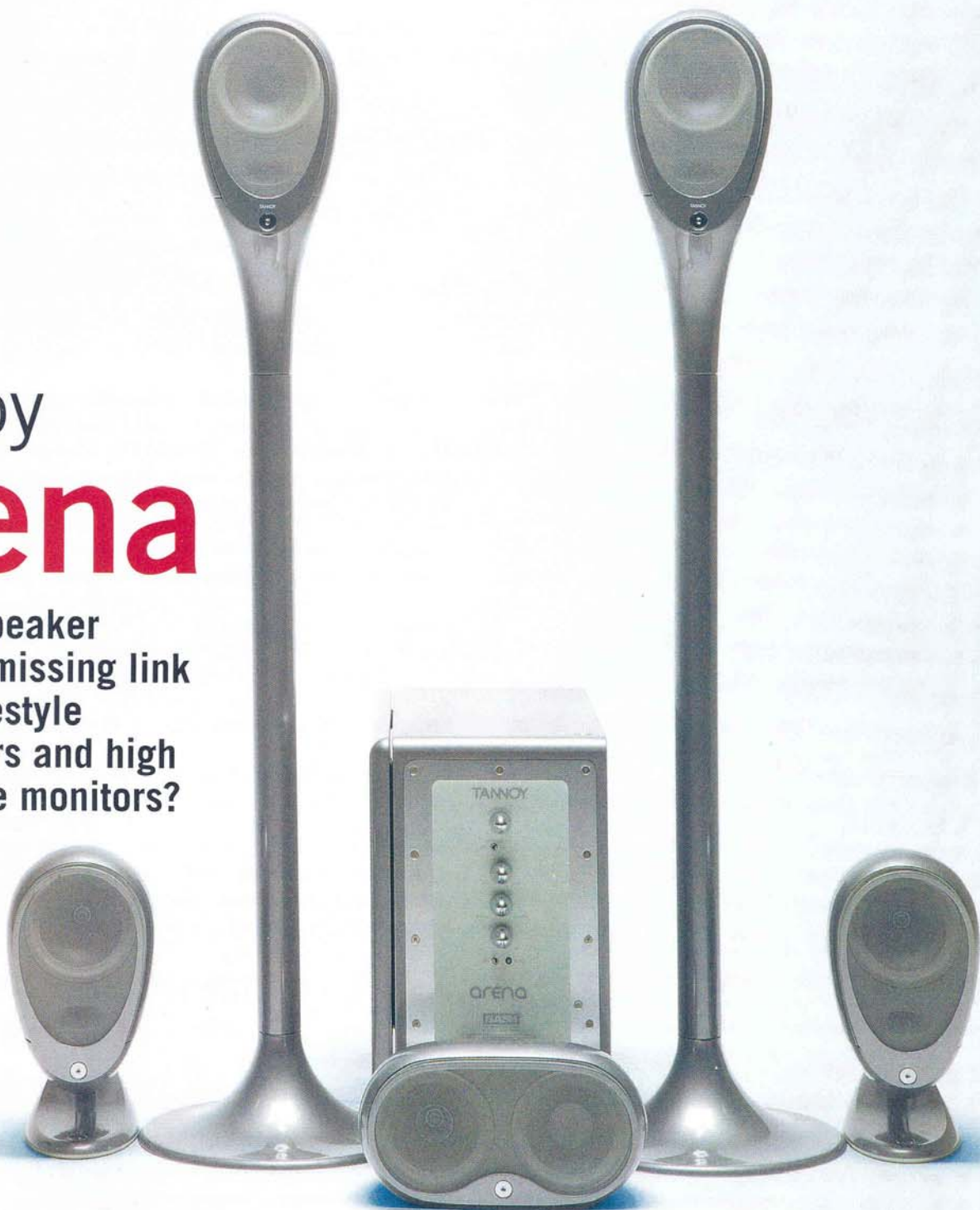


Tannoy Arena

Is this AV speaker system the missing link between lifestyle loudspeakers and high performance monitors?



Good hi-fi is about more than good sound. Having the fastest car in town impresses no-one if it turns heads for all the wrong reasons as you're driving down the street; and so it can be with home audio, where it's been a point of pride for some manufacturers to have spent the parts budget on the inside, relegating the exterior

design to a more functional role. And there's also plenty of equipment that nods toward the lifestyle end of the market, and here the sound performance may be a lesser concern. But in the case of Tannoy's new Arena speaker system, the company's pedigree bodes well that a sophisticated-looking design may be more than just skin deep.

These rounded, curvy-form loudspeakers gain more respect once you've picked one of them up, as hefting the weighty metal castings lets you know of the solid engineering within. The visuals may appeal to different audiences according to taste, and there is plenty of flexibility in the appearance of all the speakers in this package – the pod-like satellites, the centre speaker and the subwoofer – which are available in a variety of

finishes with a choice of different colours for the front panel of the satellites too.

The body of the speaker is an aluminium extrusion with a curved back that helps combat the build-up of internal standing waves that can occur in a regular box loudspeaker. This shape also confers strength on the cabinet, making a rigid shell to fix around the drivers. The crossover is fitted vertically at the back of the shell, and a small amount of bonded acrylic fibre (BAF) inside helps to reduce ringing and resonance. To the rear of the speaker is a single pair of connection terminals – high quality posts with a chrome finish. Each satellite weighs 2.5kg (5.5lb), while the centre speaker is rather heavier at 4kg (8.8lb). This centre speaker sports two main drivers fixed



Colour options are silver, black, white and bronze

side by side, with the widerange tweeter sited in the left-hand driver.

You can take an Arena pod out of its polystyrene tray and simply place it on a shelf or stand, connecting it to an amplifier using either bare wires or 4mm banana plugs. Or there is an optional mounting foot, which can also serve as a wall bracket, allowing all wires to be hidden from

with the neat design of drive unit and front reflex port there's probably less reason than usual to hide this part away.

Once set up in a surround-sound AV system, it was possible to sit back and enjoy the delicious small-scale sound that emanates from these ear-fooling point sources. Without the subwoofer connected there's no low bass



With grille fitted but without mounting bracket



Centre speaker on optional foot bracket

“ Once you've picked them up, hefting the weighty metal castings lets you know of the solid engineering within ”

view (although this will limit cable choice to the thinnest of wires). Alternatively, there are custom column stands which blend organically with the speaker, resulting in a parking meter-like construct which makes an arresting change from most speaker stands. If these are used, the total height of stand-plus-speaker is 1018mm (about 40in).

Then there are the detachable speaker grilles, supplied as standard, made from a metal gauze which hides the front panel entirely – although

of consequence, of course, and yet in a small room it should still be possible to appreciate the finely-etched rendering of music. Adding the sub makes this a truly full-range system though, with Tannoy quoting an overall frequency response of 29Hz to 54kHz (–6dB).

If you've ever spent time with full-range two-way concentric designs like KEF Uni-Q or Tannoy Duals, and not been convinced by the sometimes 'darker' presentation, be prepared for

something of a revelation with Arena. Again, used alone *sans* sub, there's a rather 'hot' shading to the higher frequencies, but wired as designed with the subwoofer taking a line-level signal (there's no high-level option for connecting to an amplifier's main speaker outputs), the Arena system could sound finely balanced, once the sub had been tweaked for best blending. There are four principal controls here – crossover frequency, variable from 50Hz to 150Hz; volume; 'LF Extension', which varies the lower limit, the 'Music' position giving deeper bass while the 'Theater' position increases the impact of film low-frequency effects. A continuously-variable phase control is also fitted, spanning 0 to 180°. The 'LFE Mode' switch bypasses the sub's internal low-pass crossover, which is useful if you want to control the blending frequency from a suitably-equipped AV processor.

An automatic sleep function can also be switched on, in which case the amplifier goes into a standby state after 12 minutes of inactivity, and wakes up upon sensing a signal on its input. There's plenty of flexibility in the siting of the subwoofer: it can be placed down on its longest side, with 10in woofer pointing outwards; it can be placed on its end, again with driver pointing out; or it can be lain on its side, with woofer pointing either up or down, in which case some extension spikes help to give more clearance

Dual Concentrics all round

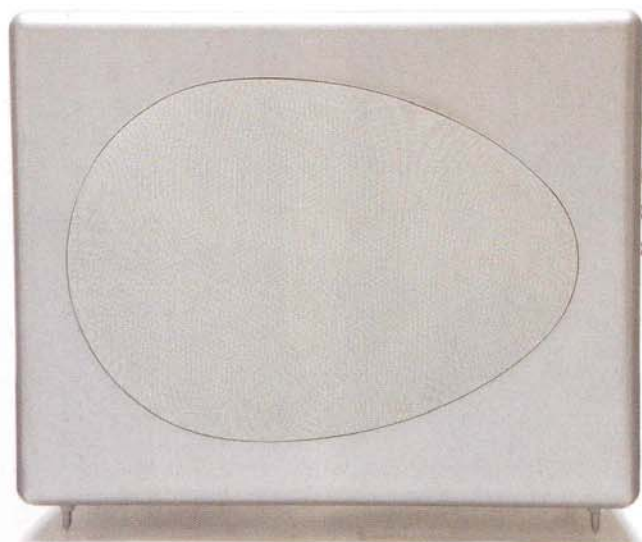
Each of the five main speakers uses a 100mm (5in) Dual Concentric driver to cover around nine octaves of the audio band, with the closed-box subwoofer covering the area below about 100Hz. The 100mm unit uses a 'mixed fibre' cone, based on paper, with a 19mm titanium-domed tweeter fixed concentrically behind. These drivers cross-over at 1.75kHz, with a 2nd-order filter on the bass/mid unit and 1st-order on the tweeter. The low-frequency filter includes an impedance compensation network, and a series capacitor to remove the deep bass that the satellite cannot reproduce. 'Dynamic Overload Protection' is included, to protect the satellites at high running powers, and this takes the form of a 12W light bulb fitted in series. Its resistance is usually less than 1 ohm, but if driven hard the positive temperature coefficient

results in increased resistance, which limits the incoming power. Sensitivity of the satellites is quoted as 88dB, 8 ohm impedance. The centre speaker sees its two mid/bass drivers wired in series in order to better match the specification of the front and surround speakers. Powering the subwoofer is a 300W amplifier using proprietary BASH technology from Ontario-based company Indigo, and this uses a form of high-efficiency switching circuit, fed by a switch-mode power supply.





Subwoofer can be sited in a variety of orientations to suit taste or for best sound, including upward-firing...



...and side-firing. If set for downward-firing, the removable grille can be fixed to the top surface if desired

between the box and the floor. Given a 5.1 speaker system, there are many possibilities for trying a variety of audio sources, from low-resolution digital audio DAB radio and Dolby Digital DVD soundtracks, through CD stereo material (which can be converted to a matrix 5.1 surround system, such as DTS Neo:6 or Dolby Pro Logic II), to true discrete surround sound from DTS, DVD-A and

the quality of the input sound, with CD sounding quite respectable in a 2.1 channel configuration. Thanks to the Dual Concentric driver arrangement, it is possible to move around a variety of listening positions without obvious shifts in tonal colour. In this respect alone, the Arena deserves careful consideration by anyone looking for a high-quality sub/sat system for use in a real

Soundstaging could be excellent too, with very good spatial integrity heard from a variety of listening positions

SACD. As with any speaker, the better the signal fed them, the more impressive they will sound. Given compressed digital audio, such as from UK digital terrestrial TV, there is a more brittle quality to the sound, accentuated by the speakers' slightly explicit extension into the high frequencies. But this becomes less conspicuous when you improve

living room, as the issue of a 'hot seat' where the sound will be at its best is almost irrelevant.

The sound that you do hear from most positions is clear and bright, with a little increased 'zing' apparent on steel-strung acoustic guitar and hi-hat cymbals. Midrange sounded a little set back in relation to treble, but this balance was not



If desired, the optional foot bracket can be used to mount a satellite on the listening room wall

enough to make the Arena actually tiring to listen to. And bass could be very muscular and profound, set up in a 14 x 12 x 7.5ft living room with the sub sited near the corner of the room. I used the LFE input mode, with a Naim AV2 processor set at 80Hz for bass management, and the satellite speakers set to 'small'.

Maximum volume is a little more limited compared to when using true full-range speakers, but I found the system could be played relatively loud and cleanly before signs of distress. On dynamic peaks at higher volume, there was a transitory cutting-out effect apparent, which may have been the action of the overload protection circuit [see 'Dual Concentrics all round' panel].

Overall, the Tannoy Arena proved to offer a high quality of sound reproduction, quite in keeping with its smart designer looks. By increasing the upper reach of the satellites' frequency response, Tannoy has given this speaker effective supertweeter performance; although this does mean a mildly bright balance, and no provision is included for toning down the top end for more sensitive ears.

Soundstaging could be excellent too, with very good spatial integrity heard from a variety of listening positions. Considering the very high quality of construction, the level of thought that has gone into the design and styling, and the revealing and musical sound itself, this package actually appears to be very well priced at just £1200 for the core system. Highly recommended, not just for turning heads, but highly competent sound performance too. ■

Supplier

Tannoy
01236 420199
www.tannoy.com

Hi-FiNews verdict

Tannoy's luxurious 'lifestyle' satellites use the Dual Concentric two-in-one driver principle to good effect, with a sound that's revealing and musical, if a little bright. The matching sub is capable and versatile.