

► **DETAILS**

**PRODUCT**

Bowers & Wilkins  
705 S2

**ORIGIN**

UK/China

**TYPE**

2-way standmount  
loudspeaker

**WEIGHT**

9.3kg

**DIMENSIONS**

(WxHxD)  
200 x 407 x 285mm

**FEATURES**

- 25mm Carbon Dome tweeter
- 165mm Continuum mid/bass driver
- Quoted sensitivity: 88dB/1W/1m (Bohm)

**DISTRIBUTOR**

B&W Group Ltd.

**TELEPHONE**

0800 2321513

**WEBSITE**

bowers-wilkins.  
co.uk



# Carbon dating

**David Price** says the new 705 S2 standmounter is a major advance on B&W's previous mid-price offerings



**F**or everything there is a season, and autumn 2017 saw the time for B&W to refresh its CM Series 2 range of mid-price loudspeakers. Back in 2006 the company introduced the original CM1 as an upgrade to its 600 series, then updated it in 2014 – whereas the new 700 Series is being presented more as a trickle-down of the 800 series. Now stop there, is the Worthing-based company saying that a range that starts at £799 (for the small 707 standmounter) can be mentioned in the same breath as the mighty 800 Diamond? Well, not exactly – but the point is that rather than souping up entry-level designs, the 700 range is more about trying to apply high-end engineering in a more affordable form.

The 705 S2 tested here is the £1,799 replacement for the CM6 S2 (which sold for £1,499). The new speaker is a considerable advance in design, technology and performance over its predecessor, proof that B&W's humongous research and development department hasn't been sat around playing Angry Birds and 'chillaxing'. Wherever possible, it uses technologies cascaded down from the latest

## I begin to feel like I'm listening to a really high-end speaker that's clean and crisp

generation of 800 Series Diamond loudspeakers – notably the solid body tweeter-on-top technology, Continuum midrange cone and the Aerofoil profile low-frequency drive unit.

"For that reason," says B&W spokesman Andy Kerr, "I'd say it's closer to the 800 Series now. That's why we gave the range a new name rather than refer to it as another iteration of the CM Series."

The range is a wide one, spanning from the aforementioned 707 S2 standmounter (£799) to the 702 S2 floorstander (£3,299). This 705 is important inasmuch as it's the most expensive 700 S2-series standmounter – and in my view is arguably even better sounding, in some respects, than the range-topping 702 S2 floorstander. It's a two-way reflex ported box with a single 165mm Continuum cone and a 25mm Carbon Dome housed in that distinctive solid aluminium body, which is mounted on top of the speaker cabinet. It is decoupled to a degree from the cabinet by gel, so the tweeter housing feels slightly wobbly, but only in the intended manner. ▶

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The drive units are special designs for the 700 S2 series, and both are interesting. The tweeter is B&W's new Carbon Dome, which promises a higher break-up and a lower distortion sound (see The Carbon factor box out). The Continuum mid/bass driver is inspired by the work done in the latest 800 Series Diamond. Instead of going for rigidity at any price, B&W's designers have gone for "optimised and controlled flexibility". The idea being to let the cone break-up more gracefully; all speaker cones transition from working as pistons (of a sort) to breaking up, and the thinking is that this process can be better managed.

### It projects a strong stereo image with accuracy and a fine sense of scale

The result is lower distortion and more linearity compared with the Kevlar that was previously used. Continuum is – like Kevlar – a woven composite, but it gives far better controlled break-up.

The mid/bass unit gets an improved chassis, designed using Finite Element Analysis, and made from aluminium – compared with the zinc of the outgoing CM Series. A tuned mass damper is also fitted on the front face of the chassis. The result, says B&W, is a cleaner, lower distortion sound. The cabinet is solid and nicely finished, but it's here that the 700 S2 range falls into place behind the 800-series as it's

a fraction of the price and build. Although still great, it's not quite up to the sumptuous standards afforded the flagship range. All models are available in a choice of gloss black, satin white and rosenut finishes.

B&W offers a set of matching loudspeaker stands (not shown), which are an excellent mechanical and aesthetic match, although cheaper options are available which work very well too. You need to move the speakers at least 20cm out from the rear wall; this done and gently toed-in, this loudspeaker should neatly settle into any room fairly comfortably.

It's pretty efficient for a compact standmounter and quotes sensitivity at 88dB/1W/1m; my reference system includes a Chord Chordette 2Qute DAC (HFC 402) feeding an Exposure 3010S2D integrated amplifier (HFC 397), which really gets the joint jumping.

### Sound quality

There is no mistaking this loudspeaker for anything other than a model from this familiar British brand; it has the family sound alright, but the interesting thing is that it sounds rather higher up the B&W range than I expect. The CM Series was a worthy mid-price line, but to my ears that's as far as it went. With the new 705 S2, I begin to feel like I'm listening to a really high-end speaker that's clean and crisp – traditional B&W traits – but has real refinement and surprising delicacy too. It can move a good



Costing a whisker under B&W's 705 S2, the Spondor D1 (HFC 389) is more compact and conventional mini-monitor. Some might argue it's the spiritual successor of the old BBC LS3/5a, as it shares its diminutive dimensions. It has a wonderful directness and purity of tone, something the B&W struggles to match – and excellent imaging too. Bass, however, is severely limited by comparison and it needs a much more powerful amplifier to drive it properly. Overall the Spondor is lovely, but the 705 S2 is a much better all rounder with little to dislike at or even close to its asking price.

amount of air, give a big, punchy and impactful sound and yet still seduce the listener with its impressive subtlety and insight. All in all, it has a far greater panacea of capabilities than its CM6 S2 predecessor, so much so that it effectively masks its relatively affordable price.

Feed it some delicate folk rock in the shape of Bon Iver's *Perth*, and there's a real sense that the speaker is dissolving before me. There's very little of the sensation of listening to two different drive units, and nor do I hear the box especially easily. Instead the music makes its way out of the cabinet and into the room in a surprisingly easy and unforced way; the smallest details of the guitar work snap into clear focus, yet are powerfully overlaid by the dreamy, haunting vocal track.

Indeed, the 705 S2 sounds tonally deeper and darker than earlier B&Ws at this price. That's not to say that this new speaker is dull or drab in any way because it isn't; it's a good deal better lit than some rivals. Yet there's none of that brightly lit, mid-forward balance of yore. This is especially obvious with REM's *The One I Love*. It's a pretty straightforward late-eighties rock recording with lots of strummed electric guitar work, which can lacerate the ears through the wrong amplifier/speaker combo. Here

### Unmistakable B&W design chic





**IN SIGHT**



- 1 25mm Carbon Dome tweeter
- 2 Bass reflex port
- 3 Bi-wireable binding posts
- 4 165mm Continuum mid/bass driver

**THE CARBON FACTOR**

B&W's latest 700 S2 range has received a number of key improvements over the outgoing CM S2 models, with the real eye-opener being the Carbon tweeter. This brand new unit is what the company calls its best ever non-Diamond tweeter. More than just the CM part with a dusting of matt black paint to make it look more sexy, this new driver has two key sections. The dome itself is a 30-micron aluminium affair, stiffened by a Physical Vapour Deposition coating of carbon. The second section is the 300-micron Carbon Ring that has been profiled to

match the form of the main dome, then bonded to the inner face. The result is a light, stiff structure with a breakup point of a bat-bothering 47kHz, raised from 38kHz in the old CM series. This in turn is placed in a structure of milled aluminium that weighs over 1kg, and is decoupled from the main speaker cabinet – which is in effect what B&W calls its “tweeter-on-top” technology. The same acoustically transparent tweeter grille fitted to the 800 Series Diamond is used, which is designed to prevent small, curious fingers from wreaking havoc.

though, there is no pain – the 705 S2 remains couth and even throughout – yet still invites the listener into the big recorded acoustic. This is an area where the B&W does very well as it's able to project a strong stereo image with accuracy and a fine sense of scale. With a decent recording such as this one it sounds open, expansive and three dimensional.

Feed it some classic electronica and the 705 S2 does even better; the fine integration between the two drive units giving a very coherent sound, while the midband and treble seem remarkably unfazed by any physical exertion that the mid/bass unit is asked to do. Age Of Love's imaginatively named *The Age Of Love* – “a banging slice of trance” as they used to say back in the nineties – sounds magnificent. This speaker is able to spoon out vast tracts of bass while sounding lithe and snappy in the midband and treble. It's genuinely accomplished at locking into the groove of the music and keeping the listener right there. The excellent tweeter helps with its combination of speed and dexterity, and there's a good sense of extension too, giving a more atmospheric feel. All in all, this is a

seriously capable speaker at the price – regardless of the type of music to which you choose to listen.

**Conclusion**

The real appeal of B&W's 705 S2 standmounter is that very few loudspeakers at this price are as well rounded; most don't approach its power handling or imaging, its focus or rhythmic snap – let alone excel in such things. It's a remarkable amount of speaker for the money, and is set to win this already popular brand plenty of new friends ●

**Hi-Fi Choice**

**OUR VERDICT**

**SOUND QUALITY** ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Power; punch; clarity; smoothness

**VALUE FOR MONEY** ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Tonally slightly dry, but that's it

**BUILD QUALITY** ★★★★★ **WESAY:** Consummate all-rounder with super sound

**EASE OF DRIVE** ★★★★★

**OVERALL** ★★★★★

**Q&A**

**Andy Kerr**

Marketing and communications director, B&W



**DP: What would you say is the raison d'être of the 705 S2?**

**AK:** Well, you don't buy a speaker like this to show off! You can find many larger, more 'showy' speakers for less money. The 705 S2 is an audiophile choice; it offers the best possible drive units for its price housed in the best possible configuration. In that sense, it represents the latest evolution of decades of Bowers & Wilkins research: you can see clear links in its design with both icons such as the 805 and older models in our history, including the DM7, our first tweeter-on-top loudspeaker released in 1977. The result is a speaker that looks like few others – certainly very few outside the Bowers & Wilkins portfolio – but really rewards listeners that value accuracy and insight.

**What marks it out from rivals?**

A combination of transducers and configuration. Our in-house development and manufacturing of all key components brings a specification and performance usually reserved for far more expensive speakers. It uses our Continuum mid/bass driver; developed for the more expensive 800 Series, its ultra-low noise floor gives exceptional transparency. The 705 S2 uses the new Carbon Dome tweeter, which gives outstanding accuracy by virtue of its superior pistonic behaviour. The tweeter enclosure is equally significant: it uses the same Solid Body technology as the 800 Series Diamond, with an acoustically optimised tweeter housing milled from a single solid billet of aluminium.

**How happy are you with the performance of the speaker?**

Very. I've spoken a lot about accuracy and insight. The 705 S2 certainly delivers that in spades, but it's fun too. It's full, muscular and entertaining, with surprisingly well-extended and forceful bass. It images really well and does a great job of painting a substantial sonic 'picture': it provides a deep, tall soundstage and offers excellent spatial placement.