

# Rogers LS5/9 Classic SE

One time staple of BBC monitoring, and with feet in both professional and consumer camps, this large standmount has been resurrected and refreshed by a master of the art  
 Review: **Ken Kessler** Lab: **Paul Miller**

One cannot but think of the notion that 'Once is chance, twice is coincidence, third time is a pattern'. Following the revived 1970s JBLs and Rogers' return to LS3/5A manufacture [HFN Jul '19], the arrival of a dead-accurate, reborn BBC LS5/9 as part of Rogers' 'Classic' range is further proof that a trend is under way. All those Instagram images of systems made up of 50-year-old components tell us the past is back with a vengeance.

With a difference: now you can recreate 'golden age' sound with new kit rather than used, free of the risks of running aged hardware. Allowing for inflation and other concerns, though, the new LS5/9 will set you back considerably more than a decommissioned, ex-BBC pair. Beaten-up LS5/9s exist online for £1000, minters for £2000. Peace-of-mind, in the form of these factory-fresh LS5/9s, costs £4899 for a pair in walnut, olive and Amazaque finishes; add £50 for rosewood.

## PANZER POWER

Reviewed and pictured here, however, is the deluxe 'SE' version finished in the Amazaque veneer (an African hardwood, and it is gorgeous). What you get with the SE, at £5499 in the basic finishes and £5599 for rosewood or RAL colours, are gold badges and a Panzerholz front baffle [a resin/hardwood composite also used in the Clearaudio Ovation turntable HFN Feb '13]. According to designer Andy Whittle, 'although that sounds a lot, this stuff costs a fortune and is a nightmare to manufacture... but you get the most marvellous open, natural bass'. The £1599 stands are made entirely from the same material (£1499 for the LS3/5A version) and feel as hard as metal.

As with Falcon Acoustics' search for utter faithfulness to the originals [HFN Dec '18], and JBL reviving its waffle grilles for the L100 [HFN May '19], Rogers specified Tygan, that heavy woven fabric which is

tuned to the speaker. (If you don't believe that the grille is an integral part of the design, try them without. Or see PM's Lab Report, p47.) The Rogers badge is gilt and the rear speaker sockets are the same 4mm silver-plated orifices found on the revived LS3/5A, also with a gold rear label.

## SURROUND SOUND

Panzerholz aside, the rest of the UK-made cabinet is the standard BBC design of thin-wall 9mm birch ply with damping sheets. Andy explained that Rogers is 'adhering strictly to the original BBC design brief, so the latest version is as

close as possible to the original specification. The 34mm Audax HD34 tweeter is still made in France, modified by us in the UK. The

crossover is assembled in the UK to the same BBC specification. We're using high-power, iron-dust-cored inductors with high quality capacitors'.

Rogers reverse-engineered the 210mm bass unit, which is fitted with the correct BBC specified PVC surround. Says Whittle, 'The surround is critical for the midrange performance where the BBC demanded the best possible sound

**RIGHT:** The 9mm birch plywood cabinet is available in walnut, rosewood, olive and Amazaque veneers or RAL colours. The speaker is optimised for use with the Tygan-fabric/frame grille left in place

quality'. The high frequency adjustment tag strip is visible on the baffle as per the original studio speakers, although it is not user-adjustable; for tight pair-matching, the speaker is tuned via this tag strip in a similar way to the LS3/5A, where tweeter level is matched via an auto transformer.

Weighing only 12kg each and measuring 460x275x285mm (hwd), the LS5/9s are compact and easy to handle. Supported on Rogers' dedicated Panzerholz stands, no toe-in was needed – I set them up in an equilateral triangle

from the hot seat, swiftly learning that too far apart will create a serious 'hole in the middle'. This effect is so obvious that you will soon find the optimum spacing in your own room. While these LS5/9s are modestly sensitive and not a tough load [see PM's Lab Report, p47] I found that they love power and revel in being driven hard. I was also warned that the PVC surrounds 'need to do some work before they warm up, about half an hour, to fill the bass out!'.



## REAL ROMEO

Enamoured as I am of the LS3/5A and the BBC sound *per se*, I admit to being pre-disposed toward the LS5/9. If the prices stopped me in my tracks, that ended when I fired 'em up. Over the years, having owned more than ten pairs of LS3/5As in assorted iterations, Spondor BC1s and other BBC or BBC-ish designs, I was hoping for two things: natural midband/upper-bass and realistic vocals. I was not anticipating cavernous bass, because these are not huge, woofer-filled speakers like

## AUNTIE BEEB'S BOXES

Part of a lineage dating back to 1970, when Rogers began its relationship with the BBC, the LS5/9 is a true studio monitor in hi-fi clothing – and with domestically acceptable dimensions. The series began with Rogers' first BBC design, the LS3/6 studio monitor. Four years later, the immortal LS3/5A arrived, the smallest ('Grade Two') in a family that would grow to include speakers of various sizes to suit both studio and outside broadcasting and monitoring.

Production of the LS5/9 began in 1983, this 'Grade One' model designed to fit in spaces where the LS5/8 would be too large. The LS5/9 used the same tweeter as found in the LS5/8, the BBC requiring consistency across the range. In ascending order of size, the classic 1980s/1990s Rogers lineup of BBC and BBC-inspired home models eventually comprised the LS3/5A, LS2, LS5/9, LS6, LS7, Studio 1 and LS5/8. Rogers ceased LS5/9 production in the late-1990s. Twenty years on, under the guidance of Andy Whittle (formerly Rogers' Technical Director) the much-loved BBC models are back. And I don't think the LS5/9 will be the last to be resurrected.

the Wilson Sasha DAWs [HFN Mar '19] I use as a reference. And yet, I was not quite prepared for what they delivered, despite the decades of conditioning.

As these are inherently 'professional monitors', I concentrated on open-reel tape as well as vinyl and CD. The initial reaction?

These are as revealing as one would demand and require of a 'tool' speaker at the Beeb.

Verve recordings have always stood for excellence, and *Sound Tour: Spain* [Verve VSTC 272; 7½ips tape] proved the perfect opener. This series, with an unnamed orchestra had listed the musicians, including Doc Severinsen on trumpet and Hank Jones on piano. Oddly enough – but not unusual when you consider what might have been played through speakers at the BBC – the 'tour' element of the recording includes traffic sounds, with the box even identifying

**LEFT:** Rogers' own 210mm polypropylene bass/mid driver is joined by a 34mm soft-dome Audax tweeter with phase plate. This SE version of the LS5/9 features a rigid Panzerholz baffle

an Alfa Romeo, a familiar enough sound if you're a car nut. The recording afforded a fabulous sensation of space, the car sound so real that I first thought it was an actual vehicle passing by outside.

With trumpet, piano, castanets, massed girls' voices and a host of others to create the sonic picture, the LS5/9 Classic SE swiftly revealed a number of qualities beyond excelling as described above. Of course, the bass was smooth, realistic, non-aggressive and substantial. Yes, the voices were clear, sibilance-free and utterly convincing. What I certainly did not expect, given that this is still a ported two-way box, was the way the speaker disappeared.

This isn't so much of a surprise with its smaller sibling, the LS3/5A, so tiny that it's almost a point source. But the LS5/9 is a substantial box, for goodness' sake, and it's just not supposed to escape its wooden crate constraints unless fashioned from some space-age material that relegates vibration to another dimension or bracing that wouldn't shame the Eiffel Tower. Maybe it was the recording, maybe it was the room, but, hot damn, these made me think more of panel speakers and dipoles.

## LIFE ON TOP

Before switching to vinyl and CD, the last open-reel I played was Jackie Gleason's lush double on Capitol, *Today's Romantic Hits/For Lovers Only Vol 1&2* [ZWW2074; 7½ips tape], which reminded me again that there is no other label to match this one's 1950s/1960s sessions for sonic supremacy. Somehow, the LS5/9 Classic SE manages to sparkle at the top end, with even the most delicate upper frequency information enjoying a glittery, shimmering effervescence, without turning edgy or sibilant for even a microsecond. Silky? It could be an advert for La Perla. ☺



## LOUDSPEAKER



**LEFT:** The rear face of the LS5/9's cabinet is finished in a real wood veneer, although the single set of 4mm speaker cable sockets and 3kHz crossover will not support bi-wiring or bi-amping

such a mindset is like listening for pleasure, which is what hi-fi is all about unless you are using it in a professional capacity. This speaker serves both audiences.

But how does the LS5/9 stack up against the LS3/5A at half its price? The larger speaker has deeper bass and the ability to go much louder, but you knew that. The LS3/5A simply cannot fill a room larger than, say, 15x20ft with anything even remotely convincing, so it remains a small room/nearfield

There's a superb live take of 'Lola' with the Danish National Chamber Orchestra and the Danish National Vocal Ensemble on CD2 in the 50th Anniversary CD box set of *Lola Versus Powerman And The Moneygoround Part One* [BMG 434BOX]. This is a blockbuster of a track with a full soundstage and a lovely unplugged feel, utterly realistic applause, rich bass and the sheer majesty of a choral group behind Ray Davies. He's positioned dead centre and – in this instance – standing in the room. There is no denying the 3D capabilities of this speaker, within spitting distance of the LS3/5A.

### HOLY GRAIL

Please note that I have never harboured any desire to be a musician (well, not after the age of 15), a recording engineer, a broadcaster or anything other than a scribbler, as I know my limitations and lack of talent. Despite this, and notwithstanding its design dating back almost 40 years, the analytical capabilities of the LS5/9 puts one in mind of a studio dweller listening for minutiae. I am not suggesting that

monitor. But the LS5/9 offers slightly less than pin-point imaging – this matters, principally, to anally-retentive soundstage fanatics and reviewers, which is why I noticed it. Also, the LS3/5A, for whatever reasons, appears to deliver greater image height. Then again, nothing sounds exactly like a scaled-up LS3/5A, the creation of which has been a Holy Grail quest in hi-fi for 45 years. But, wow, this comes close. 🎧

### HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

Ignore my reservations about price. If you are enamoured of the classic BBC sound, want something bigger than an LS3/5A but not too large, with emphasis on midband authenticity and vocal realism, these will charm you for what they are: LS3/5As with more level and deeper bass. I sat there rapt, the sound so natural and uncoloured that such matters as cost vanished. The LS5/9 is simply magical.

Sound Quality: 86%

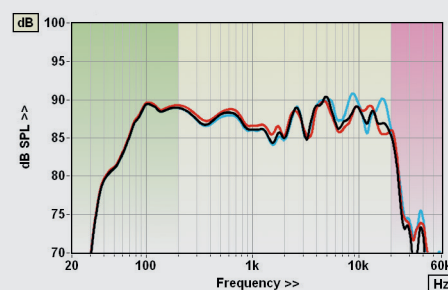


## LAB REPORT

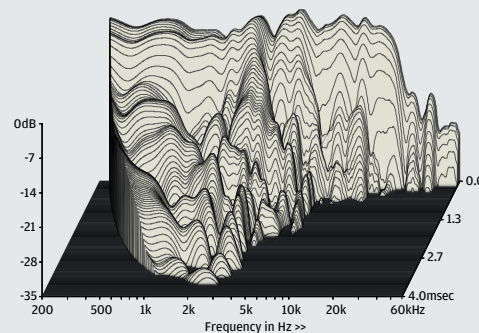
### ROGERS LS5/9 CLASSIC SE

If the 'naked' LS5/9 looks rather utilitarian then it's as well to know it was designed to be seen and heard with the tight-fitting Tygan grille left in place. So be careful how you read Graph 1 – the blue trace here is the forward response *without* the grille (where responses errors increase to  $\pm 3.3$ dB above 6kHz), rather than *with* as is usually the case! But let's first recap – the larger cabinet and reflex-loaded 210mm polypropylene bass/mid driver offers fundamental advantages over the smaller, closed-box LS3/5A. Sensitivity is higher despite the 27-element/3rd-order crossover, meeting Rogers' 87dB specification, at 86.6dB/1kHz and 87.2dB/500Hz-8kHz. Measured on Rogers' preferred mid-baffle axis, the forward response retains a suggestion of the 'BBC dip' through mid and presence, partially masked by undulations between 2-6kHz. These contribute to the overall  $\pm 3.0$ dB and  $\pm 2.4$ dB response errors [see Graph 1] and are reflected in the cone/surround mode seen on the CSD waterfall [see Graph 2].

The bass unit has a -6dB bandpass of 72Hz-288Hz [green shaded area, Graph 1], free of obvious spurious until breakup, and supported by the front port, tuned to 38Hz but with a useful 29Hz-113Hz (-6dB) output. The diffraction-corrected nearfield response indicates a LF extension of 59Hz (-6dB re. 200Hz). So is this encouraging sensitivity and good bass achieved with recourse to a punishingly low impedance? Fortunately not... With relatively *high* minima of 5.69ohm/172Hz/-8° and 5.89ohm/2.9kHz/+2° combined with maximum phase swings of -47°/103Hz and +30°/74Hz (all >12ohm) the LS5/9 Classic SE will not prove burdensome for the 'average' integrated. PM



ABOVE: Response inc. nearfield summed driver/port [green], freefield corrected to 1m at 2.83V [yellow], ultrasonic [pink]. Left, black; right, red; w/o grille, blue



ABOVE: Treble and cabinet modes are well damped, leaving breakup in the PP bass/mid cone at 2-6kHz

### HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Sensitivity (SPL/1m/2.83V – 1kHz/Mean/IEC)	86.6dB / 87.2dB / 85.2dB
Impedance modulus: minimum & maximum (20Hz–20kHz)	5.69ohm @ 172Hz 24.1ohm @ 89Hz
Impedance phase: minimum & maximum (20Hz–20kHz)	-47° @ 103Hz +30° @ 74Hz
Pair matching/Resp. error (200Hz–20kHz)	2.1dB / $\pm 3.0$ dB/ $\pm 2.4$ dB
LF/HF extension (-6dB ref 200Hz/10kHz)	59Hz / 22.1kHz/22.7kHz
THD 100Hz/1kHz/10kHz (for 90dB SPL/1m)	0.6% / 0.07% / 0.2%
Dimensions (HWD) / Weight (each)	460x275x285mm / 12kg