



Photograph by: Shireesh R Karrale

My Amigo, Ultimo

Eastern Electronics always deliver economical products which don't compromise on performance and value for money, both of which are key areas for budget products. And these new bookshelves from Norge stand up to this feat...

Based in Mumbai, the name Norge brings smiles to audiophiles who take pride in products made in India and the sonic brilliance that Norge incorporates into its line of AV electronics. The founder, Shyam Bajaj, believes in catering to the budget consumers delivering

products that are a benchmark of exceptional sound quality and of a high value for money. It's the budget special month for us here at AV MAX and it's quite impossible to have nothing come out of the production house of Norge that fits our budget series. And so here we have the Norge Ultimo priced at Rs 18,500; it is a bookshelf speaker

that they've presented to us for a review in this month's budget issue.

OUT OF THE BOX

Few weeks back when the speakers were delivered to us, we couldn't stop raving about the black speaker finish and the amazing cabinet dimensions these black beauties possessed.



The large dimensions of the cabinet created high expectations amongst us and we anticipated that these bookshelves would deliver a wholesome package in the low-end region. In addition to this, the cabinet on the rear has two bass ports for better internal air flow and a hybrid banana spade terminal for speaker connectivity; no bi-wiring or bi-amping options are available here though. It was also commendable to see that the engineers at Norge had created a curved front baffle design. This certainly adds to the aesthetics of the speakers which is quite essential on the whole, as most of the times, audiophiles tend to complain that their speakers are like simple boxes that only reproduce sound but don't appear interesting; looks-wise they are just plain boxy cabinets.

TECHNOLOGY

As with Norge's tradition, the bookshelves have a 1½" high-frequency tweeter and a 4¾" mid-bass Wavecor drivers. These drivers carry the new balanced drive technology from Wavecor. The new technology helps in eliminating harmonic distortion that is usually found in traditionally designed speaker drivers. Music is a complex electric signal, and as such harmonics occur naturally in music, leading to the fact that interference is bound to happen and as a result one usually doesn't get a linear frequency response from their sound system. With the technology in place, one can expect an improved response in the audio delivery without any spurious harmonics in the music.

The tweeter has a copper-clad aluminium voice coil, which helps improve the efficiency of the driver through better signal conductivity and an improved power handling capability. Moreover, both the LF (low frequency) and the HF (high frequency) drivers have gold-plated terminals that enhance the conduction of the electric signal that comes from the internal crossover and plus in the long run, gold is a reliable conductor as it resists corrosion that may occur due to the moisture in the air.

Also the cabinets of the Ultimo are logically heavy, simply because they will be called upon to deliver

a good and tight bass response that should fill up an average room size. The speakers at the bottom have small pointed rubber pads, which help the cabinet cut-off ground resonances, thus it enhances the coupling of the speaker to the ground and helps it deliver a more precise sonic stage and an accurate extension of the low end region.

PERFORMANCE

The Ultimo bookshelves were easy to set up and within minutes we had them playing sweet electronic guitar riffs from Led Zeppelin's 2-disc album 'Mothership'. We cosily tucked ourselves in the sweetspot with the speakers facing us in the toe in position and a distance of almost 6ft between them.

While the Ultimo was performing a rock-&-roll show in our studio while the lights were out, on certain tracks in the beginning, one could easily feel that the sound was coming from 2 bookshelves that were standing approx 8 ft in front of me. But as I turned up the gain on the amplifiers a little bit, the speakers welcomed the rush of the clean current and this resulted in a better and wider soundstage and a tighter centre imaging of the vocals. In fact, the speakers almost sonically disappeared in the darkness, and thanks to the huge cabinet design, a large wholesome bass delivery was accompanied by a rich poetic sounding mid-range. This pleased me a lot as the speakers managed to deliver a larger than life experience, a similar kind of sonic enthrallment that one would not usually expect from a budget category bookshelf speaker.

The kick drums throughout all the tracks on 'Mothership' were quick and punchy, the bass lines also from the electronic bass guitars were smooth and rounded; we could easily feel the bass thump in the couch that we were sitting on. We tried other albums like, 'The Annie Lennox Collection', 'God Willin & The Creek Don't Rise' by Ray LaMontagne and the 'Pariah Dogs' and a few other Bollywood albums. Ray LaMontagne's CD has an unmatched finesse in the recording of the vocal region, one would rarely come across such artistic and elegant work. Playing the tracks through the Ultimos revealed a

Specifications

DESIGN	2-way Bass Reflex
DRIVERS	1 x 1 ½" Super Tweeter; 1 x 6" Mid-Bass
FREQUENCY RESPONSE	30Hz-30kHz
NOMINAL IMPEDANCE	4 ohm
POWER HANDLING	40-100W
SENSITIVITY	88dB
WEIGHT	8kg Each





similar transparency and detailing of the mid-high frequency band. Vocals were crisp and clear, and one could easily feel surrounded by the intimacy of Ray's deep soulful vocals and affectionate poetry.

The warmth and natural expressiveness of the harmonica and acoustic guitars were beautifully rendered. The high frequencies too were sweet and airy, and one could effortlessly feel the percussive quality of the piano in various tracks. Only in a few instances, one could feel the muddiness in the mid-range on electronic guitars. But the speakers kept a quick pace of the sound and ensured a sizzling delivery of the mid-high frequencies without imposing any sort of ear-fatigue on us.

We emphasise that the highs were clean without the usual rings but overall, the Ultimo paid a little more attention to a tight and intense bass delivery rather than supporting the region above the 2kHz mark with equal attention. A simple way to put it would be that tonality-wise, the speakers sounded well balanced but were a little more partial to the LF (low frequency) band.

Besides, the rubber surrounds of the mid-bass driver too helped

TRIED & TESTED

GOD WILL & THE CREED DON'T RISE

Ray LaMontagne's fourth album was released in August 2010, which comprises warm soulful vocals from Ray himself. The recording gets very intimate and in a single listen most of the tracks, reveal the sentiments of a devoted bass guitar and pristine acoustic guitars.

CD

in delivering plenty of accuracy in the bass region and because of large excursion capabilities, the musical dynamics in Annie Lennox's 'The Annie Lennox Collection' were reproduced cleanly and without any physical strain on the speaker. Tonally, these bookshelves created a good impression on our minds. We had a 3½ hour listening session with the Ultimos and at the end of it we were pleased with what we had experienced.

CONCLUSION

And winding up with things, the design of this bookshelf brings up a good summation of the 1" tweeter and the 4¾" mid-bass driver to deliver a wholesome performance of punch, pace and a full bodied mid-range. We only experienced slight deficiencies in the high-end response, not quality-wise but rather quantity-wise. The bi-wiring option too was missing here, but we assume that a speaker in the budget range wouldn't get much of an option to be bi-wired or bi-amped. Also it's advisable not to run these speakers too hot, mainly because none of us would like to wear out the external or internal suspensions too early, resulting in a reduced lifespan of the loudspeaker. But the

highlight is that we were pleased by the audio quality and the Rs 18,500 price-tag of these Norge beauties. They look nice, play loud and will always kick the dust off your shelves at home.

Lionel D'souza

Norge Ultimo	
PRICE	₹ 18,500
WARRANTY	1 Year
CATEGORY	Bookshelf Speakers
AESTHETICS	★★★★★
BUILD	★★★★☆
AUDIO	★★★★☆
EASE OF USE	★★★★☆
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★☆
WHAT SALES SAY?	
For a price-tag of Rs 18,500, the Ultimo is an incredible loudspeaker. It delivers good musical dynamics and maintains an overall balanced sound pretty well. It rather pays a little more attention to the low end, somewhat like a bass machine, however, the sound is intelligible and has good timing and we're sure that this price wouldn't pinch your pockets.	
OVERALL	★★★★★
CONTACT	www.norgeaudio.com