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Spacy

Jörg Dames

14–16 minutes



Red is the colour of love, green the colour of hope – and some people are actually said to turn green with envy. Which I would absolutely understand when looking at 'my' golden-yellow Pro-Ject Speaker Box 12 E Carbon – though the speakers themselves can't help their colour. And I'm sure it works just as well with the other available variants, such as pine green or steel blue. Yes, I have to sing the praises of Pro-Ject (https://www.audiotra.de/) right from the start for these bold, spacey colours. Especially as the speaker's lacquer finish looks surprisingly high-quality, the baffle isn't marred by any unnecessary holes (the grilles attach magnetically), and the drivers fit neatly and flush with it. No, whilst the Box 12 E Carbon speakers are kept visually simple and cost a comparatively modest €1,199, still, it's clear that they're not skimping on anything here. Before we take our first real listen in the listening room, let's

let’s take a closer look at these two Austrian treats.

The cabinet of the Pro-Ject Box 12 E Carbon is just as slim as the price: the one-metre-tall speakers are barely over 16 centimetres wide. That looks good, but it also means the cones can only be six and a half inches in diameter. We’ll see what the bass reproduction has to say about that. After all, both cones are responsible for the low frequencies, with the lower one handling bass reproduction exclusively and the upper one, according to Pro-Ject, being crossed over at 1.7 kilohertz. The tweeter of the two-and-a-half-way system therefore has a rather above-average frequency range to cover and must cope with the corresponding load during operation.



The baffle of the one-metre-tall Pro-Ject Speaker Box 12 E Carbon is just 16 centimetres wide

Unexpectedly thoughtful – the choice of drivers

Incidentally, according to Pro-Ject, the final selection of drivers and the decision to use a glass-fibre carbon composite as the diaphragm material and a ‘fast’ silk dome were made with the help of ‘a listening panel comprising various listeners with different taste preferences’. So, when it comes to development, the Austrians rely not only on all the usual measurement and simulation techniques but above all on their ears; this pragmatic approach has already proven its worth with the long-running favourite, the Speaker Box 5. Hmm, given the price range of the Pro-Ject Speaker Box 12 E Carbon, I find such an approach almost unexpectedly thoughtful… a kiss for that.

Slim, yet stable

I’ve strayed a bit from the point, as I haven’t actually finished discussing the ‘slim’ design yet. Where are the outriggers? Otherwise it’ll be too wobbly, which not only smears the sound but is also dangerous for the cat. Fortunately, though, it can’t scratch the bottom driver so easily, given its roughly 70-centimetre clearance from the floor. And what are those odd plugs down there on the back of the speakers? Please don’t pull them off, because then sand will spill out of the speakers. That’s right, the Pro-Ject Speaker Box 12 E Carbon has sand inside. This absorbs vibrations that would otherwise affect the sound quality and also provides good stability. You’d have to tilt the 15-kilogram cabinets sideways by at least 20 degrees to make them fall over.



The 15-kilogram weight of each Pro-Ject Speaker Box 12 E Carbon is largely due to the sand filling in the lower section of the cabinet, as indicated by a 'plug' on the outside

Speaking of the cabinet: if you tap the Pro-Ject Speaker Box 12 E Carbon, you'll notice that the wall thickness isn't excessively high – Pro-Ject specifies 22 millimetres – but the resonances are kept neatly in check by the internal bracing and chambers. The base area even sounds comparatively 'dead' due to the sand filling.

The cones are bolted to the cabinet; if you want to access the bolts, you can try carefully removing the stylish, magnetically attached grilles. The tweeters, on the other hand, are glued in place, which may initially bother some people, but is certainly welcome from a sonic perspective: where there are no bolts, nothing can come loose or develop a leak. I recall that, precisely because of the excellent sound quality, the English manufacturer Neat Acoustics, for example, used to deliberately experiment with and work using glued-in drivers – only the servicing eventually became too labour-intensive.





The magnetically attached grilles on the cones fit together perfectly, and indeed the overall build quality of the Pro-Ject Speaker Box 12 E Carbon is very high – particularly given its price range

Pro-Ject Speaker Box 12 E Carbon – Listening Test & Comparisons

Normally, I don't just assess the cabinet, but focus my sound descriptions primarily on the individual sound parameters, in the hope of ultimately obtaining a meaningful profile that clearly highlights the qualities of the respective audio component. However, this approach doesn't quite do justice to the comparatively affordable Pro-Ject Speaker Box 12 E Carbon: I find that these dainty floorstanding speakers have something particularly refined about their sound when listened to as a whole – especially given their class. They shine with an overall performance that is more than the sum or cross-section of the individual disciplines. More on this in the test conclusion.

But first, let's set the Pro-Ject speakers up in an open space (wall clearance > 75 centimetres), align them without any wobble (I use Audioplan anti-spikes; the speakers otherwise come with metal spikes), angle them almost on-axis (that's how I prefer it acoustically) – and step curiously onto the

listening experience:

Already quite mature – the bass



The Pro-Ject Speaker Box 12 E Carbon in the listening room

Why buy floorstanding speakers rather than compact ones? Usually, of course, because of the supposedly greater bass power. Looking at the two small 6.5-inch drivers on the slim 16.5-centimetre-wide baffle of these dainty floorstanding speakers, some listeners are bound to have their doubts. Only to be all the more pleasantly surprised after the first few bars: I wouldn't have credited the Box 12 E Carbon with such depth and bass impact, which clearly goes beyond the level of compact speakers. Yes, it certainly sounds properly grown-up: typical rock songs are built on such a powerful foundation that none of the emotion is lost. And the Pro-Ject Box 12 E Carbon handles relevant drum and bass or dubstep tracks so effectively that I spontaneously cast a respectful glance at the narrow baffle.

Anyone who really wants more in terms of volume should look straight away at

look for significantly larger floorstanding speakers, dedicated fun speakers or certain active systems. Higher volume handling is then often included, although the Pro-Ject speakers are certainly capable of clean volumes with which you can effectively torment at least sensitive neighbours in rented flats. Certainly more important for many listeners: the Pro-Ject Speaker Box 12 E Carbon handle low volumes so well that they are recommended for fans of intimate night-time sessions.



In this price range, one can actually do without a bi-wiring terminal quite happily. If you drive the Pro-Ject Speaker Box 12 E Carbon via single-wiring, the sound is more homogeneous when you connect the speaker cables to the lower terminals.
Higher-quality bridges from AudioQuest (pictured) result in an even more transparent soundstage; however, the listening sessions for the sound descriptions were carried out using the pre-fitted metal bridges appropriate for this price range

Especially as – whether played quietly or loudly – there is absolutely nothing to fault in the bass quality; on the contrary: at the lower end, the floorstanding speakers are well-defined and nuanced, not bone-dry, but *pleasantly* rounded – without one being able to describe them as ‘over-rounded’. The

The Austrian developers clearly had less of a sensationalist bass tuning in mind here than an integrated, musical one that doesn't veer into the mushy.

Which actually brings us straight to the subject of dynamic range: with their bass foundation that is as neutral as it is mature, and an attack that is not overly sharp but nonetheless precise, the Pro-Ject Speaker Box 12 E Carbon Impulse project such an immersive sound at me that I – and I'm sure you too – find myself enjoying music across all genres.

Mids, highs and enjoyment …



The silk dome and the cones, with their glass fibre-carbon composite as the diaphragm material, produce a soundstage that is organic and suitable for long-term listening

No artificial flavour enhancers, no tonal posturing: even the mid-high range is surprisingly audiophile-grade and suitable for long-term listening, not least given the price bracket. The trebles are devoid of any unpleasant hints of sibilance or metallic harshness and, right at the very top, are even slightly milder than strictly neutral.

The fine dynamics are essentially a mirror image of the coarse dynamics: distinctly ‘fast’ speakers such as the Canton GLE 30 reproduce subtle differences in impulse with greater definition and also resolve details more delicately and precisely. The Pro-Ject Speaker Box 12 E Carbon counter this with greater bass power, a richer, more colourful soundstage and audiophile silkiness. Yes, their soundstage is virtually flawlessly polished – without micro-impulses and fine details being completely smoothed out or lost, so you really needn’t worry about that. Essentially, apart from the super-high frequencies, everything is there, just shaped a touch more fluidly and illuminated with a warmer tone.

The Pro-Ject Speaker Box 12 E Carbon isn’t designed to be a high-precision studio monitor, but rather a luxury item that doesn’t offer a flashy experience, yet is thoroughly enjoyable precisely because of its elegance and understated nature. If I look for sonic ‘great role models’ in higher price brackets, the 12 E Carbon is certainly much closer to a Perlisten S5m than, say, a PMC twenty5.21i

Relaxed yet incisive: the vocal reproduction



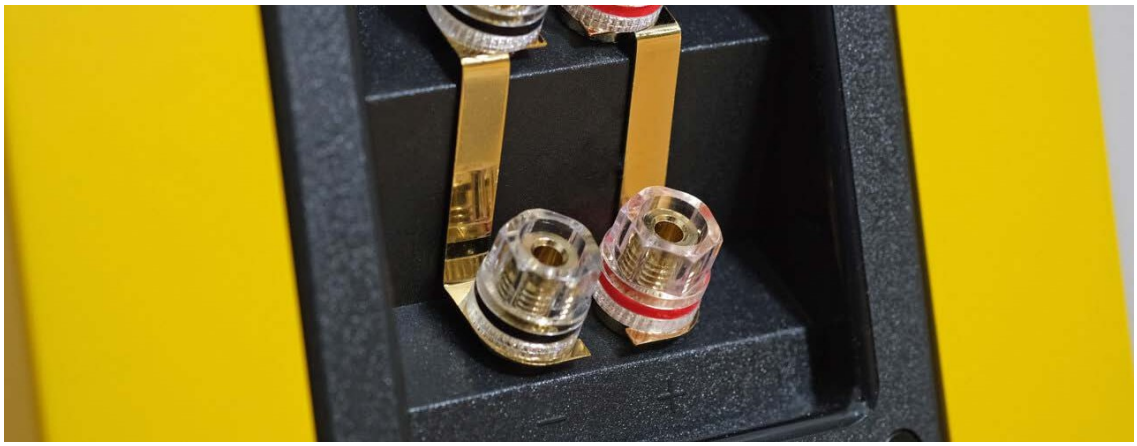
The midrange of the Pro-Ject Speaker Box 12 E Carbon truly exudes classic English flair

That said, two aspects are worth mentioning explicitly: the lower midrange, just like part of the upper midrange, does not sound the slightest bit subdued. In other words: most high-frequency elements do not sound subdued as a whole, but are interpreted as being slightly less silvery and airy. The brilliance and presence of the overall soundstage feel more relaxed.

And as far as midrange and vocal reproduction are concerned, one might – depending on the pitch of the music – describe the sound as 'slightly warm, yet distinct': vocals and guitars sound a touch more resonant and less open than on speakers tuned to be utterly neutral, yet they develop a presence that sets them out slightly from the higher frequency ranges.

The quality of the sound certainly justifies this tonal trick: I find the midrange reproduction exceptionally pure for this class and am certain that the Pro-Ject Speaker Box 12 E Carbon exhibits below-average distortion levels here. This, combined with the superb balance between proper transparency and the lovely richness of the timbres, makes vocals and acoustic instruments sound wonderfully organic, particularly given the price range. Not least, fans of classic English sound tuning are likely to find the Pro-Ject Speaker Box 12 E Carbon rather to their liking, even if they are accustomed to significantly more expensive speakers.





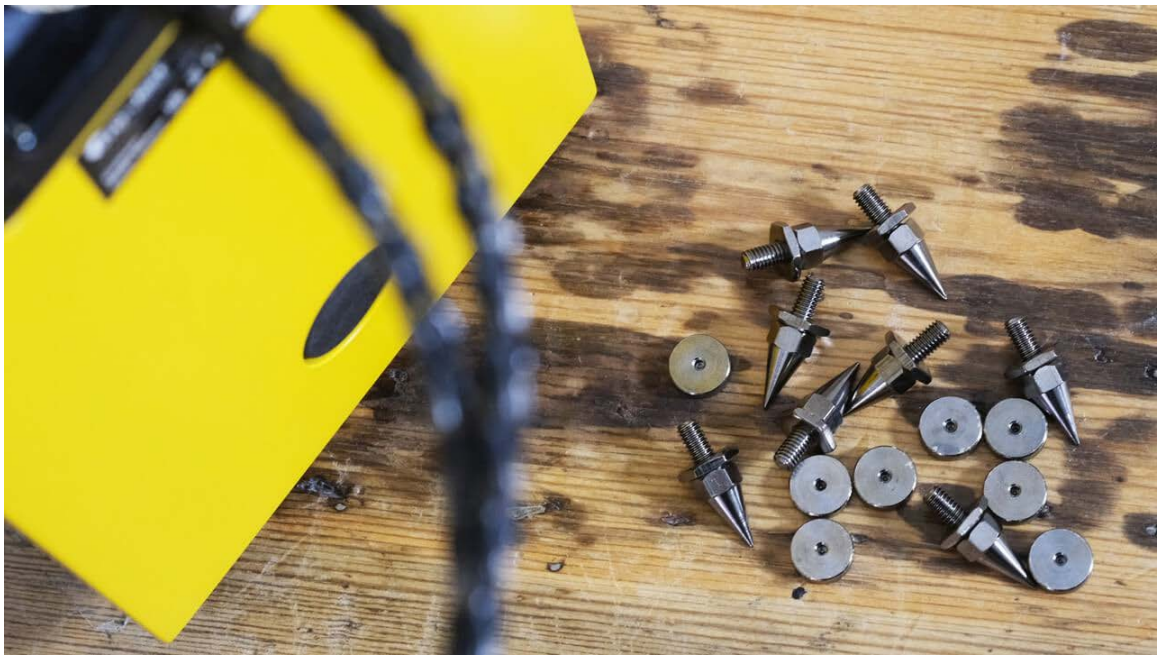
The bi-wiring terminal of the Pro-Ject Speaker Box 12 E Carbon with the pre-fitted metal bridges

Wonderfully immersive – the soundstage

And the spatiality is also likely to impress even the most discerning audiophile ears. As far as the sense of width and height is concerned, the differences compared to my significantly more expensive studio monitors are, in essence, rather negligible. Moreover, the soundstage projects beautifully forwards towards the listener, just as I am accustomed to in my own room with standard speaker positioning. The result is a wonderfully immersive soundstage illusion.

This is further enhanced by excellent localisation: whilst speakers that are fundamentally even more detail-oriented and subtle may appear spatially even more sharply defined and unmistakable – the Pro-Ject Speaker Box 12 E Carbon nevertheless leave no doubt as to where individual notes or instruments are located. Even with the worst will in the world, there is really nothing to criticise here, especially as the Austrian floorstanding speakers also create a convincingly natural sense of depth. The last floorstanding speakers in a similar price range that impressed me in terms of spatiality were the active Argon Forte A55 WiFi, which were even more contoured than the Pro-Ject Speaker Box 12 E Carbon (even

with top-quality amplification at the front), but which, in return, restricted the vertical soundstage somewhat.



The spikes supplied with the Pro-Ject Speaker Box 12 E Carbon. For the listening test, however, the speakers were fitted with Audioplan Antispikes “

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Test conclusion: Pro-Ject Speaker Box 12 E Carbon

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The included front panels attach magnetically

More than the sum of its parts: I mentioned earlier a particular refinement that emanates from the Pro-Ject Speaker Box 12 E Carbon. The Austrian developers have eschewed an attention-grabbing tuning, instead devoting themselves all the more to classic audiophile virtues such as accurate spatial imaging and a wonderfully colourful and ultimately highly organic midrange reproduction. The latter benefits particularly from one of the Pro-Ject Speaker Box 12 E Carbon's key strengths: the high purity of the sound. I am certain that, particularly in the midrange, there is a level of low distortion that is above average for this price range, provided the volume remains at a reasonable level.

To focus on this frequency range, which is so important for an authentic listening experience, and to avoid any unnecessary interference, the Pro-Ject developers have deliberately refrained from tuning the bass and treble to be overly prominent. Instead, these ranges blend in extremely harmoniously, leaving the midrange to take centre stage,

so to speak. The treble – always a source of interference fraught with compromise in cheaper speakers – is actually somewhat subdued in terms of volume. It runs with its
Thanks to their ‘non-technical’ character, there is no risk whatsoever of compromising the purity of the sound with audible grain or harshness. Nevertheless, they allow the soundstage to remain sufficiently open and well-defined, delighting the discerning audiophile with a very appealing silkiness.

In short: fans of monitor-like transparency, strict linearity and sparkling dynamics will find other alternatives in this class. However: the way in which the Pro-Ject developers handle the compromises inherent in this price range and dare to prioritise, rather than spectacle, a natural sound that is as unpretentious as possible – yet anything but boring – and long-term reliability, deserves respect.

This will find its fans: for compromises aside, the Pro-Ject Speaker Box 12 E Carbon are so skilfully and lovingly tuned that they actually let the listener feel what is meant by the often-cited difference between high-end and mere hi-fi. These slim columns will be among my personal favourite speakers of 2025 by the end of the year; that much is already certain.

The Pro-Ject Speaker Box 12 E Carbon at a glance

A strikingly pure, non-technical soundstage.

Mids that drift slightly towards the warm, with a very organic feel and almost high-end flair.

Very pleasantly silky treble, which is, on balance, slightly restrained. Fine dynamics and resolution

don’t jump out at you, but for their price range they show no weaknesses and do the job.

The bass reproduction is so mature in terms of impact and depth that some listeners may be surprised given the slender columns. These aren’t floorstanding speakers designed for volume-driven listening sessions, but they’re comfortably sufficient for living rooms up to 30 square metres and are sure to disturb sensitive neighbours in rented accommodation.

The neutral bass integrates perfectly into the overall soundstage. Well-defined, though not bone-dry, the low-frequency response—which doesn’t veer off in any direction—is one of the Pro-Ject’s strengths.

Good dynamic response; for its class, impeccably punchy and ‘fast’.

An accurate, correctly proportioned and engaging soundstage that stands out beautifully from the speakers.

Neutral, transparent, dynamically lively amplifiers should be a good choice to get the most out of the Pro-Ject Speaker Box 12 E Carbon. In testing, they even scaled audibly with the change of my power amplifiers (Norma Revo PA 150 to Chord Ultima 5).

In this price range, that might seem excessive at first glance – which is why the test was also carried out using the supplied metal bridges – but: experimenting with bi-wiring or high-quality cable bridges can be worthwhile. In our tests, the soundstage gained in presence and transparency.

Excellent build quality for the price range; not least, the quality of the paint finish ensures a premium look that should also blend in well with high-quality, design-oriented

living environments.

Facts:

Model: Pro-Ject Speaker Box 12 E Carbon Concept:

Floorstanding loudspeaker (2.5-way bass reflex)

Price per pair: €1,199 (walnut finish: €1,299) Dimensions &

weight: 100 x 165 x 220 mm (HxWxD), 15.17 kg each

Colours: Fir green, golden yellow, steel blue, white, walnut (all matt)

Nominal impedance: 4 ohms

Sensitivity: 89 dB (1 watt / 1 metre)

Other: Bi-wiring terminals, sand-filled speaker base Warranty: 2

years

Further technical information on the distributor's website

German distributor:

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https://www.audiotra.de/





Review: Pro-Ject Speaker Box 12 E Carbon | Floorstanding speakers

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Letters to the editor

About the author

 Joerg Dames

Equipment

Digital sources:

D/A converters: Canever Audio ZeroUno SSD, Norma HS-DA1 PRE, Keces S3

Music server: Melco N50-S38

Streamers: Melco N50-S38, SOtM sMS-200 ultra & SOtM sPS-500, Volumio Primo

Integrated amplifier:

Abacus Ampino

Preamplifiers:

Funk MTX Monitor V3b-4.3.1, Funk MTX Monitor V3b-4.2.1

(Upgrade from V3b), Funk LAP-2.V3 (Upgrade from Lap-2.V2)

Power amplifiers:

Chord Electronics Ultima 5, Norma Revo PA 150

Speakers:

Wilson Audio SabrinaX, Abacus C-Box 3

Headphones:

MrSpeakers Ether 2, Denon AH-D9200, AKG K812, Audeze iSine 20, RHA T20, Soundmagic E80, AAW Q

Headphone amplifiers:

Norma HS-DA1 PRE, Keces S3, Reußenzehn Harmonie III

Portable Hi-Fi:

Onkyo DP-X1, iBasso DX-80

Cables:

Speaker cables: Kimber Carbon 16, HMS Armonia, WSS Platin Line LS4, Real Cable BW OFC 400, HMS Fortissimo

Low-frequency cables: AudioQuest Pegasus (RCA and XLR), Supra Cables Sword Excalibur (RCA), Straight Wire Virtuoso (RCA and XLR)

Digital cables: USB cables: AudioQuest Carbon and Diamond, Boaacoustic Silver Digital Xeno, BMC Pure USB1

Power cables: AudioQuest Dragon, AudioQuest Blizzard, Supra Cables LoRad 2.5 CS-EU Mk2, Kondo KSL-ACc Persimmon, HMS Energia Suprema, Tellurium Q Black, Quantum-Powerchords, Swisscables Reference, AudioQuest NRG-Z2

Power strip: AudioQuest Niagara 5000, HMS Energia MkII

Rack:

Lovan Classic II

Accessories:

Power filter: AudioQuest Niagara 5000, HMS Energia MkII

Miscellaneous: SOtM Snh-10G switch, AudioQuest Jitterbug

Size of listening room: Floor area: 29 m²

Height: 3.3 m