

# FBT VERTUS

## CLASSY COLUMN LINE ARRAY

BY JIMMY DEN-OUDEM



**This and more is true of the FBT Vertus system. It's a scalable, self-powered, full-range column-based line array system, and I think it's pretty cool. The system is based around two speaker modules – the CLA604A column and CLA208SA sub. Our test kit came nicely cased in padded covers, which are an option.**

The CLA604A is internally bi-amped (400+100W RMS), and houses 6x 4" drivers and 4x 1" tweeters in an extruded aluminium enclosure. Nominal dispersion is 100x20 degrees (HxV), and it's good for 130Hz-20kHz (-6dB) at up to 122dB continuous SPL. The CLA604A weighs 11.5kg, so it's light enough to lift up easily but heavy enough that it doesn't feel like a toy. You can stack up to 3 CLA604A units, and they mate up to each other with a quick lock pin system which also allows you to pan them to different angles.

Stacking the CLA604A leads to separation between the HF drivers, ultimately yielding a less vertically tightly

COLUMN SPEAKERS. THE MERE NAME CONJURES UP IMAGES OF THE 70'S, COMPLETE WITH CARPETED WALLS. IN A TIME WHEN THE AUDIO MARKET HAS NO SHORTAGE OF COMPOSITE BOXES, THE HUMBLE COLUMN SPEAKER IS OFTEN FORGOTTEN. THAT'S A SHAME, BECAUSE THERE'S A LOT TO BE SAID FOR THE COLUMN SPEAKER. THEY ARE VISUALLY UNIMPOSING AND TEND TO HAVE PRETTY GOOD PATTERN CONTROL.

controlled pattern. If you need the system to throw for miles, you can invert one column atop the other – just re-locate the quick lock pins using a flathead screwdriver. In the "one inverted" configuration, the system behaves more like a traditional line source with tightly controlled vertical splay. So far as mounting the first column goes, there's an optional clip-on stand mount, but the design of the system is that the CLA604A slots into locator pins at the front of the CLA208SA. If you need a little more height, there's a dummy column available to provide same, though it's the priciest accessory available.

The CLA604A is internally DSP controlled and has a dial on the back with four presets. The first two are for single column use, with one providing max SPL and the other better pattern control. The other two presets allow for ganging multiple columns together. There's a HPF and a mic/line input level select button. Power and signal are input via PowerCon and XLR at the base of the column, with loop outputs at the top. It's a very tidy looking system, with no stray cables messing up the appearance.

The CLA208SA is a dual 8" active sub, with frequency response stated as 50-180Hz (-6dB), which seems believable. Maximum continuous SPL spec is 125dB (half space), which is well matched to the column. The internal amp is rated to 400W RMS, and multiple units can be stacked up to 3 high thanks to rubber feet and corresponding divots in the top of the box. You can roll the sub off at 180 or 120Hz, and there's a phase invert and "punch" mode. Dual XLR inputs correspond to dual link outputs, as well as dual high-passed outputs. You could run a stereo column system with a single sub if you wanted to, but at the kind of frequencies the sub runs up to it would start to get a bit obvious that there was only one.



ANOTHER OF THE MANY POSSIBLE CONFIGURATIONS

The Vertus system as I tested it allowed me to build a stereo system with single components each side, or a single mono system with the spacer at the bottom to elevate the columns. I tried both. I liked the results. Top end is bright and all there, and for a little box the dual 8" sub supports low frequency amply. Pushed hard the tonal balance seems to shift a bit in favour of the column, which seemed weird because I actually hit limiters on the CLA604A first. In fairness it was seriously loud – the system is capable of more level than I expected. I think the specs seem pretty honest. Gain before feedback using a



CLA604A CONTROLS



CLA208SA CONTROLS

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vocal mic was impressive, but without high-passing the mic a bit too much of it appears at the sub – perhaps due to the high crossover.

With two columns stacked “right way up” you can definitely tell when you move vertically in and out of the HF coverage. The vertical dispersion feels very narrow, and centres at the 4x dome tweeters. It would be great

to hear the system in a bigger space, where I think the “two distinct boxes” effect would be less apparent. There’s a “tilt-down” bracket available for the CLA604A allowing you to point the sound at the people in the house, not the back wall. I like that.



Because the column can be mounted either in front of the sub or centrally on top with a pole, this introduces the question of what happens to phase alignment at the crossover point. We asked the question, and FBT responded: “Phase delay between CLA604A and CLA208S when the column is in front of the sub is very low (10°) and it’s already compensated for in the internal crossover alignment. When the column is mounted on top of the sub with pole there are no substantial differences as the delay is less than 20°. Really there is no impact on sound perceived or SPL at crossover point.”. We agree – moving the column made no noticeable impact on the sound.

Overall the Vertus is a very competent little system. It definitely punches above its weight, and for the price it more than met my expectations. It’s a well thought-out piece of design, and the modularity factor allows it versatility and ultimately the capacity for faster ROI. Pricewise it’s probably a bit beyond the reach of the average MI customer. On the other hand, it looks very unimposing and it sounds good for its size. That’s a recipe for winning on corporate gigs, so anyone doing a lot of those should definitely take a long hard look, and listen to the Vertus.



BRAND: FBT  
 MODEL: VERTUS CLA604A & CLA208SA  
 RRP: CLA604A - \$1979 INC GST.  
 CLA208SA - \$1799 INC GST.  
 PRODUCT INFO: [WWW.FBT.IT](http://WWW.FBT.IT)  
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