# Steady Mercury

Recent upheavals at Tannoy look to the future, but ***David Vivian*** wonders if a new spin on a past master can steady the boat

In unsettled times, which they have been for Tannoy of late, there has to be something reassuring about having a well-loved name on side. For this 90-year-old Scottish speaker maker, Mercury has the ring of a mass-market winner. It used to mark the entry-level spot where affordability met sonic talent for many an aspiring young audiophile, me included. The pair of standmounts I used in my 'basement system' I remember with strong affection. But that was a long time ago and the Mercury lineup has undergone many changes, as well as handing over entry-level duties to the Eclipse range.

**The Mercury 7.4 sounds big, bassy and effortlessly room filling**

Now in its seventh generation, Mercury 7 may have moved a little up market and look smarter, but delivering a decent bang for your buck remains a core aspiration – albeit with a little more style than was always the case. No more visible mounting bolts holding the drivers in place, for instance, while the Tannoy logo incorporated on the tweeter body is another slick touch.

We were rather taken with the Mercury 7.2 – the larger of the two standmounts in the range – which earned a recommendation for its big, generous yet sprightly and insightful sound back in *HFC* 410. Now it's the turn of the floorstanding Mercury 7.4 and, straight out of the carton, it's clear that the high-value ethos is alive and kicking. It's an impressively beefy tower standing as tall as my resident £3k DALI Rubicon 6 (*HFC* 399) large listening room reference and casting a long shadow over the relatively titchy £550 Monitor Audio Bronze 5 (*HFC* 402) I've pulled out of the store room for comparison later.

Perhaps 'elegant' isn't the word, but the 44-litre enclosures feel chunky and well made and, with plenty of strategic internal bracing, are the most 'acoustically neutral' to date for the Mercury series, according to Tannoy. There are three finishes: black oak, light oak and, as supplied for review, walnut. The result is neatly executed, if not quite up to the exceptionally classy standard of the smaller Monitor Audio.

Clearly designed to a brief with larger rooms in mind and a degree of clear space in which to operate, it has two rear-firing reflex ports, so close boundary placement isn't really an option, though if it's necessary to compromise, foam bungs are supplied to cut down the ports' output. Whip off the peg-attached grilles and, unusually for a budget-priced speaker, its three drivers are arranged in a D'Appolito configuration with the tweeter in the middle – the aim being superior dispersion characteristics through the ear-sensitive crossover region resulting in a broader sweet spot to render the listening position less critical, highlighting the speaker's suitability for larger rooms.

The drivers themselves are all-new designs. The tweeter uses a soft woven polyester dome, coated with a micro layer of nitro-urethane and has a powerful neodymium motor. The lamination process is said to dampen the dome, pushing its break-up frequencies beyond the audio range. The midbass drivers use Tannoy's smoothly profiled multi-fibre paper pulp cones, which are said to be light and stiff and claimed to deliver deeper, punchier bass than previous designs. The new half-roll rubber surrounds help here, providing the required excursion without over damping the cone. And with a claimed peak power handling of 300W and 93dB efficiency, it's fair to say that loudness won't be a problem, even for less than muscle-bound amps. Tannoy claims that the frequency response goes all the way from a trouser-flapping 32Hz to a bat-worrying 32kHz via a second order low pass, third order high pass bi-wired crossover, which crosses over at 2.4kHz.

The big Mercury 7.4 might appeal to valve amp users keen to squeak every last drop of sonic goodness from a tight budget. In which case, they won't be disappointed with Tannoy's assertion that high-tolerance components, including quality capacitors and low-loss, laminated iron core inductors, feature in the crossovers – or that high-purity silver-plated oxygen-free copper cabling is used throughout. Tannoy has also developed something called DMT (differential materials technology), which claims to dampen unwanted vibrations and is used in the 'cabinet-to-driver interface' and crossover component mounting.

## Sound quality

My resident large listening room receiver, Musical Fidelity's kW250S, has both valves in the preamp section and continuous solid-state driving power close to the Mercury 7.4's peak limit so I go easy with the volume control, and for the most part they get on just famously.

**DETAILS**

**PRODUCT**
Tannoy Mercury 7.4

**ORIGIN**
UK/China

**TYPE**
2-way floorstanding loudspeaker

**WEIGHT**
15kg

**DIMENSIONS (WxHxD)**
314 x 955 x 308mm

**FEATURES**
- 1x 28mm polyester dome tweeter
- 2x 178mm multi-fibre mid/bass unit
- Quoted sensitivity: 93dB/1W/1m

**DISTRIBUTOR**
Music Group Innovation SC Ltd.

**TELEPHONE**
01236 420199

**WEBSITE**
tannoy.co.uk

**The seventh-gen Mercury speaker is smarter than previous models**

HFC_424_Tannoy_mercury_Reprint.indd 50-51 01/06/2017 15:06

## Q&A

**Jamie O'Callaghan**
Customer solutions manager, Music Group Innovation

***DV: Has there been a conscious effort to preserve a Mercury 'family sound' over the years?***
***JOC:*** It is always our goal to remain true to the Tannoy sound. We're proud that our speakers have a characteristic sound, enjoyed and appreciated by Tannoy fans, and often commended by the wider hi-fi press and community. Maintaining and improving this is important for the brand heritage and key for providing customers with the Tannoy experience. Creating your own, distinctive sound is an art and we like to think Tannoy does this well.

***Why did you opt for the D'Appolito configuration for the drivers?***
The nature of the D'Appolito configuration means the far-field representation of the near-field response makes for a versatile home speaker. This design means the Mercury 7.4 opens up your potential for a larger sweet spot in a conventional living room space. The presentation is typically forward but with good balance, due to the considered driver design too.

We appreciate that not all Mercury buyers will have dedicated listening rooms, so this means great performance with minimal requirement to alter room layout and sofa positioning both in stereo and home theatre applications.

***How do the new drive units improve on their predecessors?***
The multi-fibre cone is a specially treated, traditional paper cone. It's both lightweight and rigid, which are ideal principles in cone design. This is complemented by a half-roll rubber surround, which means we get high-excursion and enhanced freedom from a stiff, lightweight cone.

We also enhanced midrange performance by removing the dust caps found on the Mercury V4 driver. This removes any unwanted peaks in the mid-high range, as there is no gap or space for the small but potentially nasty resonances, which are a distinct possibility in dust cap-equipped drivers.

**IN SIGHT**

**HOW IT COMPARES**

**The comparison with Monitor Audio's smaller, slimmer but £50 more expensive Bronze 5 (*HFC* 402) is instructive, clearly pointing out, in hi-fi terms, where the Mercury 7.4 deviates from the targets it might be expected to hit, yet at the same time confounding them by delivering such a big-hearted and musically enjoyable performance. If you can stretch to £599, ELAC's Debut F5 (*HFC* 411) similarly favours scale, bass and having a good time over explicit clarity and forensic detail so make sure to audition before you commit. Q Acoustics' £500 3050 (*HFC* 398) is a formidably talented design as well that shouldn't be left off of any serious shortlist.**

What's remarkable – to me at any rate – is that, in terms of tonal colour and a generous, easy going musicality, I'm sure I can hear the same basic deal offered by my old Mercury S standmounts from 30 years ago, and it's a very likeable thing.

But before we go any further, let's get a few issues out of the way. First, the Mercury 7.4 demands an awful lot of running in. My review sample is supplied box fresh and needs three days of constant use before it properly settles down. Also, it's far from textbook, even by the fairly relaxed standards of the budget floorstander market. But it does have some very attractive qualities that fit comfortably with its obvious desire to be a bit of a crowd pleaser and, given its intended market, that's no bad thing.

So, for a start, it sounds big, bassy and effortlessly room filling – this with the Musical Fidelity barely ticking over. Goldfrapp can always be relied on for a decent low-frequency workout and *Anymore*, the opening track from the duo's latest album, *Silver Eye*, provides just that, and some. With the Mercury 7.4 pulled about a metre clear of side and back walls and toed-in just a tad, there's certainly no shortage of depth and power here. Is it the tautest and most articulate bass you'll ever hear from a circa-£500 floorstander? No. A quick run through with the Bronze 5 brings a better sense of grip and agility to proceedings. But the Tannoy does have a sumptuous, well-upholstered quality that the Monitor Audio can't quite manage to summon up.

The treble's clean, too, and displays the hallmarks of genuine smooth extension – that is, it doesn't draw attention to itself by sounding obviously bright and is free from graininess and glare. The Bronze 5's ceramic metal dome boasts similar high-frequency reach and sounds slightly more detailed and open, although tonally I'd say that the Mercury has the more natural textures – by a small margin.

Imaging is interesting. Once again, the Mercury 7.4 doesn't have the pin-sharp focus of the Monitor Audio, but recordings often sound airier and more relaxed. Take that Linn label favourite *Eye Witness* from jazz pianist David Newton and collaborators – Dave Green on double bass and Allan Ganley on drums. With the Bronze 5, players and instruments assume a tangible presence in the room, with the Tannoy everything is a little bit more diffuse – but it's a bigger, more atmospheric room and a more immersive, if somewhat less rhythmically persuasive, performance. By most regular metrics, the MA is the better speaker, but most of the time the big Tannoy is just as much fun.

## Conclusion

Some easy-on-the-wallet speakers try hard to bring a taste of the high life to the party. The MA Bronze 5 is a good example, well able to reflect the benefits expensive upstream kit can give, thanks to its basic transparency and control. The Tannoy Mercury 7.4 is more of a fun-loving proposition that isn't very 'hi-fi' but aims to give listeners a good time all the same and in that respect it's a welcome chip off the old Mercury block ●

**Hi-Fi Choice**

**OUR VERDICT**

SOUND QUALITY ★★★★☆
VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★☆
BUILD QUALITY ★★★½☆
EASE OF DRIVE ★★★★★

**LIKE:** Big, warm, room-filling sound that aims to please

**DISLIKE:** Some rivals offer superior levels of both transparency and precision

**WE SAY:** Do audition first. If you like what it does, it's great value

**OVERALL** ★★★★☆



HFC_424_Tannoy_mercury_Reprint.indd 52 01/06/2017 15:06