"Elegant design, excellent finish, flexible connectivity and first-class sound. Rating: Highly recommended"

HECO
Ascada 2.0

Overall rating:
1.0 - HIGHLIGHT
Class:
Top class
Price/performance:
Very good

Heco Ascada 2.0 – Desktop high-end system with style and source diversity

At this year's IFA in Berlin, Heco presented the big sisters of the well-known, tried-and-tested Ascada 300 BTX Bluetooth loudspeaker. The fully active desktop duo with its many extras and named the "Ascada 2.0" is now available at last and was ordered by us for testing straightaway.

Do you still remember the big hi-fi towers from the 1980s? Record player, equalizer, amplifier, cassette deck (and then, at some stage, also a CD player) stacked to form a hip-high, mostly black tower. To the right and left, there were also two (normally huge) loudspeakers. Then, a decade later, the compact systems came into fashion, offering more or less the same range of functions but taking up considerably less space. Much more compact still are the modern wireless and active loudspeakers, which are equipped almost just as extensively and are certainly a match for the old modular systems in terms of sound quality and sometimes sound even better. The amount of wiring, on the other hand, is substantially less than for the compact systems or the hi-fi towers mentioned at the beginning. This is all positive, though wireless speakers do often have a problem: They do not provide any real stereo sound on account of the speaker cones simply being too close to each other in one enclosure. Heco has now eradicated this problem with the Ascada 2.0 by virtue of the set consisting of two compact loudspeakers that can be set up remotely from each other as desired and can therefore be adapted to all room conditions.

Tradition, Technology & Design

Initially, the two white gloss loudspeakers, also available in black, of course, hardly look any different from "normal" shelf speakers. At least as far as size is concerned. They are a good 28 cm high and deep and a slim 18 cm wide. The baffle and back are inclined to the rear, making the speakers appear trapezoidal from the side. This looks quite stylish and, at the same time, has an important technical aspect. This means that the origin of the sound – the position of the two cones – is exactly the same distance from the listener. The signals emitted therefore reach the ear simultaneously. The two-way set used here is concealed behind a gray fabric cover. This is really not necessary at all, however, as the solid aluminum surround via which the two drivers are screwed to the enclosure are far too attractive to be hidden behind fabric. The famous final touch of the design relates to the edges of the speaker. There simply aren't any! All corners, angles and edges are beveled or rounded, resulting in conjunction with the trapezoidal form in a particularly harmonious overall appearance of the, at least apparently, normal loudspeakers.

When lifting them for the first time, it is noticeable that one of the two speakers is distinctly heavier than the other. Looked at more closely, the heavier of the two units, the right-hand one, turns out to be the control center of the duo. The reason for this is that, while only two screw terminals can be found on the left-hand speaker for connecting speaker cable, the rear of the right-hand unit is packed full of all kinds of connections. Strictly speaking, the Ascada 2.0 is therefore an active and a passive loudspeaker. The connections are needed on account of all the electronics previously distributed over a large number of enclosures in the hi-fi rack now being completely integrated into one loudspeaker. First, there is, of course, the obligatory power connection as the electronics working inside do, after all, need a power supply to function. Located directly above this is a USB port marked "USB Charge". This is very practical because, as you rightly assume, it can be used to charge smartphones, tablets or other music players

(also during playback). Also located on the left-hand side of the connection terminal are two screw terminals for loudspeaker cables. You've probably long guessed what's coming next: The two pairs of screw terminals must, of course, be connected to each other with a corresponding speaker cable. Heco includes a 3 meter loudspeaker cable among its accessories for this purpose, which should certainly be sufficient to use the unit for the first time in most situations. However, if you intend to set up the two loudspeakers further apart, so you can use any other speaker cable of your choice, of course. Incidentally, this "bridge" between the two speakers is the only cable connection (apart from the power supply) needed for operation because the Ascada 2.0 receives music signals wirelessly via Bluetooth. Alternatively, this can also be done via a wired connection, of course. The master unit offers four further signal input possibilities in this regard: In the classic way via an analog cinch connector or digitally via coax, toslink or USB, with which our test system appeared to be equipped for just about every eventuality. The USB port mentioned proves to be particularly practical. A notebook can be connected via this port, for example, to recognize the Ascada duo as an "external sound card" and reproduce the sound via the two stylish speakers. On a MAC, this even works without installing a driver - i.e. simply via Plug & Play. In addition, playback via USB has another considerable advantage: The internal digital-analog converter in the Hecos operates with a maximum resolution of 24 bit at a sampling frequency of 96 kHz. This is considerably more than the resolution normally pressed onto a CD (16 bit/44.1 kHz) and this can be clearly heard, depending on the material!

Setup & installation

Getting the Hecos started is as simple as can be: Once a suitable place has been found, the two loudspeakers have to be connected with each other using the cable already mentioned. Red to red and black to black. The right-hand speaker then has to be connected to the power supply - and that's it! Incidentally, all speakers feel particularly happy when they are located away from the wall a bit and are set up symmetrically to the main listening location. Setting them at a slight angle improves spatial depth and focuses the sound on the listener. The Ascada duo then has to be switched on before you can hear the music. A small remote control is supplied for this and can also be used to select the desired input and adjust the volume. In the case of the music signal being input via Bluetooth or USB, it can do even more, however, such as select the next title via the forward and back buttons or stop playback via the pause button.

Heco Ascada 2.0: Sound & space

The active Heco Ascada 2.0 duo first also had to undergo the normal "playing in" process, of course. So it was first allowed to play music at low volume for a few hours until all the moving parts had settled in. Used for the first real hi-fi test was the fantastic opener "Weight of Love" from the current Black Keys album entitled "Turn Blue". A good opportunity to show what they can do. And they can do it. What my test guests then offered actually left me almost speechless initially. And for good reason: the small speakers produce a bass whose precision and power come across so brilliantly that it is a veritable joy to the ear. I really hadn't expected that and was very impressed. But I want more. So turn the system up quickly to see what the maximum sound level is like. Answer: Plenty of sound! Even way above normal room volume, the graceful speakers still perform wonderfully and are impressive in every respect. So there should not be any shortage of volume with the Hecos in rooms with an area up to 25 square meters. I then gradually noticed that the speakers sounded somewhat "more English" to my taste. Meaning a

little less bass and a bit more treble. Don't misunderstand me, this certainly should not to be regarded as a problem because the sound characteristics in the high and low ranges can be adjusted flexibly to one's own preferences via the integrated equalizer. With slightly lowered treble and the bass raised somewhat - a sound setting that I personally like better - the test continues with the Eagles classic "Hotel California", going back almost 40 years in time. A song that is still a benchmark in technical recording terms and is furthermore available in various formats and resolutions. Even with simple CD resolution, I like the - for a loudspeaker pair of this size - exceptional spatial sound of the Ascadas, which produces a particularly realistic stage performance irrespective of the volume. And that at a distance of something more than 2 meters between the speakers and approximately the same distance from the listener and without any hole appearing in the center of the stage. That makes me want more, so let round two begin. The same song, but this time at 24 bit/96 kHz. A step that is then also quickly and clearly understandable in terms of sound. The treble is finer and softer and, at the lower end of the frequency range, the bass comes across as distinctly more structured and somehow more well-balanced than before. All of which puts the fun back into listening to music! So if it is a matter of enjoying your own high-resolution songs in the best possible quality, I definitely recommend selecting direct input via USB. Choosing this method unlocks the entire potential of the Ascadas.

Conclusion

You're looking for 2 compact loudspeakers to provide you with the best possible sound at home without a lot of wiring? Then the new Ascada 2.0 system is just the thing for you. At a fair price of €599.00, the graceful active all-rounders have everything that can be desired from a modern active loudspeaker: Elegant design, excellent finish, flexible connectivity and first-class sound. Rating: Highly recommended!

RATING:

Sound (60%):	1.0
Practical (20%):	1.0
Equipment (20%):	1.0
OVERALL RATING:	1.0

Class:	TOP CLASS
Price/performance	VERY GOOD