

# JMLab 806 Signature

One of the less expensive models from the French speaker specialist

**PRICE** £600/pair

**SUPPLIER** Focal-JMLab UK

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**French company** divided its expanding range of domestic hi-fi loudspeakers into four ranges to cover every budget, from a modest £190 for the entry-level Chorus 705, up to a giddy £45,000 for the latest Grande Utopia Be with beryllium tweeter.

Two notches down from the lofty Utopia series rests the Cobalt range, an affordable selection of bookshelf and floorstanding hi-fi speakers that includes dedicated centre and

## TECHNOLOGY

Drive unit design and manufacture is all done in-house for JMLab loudspeakers, allowing the designers to easily use bespoke drivers for each individual loudspeaker design. The drivers in question are a little different to those used by anyone else too (excepting that many other manufacturers will buy their drivers from JMLab).

The main 'sandwich' driver is described as a W-cone by Focal, from the French for double 'V', where *verre* means glass. In other words, the cone is constructed from two layers of glass-fibre, which is separated by a layer of aerospace foam, all sealed together with a high temperature epoxy glue. The important properties of mass, rigidity and damping can all be controlled by varying thicknesses of glass, foam, the amount of resin glue, and so on.

Optimum Phase Crossover refers to a high-order filter used in the crossover, a 36dB/octave design, which reduces the amount of overlap between drivers. The tweeter is run down to about 2.5kHz, in order that less the higher-frequency signal is sent to the mid/bass driver, which can otherwise result in heightened forward beaming of that driver. The result is good uniform dispersion with less phase suck-outs caused by destructive driver interference.

## KEY FEATURES

- Advanced driver complement
- Optimum phase crossover
- High quality construction

surround boxes to make up a home cinema installation if required. In fact, the original Cobalt components have featured in the *HFN* Awards for the last two years in the form of an AV package. The one bookshelf model in the range, the Cobalt 806, at £550, has recently been groomed to make this, the 806 Signature, for an additional £50.

Externally, the 806 and 806S models are almost indistinguishable, except that the Signature model is only available in an eponymous finish that features dark red cherry wooden side cheeks and an aluminium-effect front and back. This is complemented by an unusual perforated metal grille, mechanically decoupled from the baffle by rubber grommets.

The trademark Focal inverted dome tweeter is present here, but takes the improved form seen on the Elektra series, replete with a TiO<sub>2</sub> coating to help dampen out HF resonances from this revealing, if sometimes effusive, transducer. Inside, the damping material is of a better quality than previously, and the main driver has been tweaked for performance in the context of the revised design. Other key features carried over from the original is a W-cone mid/bass driver, and an OPC filter network with high-grade components [see Technology box]. Crossover components are visible through a clear plastic panel on the speaker's rear baffle.

This isn't a speaker to hide its light under a bushel. Without actually sounding like it's trying too hard, it lets you know that it's more than up to playing — with some panache and style — any style of music. Its midband and treble meld together without a conspicuous join, letting you forget that you're listening to a ported two-way box speaker — it has an integrity around the presence band that suggests a clean handing over of duties between the two drivers, where costlier designs can still get confused. Moreover, the sandwich cone is free of normal paper or polypropylene colorations that can subtly mar the sound of speakers using these materials.

There was a lightness of touch and a sense of transparency in the upper midband that benefited the accessibility of voices and instruments, which — coupled with the fast, extended response from the tweeter — made for a revealing and informative loudspeaker. Bass was clean and fast, if not quite up to the same superlative standard. There was a good sense of extended bass, albeit with less of the definition



that was on show higher up. Jazz double bass, for example, had weight without undue box or port bloom. The overall result still sounded very much all in one piece at various volume levels.

The tweeter response is the point to watch, though, as many CD players might give cause for this to sound a little too conspicuous, especially at higher volumes. A shy and retiring transducer this is not, but its revelatory qualities are instrumental in making this speaker open up a recording, warts and all.

This is a speaker with a distinctive style — both cosmetic and sonic — which will blend in well with well-behaved sources and smooth amplification. It worked very well with Naim amplifiers, for example, whereas a Linn CD source and amplifier tended to highlight the forward top-end too much. By the same reasoning, I wouldn't use these speakers in a home cinema system that'll be frequently playing Dolby Digital soundtracks.

Reservations aside, the Cobalt 806S gets a recommendation as a great music loudspeaker.

**WORDS ANDREW HARRISON**