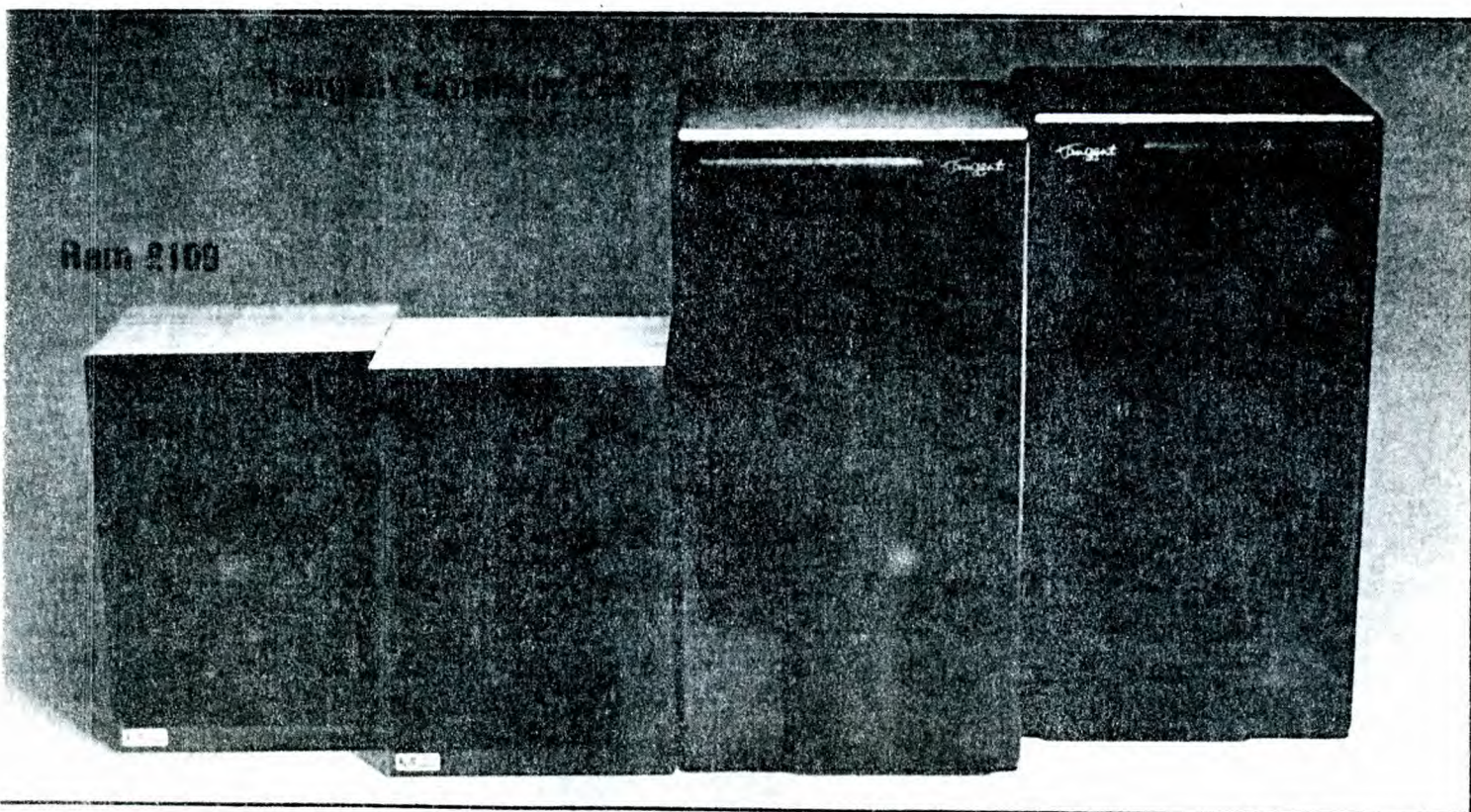


Bigger and better?



economic recession and the chill wind of competition from the East has concentrated the mind of British speaker manufacturers wonderfully.

To tell you the truth I'd been getting a bit worried about people like Sony and Sansui making speakers especially for the European market, and I thought there might be a real danger that they'd seen the smaller British companies off. After listening to the Ram CD10 and Tangent Excelsior, however, I can see that it'll take a lot more effort from the Japanese to put these two firms out of business.

In commercial terms, Ram seems to be just about the most successful firm of its kind in Britain. In spite of their grandiose advertising claims, they actually operate with probably not much more than a couple of dozen employees from an old mill outside Norwich. There they assemble loudspeaker systems from drive units and

Here the big speakers are much cheaper than the small ones! Clive Stone compares Tangent's latest with the new Ram

cabinets made by other people, and use a ruthlessly efficient marketing company to sell the products very hard indeed.

It's a flexible and efficient setup and means that they don't have the enormous capital commitments of giants like Wharfedale, Goodmans and Celestion, but they do have the marketing expertise which is lacking in so many other comparable UK firms.

Tangent is similar to Ram in many ways, although they don't seem to have achieved quite the same single-minded sense of purpose that we find with Ram. Originally founded by John Greenbank, a man not noted for

self-deprecation, the company fell into the hands of the receiver after an over-rapid expansion programme came to grief. But the marque was soon re-launched by Yorkshire businessman Peter Hardcastle, a man whose personality contrasts interestingly with Greenbank's metaphysical outlook on life.

In the tough world of hi-fi marketing however, it is reassuring to discover that both Ram and Tangent have come to terms with worsening economic conditions in surprisingly effective, though contrasting ways.

The chief economic reality which speaker firms have to

contend with these days is the price of timber.

When you buy a loudspeaker in the shops, something like half the production costs go on the wood for the cabinet, and a good proportion of that is for the wood veneer on which so many purchasers are presumed to insist. In the case of the speakers tested here, Ram have used small cabinets, which don't need much veneer, while Tangent use black paint, instead of the wood veneer, on what are very large speakers indeed for the price of £89.

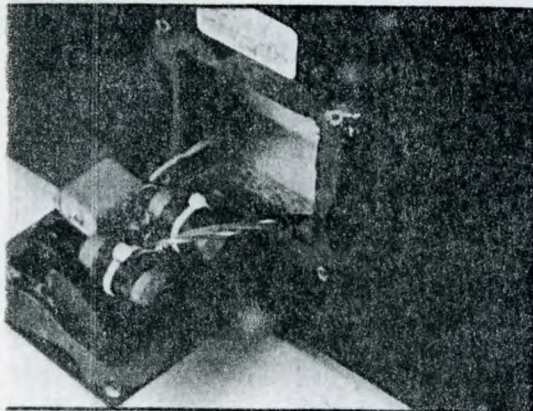
Tangent tell us that they are able to make such large cabinets because the proportions are carefully worked out so that the carpenters don't need to waste any wood when they use standard sized planks, and the black paint gives a positive and innovative appearance to the product. I can report that the finish is pretty good, although you'll have to make your own



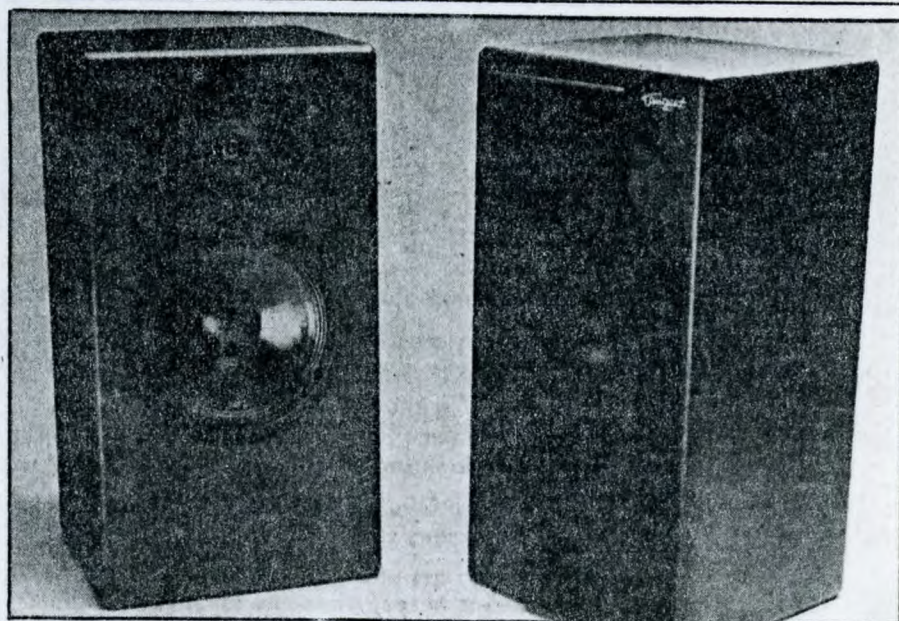
"The chief economic reality speaker firms have to contend with these days is the price of timber..."

TANGENT EXCELSIOR

Typ: £89



Three element crossover soldered to the input terminals



Big and black — Tangent Excelsiors

KEYS
Extended bass
Price
Simplicity

SLIKES
Warm midrange
Hazy imaging
Colouration

SPECIFICATION

Drive units: 210mm doped paper bass/midrange, 19mm dome tweeter
Frequency response: 68Hz-20kHz±3dB

Nominal impedance: 8ohms
Recommended amplifier power: up to 80watts
Dimensions: 51 x 28 x 25cm
Finish: black acrylic paint with black fabric grille

price level — although you wouldn't think so to see the long list in Band Two of the *What Hi-Fi?* Buying Guide.

One design I would suggest for comparison, however, would be the Mordaunt-Short Festival 2. This is the same price, and has a larger cabinet with the excellent eight-inch bass unit, the DSB208. I haven't compared them directly, but my impression is the Mordaunt-Short has deeper bass and brighter treble with imaging and depth at least as good as the Ram. I might be wrong, however, and you are urged to make up your own mind by listening to demonstrations.

Unfortunately for the Tangents, they are in a very competitive section of the market although they must be the largest genuine hi-fi speaker available at the price. With careful position they will give exceptionally deep bass and have a reasonable performance through the rest of their range, although they do retain a boxy colouration which is nonetheless not difficult to live with.

ut being overbearing and a accurate and pleasant quality. Nevertheless, r-frequencies were clean understated in character. rkest aspect of the CD10s rformance was probably in o imaging which was a diffuse and smeary, but not sonably so for the price.

asured

ging to the Tangents, it clear that the sound was coloured. I suppose the ar the box is, the more iration we can expect, and nder its frequency.

ormation in the presence was certainly much less defined, and although the frequencies were of a arly high standard to the s, and the bass extension

was greater, there was very little more subjective bass output. It would appear, in fact, that the larger box had given us greater efficiency rather than more bass. Not that there's anything wrong with that — particularly since moving the speaker into the corners performed miracles.

Closeness to the walls increased the levels of the lower bass to levels much higher than would have been possible with speakers as small as the Rams, and this positioning also had a good effect on the midrange. Vocalists began to emerge much more convincingly from their backing, for example.

In fact, with the speakers against the wall, the Excelsiors began to approach the sort of sound which has become typical

of Tangent, and which is popular with many people. This means a deep airy bass which makes up in extension what it tends to lack in definition. The midrange was a bit warm and coloured, and the top a bit lacking in excitement.

So which is the best? In terms of sound quality it must be the Rams, but at £20 cheaper it is difficult to fault the Tangents for value.

With apologies to the Editor, it is frankly unfair to compare these 'two purely on sound quality when the price differential is considered — although the Tangent does score on low bass response.

The Rams are good speakers, and have the advantage that there is not a great deal of effective competition at this