

GROUPTEST WIRELESS LOUDSPEAKERS
£1,450-£4,000



Cabasse Pearl Akoya £2,950



If Gerry Anderson made loudspeakers, this would surely be his choice of in-spaceship entertainment

DETAILS

- PRODUCT**
Cabasse Pearl Akoya
- ORIGIN**
France/China
- TYPE**
2-way bass reflex design
- WEIGHT**
6kg
- DIMENSIONS (WxHxD)**
220 x 220 x 220mm
- FEATURES**
 - 130mm tweeter/mid driver, 170mm bass driver
 - RCA analogue; optical digital; Ethernet; USB; Bluetooth
 - Claimed power handling: 1,050W (total)
- DISTRIBUTOR**
Henley Audio Ltd.

Easily the most striking design here, this has a retro-futuristic sense of glamour to it. Cabasse would argue that form follows function; the boxy fibreboard cabinets of its rivals are far from ideal sonically, of course. However, the compact size of the Pearl Akoya means there's not a lot of internal cabinet volume to play with, and that creates other limitations. Unusually, this speaker is sold as a single item, so you need to buy a pair for stereo and then sync them using the app.

This proves easier said than done, as first time round both speakers struggle to find my wi-fi network. After powering everything down and starting again, we're in business. The Cabasse StreamCONTROL app is nice enough to use, and works with your chosen streaming service. If you use Bubble UPnP you'll only get one speaker as the Pearls don't natively link together.

Set-up quirks aside, this is impressive. The spherical speaker enclosure is

made from lacquer-coated resin and fibre, and is very solid. The coaxial tweeter and mid driver sit at the front, with a bass driver at the rear. The sparkle black finish looks classy, and the cloth-covered power leads are nice. Each speaker comes with a neat hockey puck-style remote that looks like a Nest thermostat, with a bezel around the outside to control volume.

Connectivity isn't the best here, but will still be enough for most people. In addition to wi-fi and Bluetooth, you get rear-mounted Ethernet, micro USB and analogue inputs; there's no HDMI. Overall these speakers look and feel expensive and exotic enough to (just about) justify their price.

Sound quality

As soon as you get over the visual novelty of this speaker pair, you begin to realise that it's actually very accomplished at what it's designed to do. Some of the less expensive designs in this group need to have allowances made for them, whereas pretty much any audiophile could

listen to the Pearl Akoya and be happy with what they hear. It gives a detailed, crisp and refined sound – one that's better than you'd expect from a pair of small spherical objects that look like this.

Rush's *Vital Signs* is always a good test of any music system; it's a little forward and has lots of subtle detail that's often obscured by inferior replay equipment. Yet this Cabasse duo carries it in an engaging and enjoyable way. Tonally it's a little dry perhaps, lacking the warmth and depth of the B&W and Q Acoustics packages, and it doesn't have the low down grunt of the KEF either. Yet the midband is one of the most open of the group, and that translates to fine

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vocal handling, and a lovely textured guitar sound.

The fun continues with the old-school techno of Manix; this speaker pair sounding super snappy and rhythmically very engaging with *Rave Fantasy*. This track is all about mood and beat, and the Cabasse manages to get a grip on both. It has super-fast attack transients on notes, and the decay is quick too, so you don't get a laboured, slurred sound. Despite this finely etched character, things never get tonally harsh.

The cleaner, smoother soul of Donny Hathaway's *Little Ghetto Boy* is also well carried. I really enjoy its expansive soundstaging, although the treble lacks a little sparkle and the bass a bit of oomph; some will want to use a subwoofer. As wireless speakers go, however, this is one of the most accomplished designs around – and doesn't exactly give its rivals an easy life ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★	LIKE: Crisp, expansive sound; multi-form
VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★☆	DISLIKE: Distinct lack of low bass
BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★	WESAY: Superlative space-age stereo
FEATURES ★★★★☆	
OVERALL ★★★★★	