their local sales representative sent me an email to put together a review, it came front and center again.





Designer Peigen Jiang lives just outside of Seattle and has the speakers assembled in China. There are two models, the one you see here (the SE version) which retails for \$3850 and is made from laminated bamboo, while the standard F200 is made from MDF. The Efcion website claims the SE version has "slightly tighter bass response, due to the additional stiffness of the bamboo cabinet." External veneer is available in Cherry or Santo Rosewood. The matching stands are another \$400. Should you be placing these speakers in a bit more design conscious environment, I suggest the factory stands, they are very attractive.

The F200's have an understated style and are wider at the bottom (10") than the top (8") about 14" deep and 17" tall. Solidly built, they weigh about 35 pounds each, with some very heavy duty binding posts on the back that allow for bi-wiring. They feature a 6.5" woofer with a 2" voice coil that is crossed over to a ribbon tweeter at 2khz. A black grille is included, but the speakers are so well finished and attractive, I can't imagine ever using the grilles. Sensitivity is claimed to be 88db and our listening confirmed that they present a fairly easy load to drive, working with everything in our amplifier arsenal equally well.

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Break In and Setup

The brand new pair I had was stiff out of the box, but don't panic, they just need some hours on the clock. The F200's eased up quite a bit after the first 24 hours of continuous play and were a lot better at the 100 hour mark, but really need about 200 hours to sound their best. Leave them play while you are at work and in a week or two, you will be ready to fully enjoy them. Don't be discouraged by what you hear straight out of the box.

We make it a point to audition every speaker that comes by with a very wide range of amplifiers, both in power and in design to see where possible synergies and/or incompatibilities exist. Any good tube or solid state amplifier in the 30-60 watt range should be more than adequate to make magic with these speakers, but as they are quite revealing, the quality of your source components will determine your final outcome. *(continued)*

NEW PRODUCT

SKY SERIES

signal cables

Sky Series Signal Cables: An Evolution in Signal Cable Science!

A PATENTED BREAKTHROUGH IN SIGNAL GEOMETRY!

The new Sky Series Signal Cables utilize Shunyata Research's extremely complex, hand wound Helix Geometry braid; granted a patent for its ability to minimize the effects of electromagnetic interference, reactance and self-induced distortion. The dual helix, longitudinally offset, counter-rotating geometry eliminates the self-induced distortions that plague other cable designs.

All signal cables have a characteristic resistance and reactance (capacitive and inductive), which is essentially a simple type of filter. Resistance is a linear function and simply reduces signal level while reactance is much more destructive to signal integrity in that it is frequency dependent. It skews amplitude and phase as frequency increases.

Conventional cable geometries dictate that a cable must be either capacitive or inductive, if one is reduced the other increases and vice-versa. By all accounts, the ideal cable would have virtually zero resistance, zero inductance and zero capacitance — which of course is impossible to achieve, but it should be the design goal. No cable should be designed to be either capacitive or inductive.

Shunyata Research's patented Helix Geometry solves the cable reactance problem. Wide conductor spacing and 90-degree crossing angles, minimize capacitance. Counter-rotating helices that are longitudinally offset create disparate EFF (electromagnetic flux fields) that minimize inductive reactance! Only the Helix Geometry achieves both low capacitive reactance AND low inductive reactance.

By virtually eliminating the self-induced distortion inherent in all other cable designs, Shunyata Research's hand braided Helix Geometry Cables have brought about universally documented endorsements from the world's foremost recording engineers, studios and sound professionals, as well as the industry's toughest critics and most renowned electronics manufacturers.



A DEFINABLE ADVANCE IN CONDUCTOR SCIENCE

After 3 years of development and testing, Shunyata Research introduces Cohergenic Conductors. Cohergenic Conductors are the result of a process that creates a permanent inter-molecular alignment of the copper molecules within a conductor. During the extrusion process or the casting process of copper wire, the wire is in a molten to semi-molten state. In this state, the molecules are free to move in relation to one another. As the copper cools and hardens the molecules are locked into place in a relatively random orientation.

The Cohergenic Process creates an electrical alignment of the molecules through the use of a Shunyata Research designed electromagnet. The electromagnet's powerful electromagnetic field induces an electrical current within the conductor while the conductor cools, locking the molecules into electrical alignment — PERMANENTLY.

UNIQUE ALPHA CRYOGENIC PROCESS

All connectors are treated with Shunyata Research's exclusive performance enhancing Alpha Cryogenic Process. This treatment uses a modified atmospheric condition during the cryogenic treatment process that improves upon the effects of conventional nitrogen based cryo treatments.

PATENTED SCIENCE — A REVELATION IN PERFORMANCE

The Sky Series' advances in Helix Geometry, proprietary Cohergenic Conductors and the exclusive Alpha Cryogenic Process deliver performance in recording and entertainment systems that simply must be experienced to be appreciated.

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SHUNYATA RESEARCH
THE QUIET COMPANY

Even in the studio, with my reference Conrad-Johnson ACT2 pre-amplifier and Premier 350 power amplifier, the F200's held their own.

I ultimately settled on the combination of 30.2 Signature amplifier and Isabella Preamplifier (with built in DAC) from Red Wine Audio in my living room system once the break in was complete, as I had been using this combination with my Harbeth compact 7ES-3 speakers for quite some time. I had excellent luck with Empirical Design 422 interconnects between amp and preamp, Empirical Design 213 speaker cables and ALO Audio's newest digital cable from the Sooloos to the Isabella. As these are both battery powered, no upgraded power cords were necessary and a Shunyata Guardian 4 took care of power for the Sooloos. A pair of 24" Sound Anchor stands kept the speakers firmly planted on the hardwood floor.

A Very Interesting Little Two Way

Having owned Apogee speakers as well as later model Magneplanars with ribbon tweeters, I am definitely fond of the speed that a ribbon tweeter can offer, though they sometimes come off harsh sounding. The crossover in the F200 does a perfect job of mating to the 6" woofer, and I'm sure a big part of the seamless sound these speakers exhibit is due to the small woofer being fast enough to keep up with the ribbon tweeter.

The Red Wine gear is very high quality and very revealing of source components, however the 30.2 Signature amplifier is sensitive to what you mate it with.

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It's magic with the right speakers but can either come off as a little thin or a little dull with the wrong speakers, much like the VTA on your turntable improperly set. Happily, the match with the F200's was fantastic, just like it was with my Harbeths. Though my living room is a hell hole for acoustics, British monitors seem to do very well there and now I can add the F200 to my list.

The Harbeth Compact 7 is one of my favorite speakers in the world at any price, so the F200's were facing some stiff competition indeed. After a few months of listening on a very wide range of program material, I am very pleased with the F200's but it is a completely different listening experience than the Harbeths.

I've had a lot of small two-ways in my living room over the past five years and I have to say the the F200 joins my short list that includes the B&W 805S and the Harbeth Compact 7. All three of these speakers have great virtues, precious few weaknesses and in a small room with the right gear can offer up a very large helping of what a much larger system can do at modest volume levels.

Dynamic and Versatile

Even with the 30 watts of the Red Wine power, I was able to really crank the F200's. Substituting the 30.2 for my Nagra PSA power amplifier with 100 watts per channel on tap, I could blast these speakers in my 11 x 17 foot living room with no sign of strain. Even with the PSA's clipping lite flickering on occasion when I was playing Van Halen, the F200's showed no sign of distress.

Thanks to the Isabella's built in DAC, I used the Soolos Music Server as a source, so I could cover a lot of musical ground in a very short period of time. I now have a "test" playlist that has about 100 favorite songs on it from classical to rock with everything in between which makes it very easy to get a read on a new component.

This speaker has a neutral character, but is very revealing as well. Where the Harbeths are the slightest bit forgiving, the F200's were not with the solid state system. I was able to get a more mellow overall sound, switching to the Conrad Johnson MV75 power amplifier, so these are very versatile speakers indeed.

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eficion F200

Serial Number:

Rated Impedance:

Rated Power:

Sensitivity:

Frequency response:

www.eficion.com

8 ohms

150W

88dB/W/m

38Hz-40kHz

High

Low

in China

I had the same results with the Mystere ia21 integrated amplifier, which is all tubes, so if you want a bit more romantic sound, these speakers are neutral enough that you can tune your system either way.

That ribbon was very clean through the midrange. Listening to a ton of male and female vocals, I found the midrange very natural and lifelike. KD Lang, Tom Waits and Tom Jones sounded as they should. Where I felt the F200's really shine is with very dynamic, punchy music. This speaker is very fast overall and whenever I listened to anything with a lot of natural attack and decay. Zooming through my favorite Brand X, Dixie Dregs and Joe Satriani albums at fairly high levels proved that the F200's could keep their composure when the music got complex.

These speakers have a claimed lower limit of 38hz, and with a little bit of corner loading in my living room, they did a very impressive job when I was listening to Peter Gabriel's *Security* and *Into the Labyrinth* by Dead Can Dance. I'm pretty confident that whatever music you enjoy, the F200's will keep you very happy. Their limitations are very few; they won't produce Earthshattering SPL's and they don't offer that last octave of bass response, but neither do any of its competitors. This is another great example of a designer concentrating on getting the main 85-90% of where we listen right, rather than sacrificing overall quality for that last bit of bass extension at this price level. If you want that last bit of bass, these speakers will mate up exceptionally well with any good subwoofer.

A Great Little Speaker From The Pacific Northwest

Much as I feel like if you take a comparable Lexus and BMW for a test drive, you will probably respond more strongly to one than the other. While the Harbeth is more organic in presentation, the F200 is a bit more detailed and extended on top. If you are someone who needs a very resolving, high performance speaker to work in a small space and you do not like the Harbeth/Spendor/ProAc way of doing things, I can't suggest the F200 highly enough. With this kind of a first effort, we sincerely hope the people at Eficion join the ranks of great speaker builders as time goes on. ●

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