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TANNOY ARENA ♦ £1,200 (Approx) ♦ 01236 420 199 ♦ www.tannoy.com

Tannoy marries form and function in the Arena series

# Next-generation sub/sat design

The Tannoy Arena range takes Alvin Gold to the next level of sub/sat design. Never before has a reviewer so scruffy auditioned a system so smart

**F**ew speaker systems have been as eagerly anticipated as the dramatic addition to the Tannoy range. The Arena package has been making cameo appearances at public shows for more than a year, and finally it has found its way into stores, albeit in limited quantities.

It is a sub/sat system – a genre of speaker which these days means small of footprint and with styling that could be described in the broadest terms as 'domesticated'. What sets this system apart from its peers is the way it treads the line between performance and an obsession with living room styling that requires tiny matchbox enclosures which compromise sound quality.

Many other manufacturers have trodden this now well established path – indeed, Tannoy is one of the last major names to do so. But the delay has been put to good use in harnessing some key technologies that the brand has been developing over many years. One is the Dual Concentric driver, and the other is the so-called supertweeters, an idea that Tannoy introduced to the mainstream commercial arena around five years ago.

## Revolutionary drivers

The original supertweeters were 25mm domes which looked similar to, and were partnered with standard tweeters, or sometimes with Dual Concentric drivers (see Practical Tip), and which extended the frequency ceiling from around 20kHz by at least another octave – to 40kHz or higher. An evolution of this has been adopted by the Arena system.

There's no doubt that these are stunning speakers. A great deal of thought has gone into their aesthetics and build. The organically curvaceous, richly coloured and finely detailed enclosures speak for themselves. The centre speaker is similar, except that it boasts an additional dedicated bass driver, making it a two-way system. What is not obvious to the camera is the solid, die-cast alloy construction.

The satellites and centre speaker can be used free standing, but Tannoy also offers a range of accessories so that the system can be used successfully in a wide range of surroundings. They include cleverly designed dedicated adjustable stand/wall brackets for the satellites, and a special version for the centre speaker.

## Floor-standing option

Another option included in our test system is a floor stand in the shape of a hollow tube, flared at each end, and fitted with eight spikes to give the widest and most stable footprint. Rubber floor protectors for the spikes are supplied, and the floor-standing combination is both striking and attractive, though the uncharitable might find it difficult to ignore a certain superficial resemblance to a parking meter.

The speaker bolts to the top of the stand which includes internal cable routing, enabling the wiring to emerge at floor level. A long length of thin speaker cable is supplied which can be cut to length and the bare wires screwed to the terminals. Front baffle covers in the

## RATINGS

**Highs:** Coherent imagery and clean, tactile mid-band  
**Lows:** Some minor mid-band colourations

Front/rears	★★★★★
Centre	★★★★½
Subwoofer	★★★★
<b>OVERALL</b>	★★★★★

## HEIGHT (445mm subwoofer)



## HCC PRACTICAL TIP

In conventional speaker design, the full audio frequency band is normally covered with a minimum of two drive units, a tweeter and a woofer. In Tannoy's proprietary Dual Concentric driver, the tweeter is mounted inside the bass driver in such a way that the two behave more like a single driver.

All frequencies appear to come from a single point in space irrespective of the listening axis, where with normal speaker disposition, the differing points of departure for different frequencies introduces integration problems that cannot be fully resolved except on a single, ideal listening axis. The result with Dual Concentric is that the listening 'sweet spot' is much wider, but the trade-off is that the physical design of DC drivers introduces certain constraints that can result in higher colouration levels than conventional systems. That was historically true, but Tannoy is now well practiced in the arcane arts of DC design, and the latest generation is much improved.



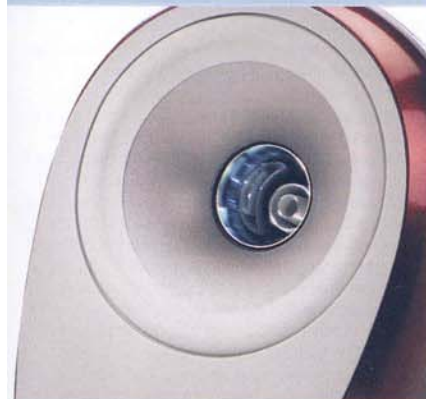
Even the 300W subwoofer is a slender and elegant design



The front speakers swivel and tilt on their own table-mounts...



...while the rears are mounted on tall speaker stands



The dual concentric cone is a classic Tannoy invention

form of brackets that sit just proud of the main speakers are supplied. Finally, drive unit surround mouldings in a wide range of colours are available for those who want to ring the changes.

### There's the sub

The subwoofer is a compact sealed box design with an onboard 300W amplifier driving a 25cm drive unit. It is almost as flexible as the rest of the system, both physically and electrically. It can be used in several orientations, limited only by the fact that one face accommodates the controls, and an adjacent face the mains and signal inputs.

Electrically, it can be used full range, with the system amplifier doing the low pass filtering, but it has its own adjustable filter. Continuously adjustable phase makes it easier to position in the room and still achieve good integration, and another control allows the system balance to be tailored for music or, more suitably, home cinema.

There are several ways in which the performance of the Arenas can be tweaked, as the system benefits from the flexibility provided by the various stand and support options.

I was beguiled by Tannoy's new Dual Concentric driver, which helps the system deliver very wide angle coverage, providing a well-balanced sound almost anywhere in the area surrounded by the satellites. Predictably, if you sit well off the main forward listening axis of any satellite, the treble becomes a tad duller, and intelligibility suffers. But the mid-range balance stays consistent.

This is especially true when listening from a very high or a low position – when standing, or sat on the floor for example. If you like, the Tannoy encourages the kind of casual listening experience that the cosmetics imply.

## FEATURES

**Specifications (Arena Satellites):** Drive units – Dual Concentric 100mm mixed fibre pulp cone, with concentrically mounted 19mm titanium dome tweeter dome and neodymium magnet system; enclosure type – front vented bass reflex; frequency response – 80Hz-54kHz; crossover frequency – 1.75kHz; sensitivity – 88dB/m @2.83V; impedance – 8Ω nominal; power handling – 60W RMS  
**(Arena Centre):** Drive units – Dual Concentric 100mm mixed fibre pulp cone, with concentrically mounted 19mm titanium dome tweeter dome and neodymium magnet system, 100mm mixed fibre pulp cone bass unit; enclosure type – rear vented bass reflex; frequency response – 80Hz-54kHz (-6dB); crossover frequency – 1.75kHz; sensitivity – 88dB/m @2.8V; impedance – 8Ω nominal (3.4Ω min); power handling – 100W RMS  
**(Arena Subwoofer):** Drive unit – 250mm pulp cone; enclosure type – sealed (IB); frequency response – 29Hz-60Hz/150Hz (variable); power output – 300W  
**Dimensions:** (Centre): 245(w) x 133(h) x 149(d)mm (Sats): 134(w) x 188(h) x 178(d)mm (Sub): 350(w) x 445(h) x 210(d)mm  
**Weight:** (Centre): 4kg (Sats): 2.5kg (Sub): 14kg



## 'The Arenas combine sublime performance with a design perfect for contemporary home entertainment'

The Arena system is more than just about flexibility, however. It is also about outright performance. Even in the preferred central sweet spot, the more coherent nature of room reflections makes for an unusually homogeneous, coherent feel. Tannoy's high fidelity roots have ensured that the system is well integrated right through the frequency band.

The mid-band is tactile and alive, and the treble has few of the colouration artefacts of older generation Dual Concentrics. With relatively little tweaking of the controls, it is easy to achieve a well balanced bass, and the 80Hz crossover that the system is designed for is low enough to allow consistent imagery without the bass detaching itself from the rest of the audio band.

Such qualities are precisely what is required for effective home cinema. The Arena system is light, clean and agile, and that supple and lively mid-band quality stands it in good stead, helping to make dialogue more intelligible. And it has enough raw power to fill a decent size room at moderately loud volume levels, and enough authority to hit hard with effects-rich material.

I used the system with a Lexicon processor and was thrilled with the performance. The drivers help provide pin-sharp, consistent imagery, with lateral positioning precisely defined. Just be careful not to inflate the bass too much with the various controls on the sub, which can quickly soften the sound.

### Conclusion

It's taken some time for the Arenas to make their public debut, but the wait has been worth it. They combine performance with a design ethic that's a perfect match for contemporary home entertainment products.

Although not intended as a music system, the Arena's aural talents are good enough for the purpose, but above all it is a well-designed home cinema package of unusually exacting design. It utilises Tannoy's expertise in key areas of technology to spectacular effect. The advertising copywriters suggest that the Arena 'defines the category', and for once I think they have it just right ■