

Kharma Elegance dB9-Diamond floorstanding loudspeakers

Eric Neff

One of the significant benefits of attending a major audio show, in this case, for me, being AXPONA in Chicago, is the chance to see and hear gear that isn't available close to where I live. The nearest Kharma dealer is over 650 kilometres away, so, unfortunately, I haven't had the opportunity to spend time with the brand. A few years ago, I had the chance to hear the Kharma model Elegance dB7 at an audio show.

The dB7 is the second smallest model in the Kharma range, yet I was very impressed with its overall presentation. Fast forward a few years to this spring, and I spoke with Vivienne van Oosterum, International Sales Director for Kharma, about the possibility of spending some time with one of their speakers. She mentioned that their newly updated Elegance Line's dB9-Diamond model would be an option, as it was already here in the States, so there would be no tariff concerns in arranging to send it to me.

Birkin coloured

A few weeks later, two large crates arrived, and I was greeted by a pair of the said Kharma Elegance dB9-Diamonds in a stunning Hermès Orange! Yes, the speakers are the same colour as the iconic \$17,000 Hermès Birkin handbag. They (the speakers) feature gold-accented badges and feet, striking a beautiful pose in front of my listening room. The dB9s come in a few standard colours, but you can order all Kharma loudspeakers in any RAL shade to match your interior as desired.

The Kharma Elegance dB9-Diamonds are a three-way closed system featuring a very rigid and proprietary cabinet material. The speakers include adjustable spikes and brass cups for use on hardwood floors. The twin nine-inch aluminium drivers are paired with the Kharma Omega seven-inch carbon fibre cone. The highlight is the diamond tweeter. Measuring 25mm and equipped with upgraded wiring, the diamond tweeter surpasses the already impressive one-inch beryllium tweeter on the dB9 Signature





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» models. The tweeter itself costs nearly \$25,000 USD extra. As I will explain in the listening section of the review, the tweeter is remarkable and undoubtedly the finishing touch of an already world-class speaker!

Taken as a whole, the Kharma Elegance dB9-Diamonds are visually stunning with the fit and finish you would expect from a high-end supercar — a Maybach with woofers rather than wheels. Perhaps because I am based in the USA, I appreciate the distinctly European aesthetic of the Kharma design. There is a sophistication to the whole that I greatly admire.

Another feature of the Diamond version of the dB9s is the option to bi-wire the speakers. The Elegance dB9 Signature model does not offer bi-wiring unless requested. I connected a pair of AudioQuest William Tell Zero bi-wire cables to the dB9-Diamonds and then linked them to a pair of Atma-Sphere Class D Monoblocks, which provide 200 watts into 4 Ohms. Sources were routed through my Pass Labs preamp. I let the speakers break in with Qobuz running via Roon for a few days. As I spent more time listening more closely, I did not hear the scale I expected from the dB9-Diamonds.

Sealed and rigid

Considering the sealed and rigid nature of these speakers, I switched from the Atma-Sphere Class D Monos (an amplifier I greatly admire for more efficient speakers) to the Sanders Sound Magtech Class AB amp. The Magtech, delivering 900 Watts into 4 Ohms and with a very high damping factor, made an immediate impression. It was time to start listening.

One acid test for great speakers is the ability to handle female vocals. One of my favourite vocalists is Annie Lennox. Her performance of *Into the West* on the soundtrack to *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* [Reprise Records] is one of my favourites. The dB9 Diamonds presented her voice with purity and strength. Annie always delivers, and, in this instance, it was as good a performance as I have heard.

Singing alongside a massed ensemble of strings, interspersed with a plucked harp, you can appreciate both the texture of the strings and the timbre of her voice, blended with the tactile sensation of the harp strings, all coming together in a very pleasing musical tapestry. A wall of horns swells from beneath the strings with perfect tonality. As a former French horn player, I certainly enjoy a good horn section, and the reproduction of their tone is crucial for me. The Kharma Elegance dB9-Diamonds were more than capable of reproducing the horns accurately.

Jump!

If you want to assess the jump a speaker has in the low end, try some Deadmau5. His 2014 album *While (1<2)* [Virgin] features many excellent club tracks, but Seeya is a personal favourite. A collaboration with Colleen D'Agostino, Seeya gets the club moving. Heavy EDM bass tracks challenge many speakers, as they must handle both the low frequencies and the rapid switching of low and subsonic signals. Smearing of consecutive low notes produces a more constant sound rather than a clear separation of notes, which affects the song's original intent.

The dB9 Diamonds performed flawlessly, reaching the lowest levels asked of them while maintaining each note's shape. Magtech's powerful presence and high damping factor paired beautifully with the Kharma Elegance dB9-Diamonds to deliver the performance as intended. Pushing the volume well beyond 100dB, the sound remained pure and distortion-free. Club-level power met precise control. It was a splendid experience.

My primary in-house speakers, the DeVore O/93, suit lower-wattage SET tube amplifiers and more intimate music choices. Using the dB9s and the Magtech had me reaching for Beethoven and other larger-scale orchestral works. I have always been fond of Beethoven's *Nine Symphonies*, performed by Herbert von Karajan (2024 Remastered, Berlin 1962 Alexandre Bak Classical Music Recording) via Qobuz through my Cary DMS-700 streamer/DAC—the *Symphony No. 3 in E flat major ('Eroica'). Op.55 part I. Allegro con Brio.* is a powerful movement with grandeur and depth. Massed strings are contrasted by brass and topped by oboes and other woodwinds, floating over the sound.

With so many instruments, it is sometimes difficult to perceive the proper placement of individual or sectioned instruments. Not so with the Kharma Elegance dB9-Diamonds. Spatial accuracy was impeccable, allowing you to "see" with your ears and pinpoint precisely where each artist was performing.

Just like being at a live orchestra concert, you could hear from left to right and front to back, taking in the whole orchestra. Sweeping fortissimo gave way to intimate pianissimo in a way that made you feel as if you were in that centre seat in the concert hall. It was clear that the dB9-Diamonds were at home in a concert hall environment. Glad I had cleaned my tuxedo!



EQUIPMENT REVIEW
Kharma Elegance dB9-Diamond



It was as if you experienced an aural kaleidoscope, with percussion, chimes, and cymbals tracking in three dimensions across the soundstage.

» On to vinyl

Moving on to some vinyl, I queued up my brand new Intervention Records Kevin Grey mastered copy of Billy Squier's *Don't Say No* [Capital Records]. I settled in for a full side, one listen. First up was 'In the Dark.' Mastered from the original tapes by Kevin Grey at CoHEARent Audio on 180-gram vinyl, the pressing is immaculate. My Ortofon Cadenza Bronze glided through the pristine grooves and delivered a slice of my college dorm room. 80s power rock was partly defined by crunching guitars, and the dB9s delivered just that. All the power I recalled came through as the Omega 7 midrange reproduced the sounds with incredible accuracy. 'The Stroke' was a virtual time machine, transporting me back to campus parties and good times. The dB9-Diamonds will surely entertain fans of arena rock.

Switching albums to Bryan Ferry's *Bête Noire* (1987 Reprise Records), Kiss and Tell features an excellent bass groove that propels this song forward with funk and strength. Listening through the dB9-Diamonds was a delight as the twin 9-inch woofers kept the groove tight and on course. Ferry and his band deliver a lot of spatial sound throughout the track and the dB9-Diamonds. It was as if you experienced an aural kaleidoscope, with percussion, chimes, and cymbals tracking in three dimensions across the soundstage. Yet, you never got the impression that anything was misplaced or misrepresented.

A consistent trait of the Kharma Elegance dB9-Diamonds was their unwavering fidelity to the source material, presenting it with accuracy and timing.

I was enjoying a notable benefit of the dB9-Diamonds: their fantastic control of sound »



EQUIPMENT REVIEW
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I was enjoying a long-time favourite presented with as clear and powerful a delivery as I have had the privilege to experience.



» across various frequencies. It is seamless, very well-conceived, and precisely controlled. Regardless of your sonic preferences, your favourite music will reach your ears in the quality you expect from a well-recorded piece.

One of my favourite well-worn albums is Dire Straits' *Brothers in Arms* [Warner]. I own this on remastered vinyl, original vinyl, and 2005 SACD, and for convenience, I listen to it via Qobuz high-res. Perhaps my favourite aspect of this album is the solidity of the low end, achieved through the bass guitar. It is, for me, simply foundational and crucial to how I enjoy the album. Songs like 'Your Latest Trick' won't work as well if the playback does not do justice to the bass guitar. A speaker needs to be capable of reproducing actual sound below 30Hz to convey the foundation of the song effectively.

Truly remarkable

That is one thing that I miss when listening to my usual setup. In the past, when I had the Vandersteen Quatro CTs with their powered built-in subs in-house, I got absolute joy out of that solid foundation. The dB9 Diamonds have that fantastic low-end control and delivery and then some. Remarkably, they offer it up without the benefit of a powered sub. Between a strong amp, bi-wiring and a clearly well-designed bass section and crossover, they offer up a very satisfying low end. Tight, controlled

yet seamlessly integrated into the overall tune without overpowering the music. The fact that this low-end competence is combined with a mid-range driver of very high quality, as well as a state-of-the-art diamond tweeter inside a body that has been refined and improved for several generations, has led to a truly remarkable speaker.

Listening to 'Your Latest Trick' a second and even a third time in a row, I was enjoying a long-time favourite presented with as clear and powerful a delivery as I have had the privilege to experience. And this is what it comes to: I consider Kharma an aspirational brand. Their flagship costs several times more than the Kharma Elegance dB9-Diamonds. Yet, should you decide to purchase a pair, it would be akin to choosing a Maybach, a Hasselblad camera system, or a Patek Philippe watch. The form and function of all are aspirational. Beauty and performance combine to satisfy the buyer.

Art you play with

I have a friend who owns a top-end Porsche. He described his car as art you get to play with. The dB9-Diamonds qualify as art. They are beautiful, and yet I can also play my favourite music through them and enjoy their sound. Two wins for the price of one! If you have the chance to audition a pair of Kharma Elegance dB9-Diamonds speakers within your budget, they could become your forever speakers. I will be sad to see them go. Highly recommended! +

Technical specifications

Type: Three-way, rear-ported, floorstanding loudspeaker
Drivers: 1x25mm Diamond tweeter, 1x180mm Kharma Omega 7 midrange driver, 2x230mm aluminium woofers
RMS power 250 watts
Program power 500 watts
Frequency range 26 Hz - 30 kHz
Nominal impedance 4 Ohms
Efficiency 2.83V/1m 89 dB
Maximum SPL 113 dB
Dimensions (HxWxD): 104.1x41x60.6cm
Weight: 63 kg.
Price: €65,000, \$90,000 per pair

Manufacturer Kharma International

🌐 www.kharma.com