

## Best Intros at CES: Vandersteen Model Seven and Wilson MAXX Series 3 Loudspeakers

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Posted by: Jonathan Valin at 8:08 pm, January 13th, 2009

Contrary to what some people may think (see my Magico M5 blog), I did listen to other ultra-high-end speakers besides the Magico M5 at this year's CES, and after the M5 the two I thought best (there is a third but you will have to wait for our show issue to learn what it is) were the \$68k Wilson MAXX Series 3 driven by Boulder electronics and the \$45k Vandersteen Model Seven driven (marvelously) by Aesthetix electronics and the Clearaudio Statement turntable (there was no digital source in the room).

Although both speakers took me utterly by surprise, I'll begin with the Vandersteen since it is such a dramatic departure from previous Vandersteen designs.



Technologically, the Model Seven is a huge step away from 70s/80s thinking into the twenty-first century for designer Richard Vandersteen, who has been working on this project for better than three years. As Robert has already noted in his blog on this speaker, the powered 12" woofer in the "New School" Model 7 is the same as the woofer in the "Old School" Model 5, but just about everything else is different. The midbass, midrange, and tweeter are now made from a three-layer carbon-fiber/balsa wood/carbon-fiber sandwich (an unusual combination but, when you think about it, not really that much different than a carbon-fiber/Rohacell sandwich).



The pretty little enclosure is made entirely from carbon fiber, five layers of "skin" bonded to a carbon-fiber skeleton. There is an "ambience tweeter" on the back of the Seven, which Richard Vandersteen says you can use if it helps (although he generally doesn't).



Since I brought my own vinyl to the show I can comment with some confidence about the sound of the Model Seven,

which was just as revolutionary as its build. On Norah Jones' "Come Away With Me" (from *Live From Austin Texas*), for example, the Seven sounded very neutral, open, and high in resolution, with exceptional low-level dynamic nuance on Jones' voice and excellent control in the bass. (This is a cut that can test woofers, easily making them sound out-of-control since the Fender bass is, in fact, rather too big and fat. Here the bass was just right and superbly integrated with the rest of the speaker.) There was no sense of a cottony scrim overlaying the sound and obscuring very-low-level detail, as there has been (for me, at least) in previous Vandersteen models. Indeed, I wrote down in my notes: "Right up there with the MAXX III for best intro at CES." There was a liveliness, presence, and breathiness to the sound, without a hint of darkness. Though they weren't quite as "there" or as "transparent" as MartinLogan CLXes or Magico M5s, the Sevens were nonetheless superb--the Audio Research of full-range transducers.