

# Burmester Audiosysteme B18 loudspeaker

by Alan Sircom

Outside of its native Germany, Burmester is perhaps best known for its audio electronics and, more recently, its automotive audio systems inside some of the world's best cars. Although the company has made loudspeakers for decades, and some of those loudspeakers were highly respected, they were frequently dismissed by those who thought one brand is never able to perform all audio tasks, and were somewhat harder to justify in smaller listening spaces due to their demanding room size requirements.

Recently, however, those objections are fast being overturned, and it's thanks to loudspeakers like the B18. In part, one of the reasons why the B18 is such an agent of change is down to size and price. Electronics, even designs as 'statement' as Burmester, are relatively easy to slot into most European living spaces. Even the flagship 909 Mk 5 power amplifier is not much larger than a beer fridge that can stand close to the wall (the beer fridge should join the Olympic-sized swimming pool, the double decker bus, and Wales as slightly bizarre units of measurements). Loudspeakers, on the other hand, demand and take up a lot of space, and the bigger the loudspeaker, the more demanding their room requirements. Burmester traditionally makes very large loudspeakers (like the B100 and B80 Mk 2) that are never going to fit into a small, elegant apartment in Berlin, Paris, or London. Models like the B18, and the B10 before it, challenge that perception head on, by being smaller, more attainable loudspeakers. ▶



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▶ The B10 was mentioned on purpose, because the standmount – Burmester’s first – delivered much of what ultimately trickled up into the B18. OK, so the front baffle of the B10 is not the midrange and treble panel of the B18, but they are close enough to mean they should never marry.

The B18 is a two and a half way floorstander. It’s rear ported, so placement close to the rear wall is not advised, but the loudspeaker is provided with a pair of foam bungs, and there is a bass control to tailor the loudspeaker to a surprisingly large number of rooms, both in terms of room position and ultimate bass control.

It seems Burmester might have learned quite a lot from its automotive division, too. The aluminium-MDF sandwich front baffle is there to significantly reduce cabinet resonance: this follows the concepts investigated in the B10, but the same idea makes a lot of sense when you consider trying to get good sound from the inside of a car. Alongside some heavy-duty DSP, the interior of a car is all about resonance control and finding ways to keep that resonance at bay. FEM analysis of the cabinet helps, and the resultant cabinet is exceptionally torsion-resistant. That doesn’t just make it corner better in the wet; it helps reduce internal resonance simply by making a more solid enclosure. All without having to adopt some wild styling that would make it harder to sell to the more conservative buyers that respect the Burmester brand.

Drivers, too, have come in for some heavy analysis. Again like the B10, the B18 eschews Burmester’s preferred Heil-style Air Motion Transformer ribbon tweeter, for a bespoke ring radiator tweeter. This gives a lot of the resolution of an AMT, without the Heil driver’s greater cost of manufacture and its more demanding demeanour. Ring radiator tweeters continue to be popular with many brands, because they give much of the clarity and extension of such ribbons, without the excessive brightness of metal cones. Partner this unit with low and mid fibreglass 170mm units derived from the B10, and this is an accessible design for the real-world user, not some audiophile dream that becomes a nightmare outside of the man cave.

The B18 demands and deserves some grip from its amplifier partner. Although it’s not simply the end piece for Burmester systems, it’s both a natural partner and the choice of listening instrument for the speaker designers, so the B18



is best used with solid-state amplifier designs with good current delivery and a good damping factor. Used with an ill controlled valve power amplifier that is pathologically afraid of power delivery and you get ill-controlled bass where the sense of bloat is hard to control. That is not the fault of the B18, however, because once you put a good solid-state amp to its speaker terminals, it responds to the extra grip by throwing out a lot of clean detail across the range, and a wide, expansive soundstage. It goes from ‘flap’ to ‘snap’ in seconds, and the results when suitably partnered, are excellent.

The loudspeaker settles in quickly and easily. Straight out of the box, the sound is somewhat ‘boom-tizz’, with a clear treble, a healthy sounding low-end ‘thwack’, and not much more. That goes away quickly though, as the midrange seems to fill out at speed. A couple of hours into listening, that sense of ‘boom-tizz’ all but evaporated. There remained a very slight enhancement of the upper bass that didn’t completely disappear, but the effect is mild and certainly not troubling. If anything, it’s a measure of Burmester getting its potential clients right, because this help in the upper bass is perfect to make small to medium sized rooms sound big.

I found the B18 a very easy loudspeaker to live with. It has that great combination of refinement, easy and effortless bass, and unforced dynamic range that lends the speaker to protracted listening sessions. But, alongside this unforced presentation, it has a fine ability to wig out and play really loud! ▶



*“But perhaps what makes the B18 so attractive is its ability to play music gracefully.”*

this means the B18 is not the last word in beat management, but it never once seems to enforce a rhythmic structure of its own on the music. It's not that kind of control. Instead, it's like music with a strong impresario at the helm. A sound of great authority, with only the last octave standing between this speaker and absolute top end audio perfection.

I have to admit that one of my last pieces of information I check before filing copy is the price, because price can be its own bias. As a result, that usually means the price in the specifications box is written as “£xxx”. It also acts as an unconscious guesstimate of just how expensive a product is, in very broad terms. And, thanks to reviewing a lot of products, I'm usually pretty good at that guessing game. For most of the review, I had this loudspeaker down as “£xx,xxx” and had it in my head as being around £12,500, not £7,500. Granted at £12,500 it might represent ‘challenging’ value for money, but not that challenging given the provenance. For £7,500, the B18 floorstander is a real killer, and it's not simply a product for Burmester owners. Recommended. +

▶ It's hard not to play ‘No Sanctuary Here’ by the late Chris Jones [*Roadhouses & Automobiles*, Stockfish], because I've never been to any Burmester demonstration that didn't feature this recording. But, it sums up everything that is really good about the B18 in the process. Like the recording, the loudspeaker is extremely detailed, with lots of midrange and treble information on offer. Yet, for all that detail, the overall presentation is far from fatiguing, which accounts for the ability to sit in front of the B18 for hours without complaint (and the ability to hear Chris Jones played 30 times an hour at an audiophile show without a burning desire to throw up). Also, both recording and loudspeaker produce an outstanding sense of imaging and soundstaging, with a visceral, holographic instrument stage, with musicians rooted solidly in place. But perhaps what makes the B18 so attractive is its ability to play music gracefully. I didn't find myself reaching for classical music too often while listening to the B18, and ultimately ended up kicking myself for the omission. This is an extremely deft transducer for playing Mozart, as it is for playing, er Mastodon.

For all its grace combined with that ability to play at surprisingly loud levels, the B18 is every bit the controlled loudspeaker design. It can go wild – I played ‘Supermassive Black Hole’ by Muse [*Black Holes & Revelations*, Warners] at levels far louder than I should – but the B18 never seems to trip over itself. There is always a sense of control that isn't simply self-preservation; the B18 plays music as if you will back off before the loudspeaker begins to struggle. Perhaps

## TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

**Type:** 2.5-way floorstanding rear-ported loudspeaker

**Drive units:** 1× 25mm ring-radiator tweeter, 170mm glass-fibre cone midrange, 170mm glass-fibre cone bass unit

**Impedance:** 4Ω

**Sensitivity (at 2.83V/1m):** 88dB

**Power rating:** 120W

**Frequency response:** 42Hz–30kHz (±3dB)

**Crossover frequencies:** 400Hz, 2.3kHz

**Available in:** high gloss white, black, walnut, or makassar finish

**Dimensions (W×H×D):** 20.4 × 105.6 × 39.5cm

**Weight:** 34.8 kg per loudspeaker

**Price:** £7,500 per pair

**Manufactured by:** Burmester Audiosysteme GmbH

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