

HomeTechTell Review: GoldenEar SuperCinema 3 System

by Dennis Burger on Feb 7, 2011

“Genius” is a word I use sparingly, reserving it generally for the Carl Sagens and Neil deGrasse Tysons of the world. But loudspeaker maven Sandy Gross is as deserving of the appellation as anyone in our industry. If you’re not familiar with the name, you’re certainly aware of Sandy’s work: he co-founded both Polk Audio and Definitive Technology, and after a few years off the radar, Sandy is back on the audiophile scene with his latest offering: [GoldenEar Technology](#).

When I first spoke with Sandy a few months ago about reviewing a set of his new GoldenEar speakers, I have to admit to feeling a little disappointed when he said, “I want you to hear the SuperCinema 3,” the smallest and least-expensive of the company’s lineup thus far. My heart was set on the four-foot-tall Triton Two Tower, the flagship, the highly-lauded upper echelon of the line, and being asked to settle for the runts of the litter, even a litter with a pedigree like this, was a little disheartening at first.

It wasn’t until I ran into Sandy at CES and he uttered those same words again — “I want you to hear the SuperCinema 3” — and I could see the mischievous twinkle in his eye as he said it, that I realized I was being asked to look after his babies. He’s as proud of these little guys as he is the big boys, and after spending a few weeks with the system, I understand why.



It takes little more than unpacking and holding one of the system’s SuperSat 3 speakers to realize this isn’t your typical décor-conscious satellite. Despite their size — 12" x 4.75" x 2.7" (hwd) — the SuperSat 3s feel hefty, substantial, due to their incredibly dense marble-powder infused polymer cabinets. And the material isn’t just an aesthetic choice; from the moment you hook up and fire up the system (a cinch, given the center channel’s little adjustable kickstand, optional feet for the front channels, and keyhole slots or threaded inserts for whatever sort of wall mount you’d like to use), the first thing you notice is that the SuperSat 3C doesn’t suffer a bit from Little Center Channel Syndrome. Even when I throw my typical go-to discs for difficult dialogue clarity at the system — *V for Vendetta*, the Mines of Moria sequences in *Fellowship of the Ring* — voices sound natural, effortless.

Indeed, “effortless” is probably the single word that best sums up the system’s sound, in no small part due to its High-Velocity Folded Ribbon (HVFR) Tweeter, which is of similar design to the Folded Motion Transducers of MartinLogan’s Motion Series and the AMT tweeter found in Steinway Lyngdorf’s luxury loudspeakers. Unlike traditional dome tweeters, the HVFR works much like a blindingly fast accordion, squeezing the air between its folds to generate high-frequency sounds.



In the upper registers, the SuperCinema 3 system absolutely excels, delivering a smooth-but-sparkling high, and a wonderfully wide, unified soundstage, not to mention a seamless flow from the front soundstage to the surrounds.



Perhaps more surprising than the beautiful high-frequency performance is the system's rich midrange and, even more so, its hefty oomph. Continuing the *big-sound-out-of-a-shockingly-small-package* theme, the ForceField 3 subwoofer delivers way more kick than its eight-inch driver would suggest. I found the subwoofer's lack of a phase switch a little concerning at first, but a quick run-through of the test tones on Chesky Records' *Ultimate DVD Surround Sampler & 5.1 Setup Disc* result in virtually identical bass response with in-phase and out-of-phase samples — whether I position the sub for front- or side-firing — which I assume has a lot to do with its down-firing 9" x 11" Quadratic Planar Infrasonic Radiator.

Whatever the reason, the ForceField 3 is a perfect match for the system, although I rather wish I could have tested the setup with two subs in place. One definitely works, but I find myself driving the single sub so hard (and with 1000 watts of power behind it, you can drive it really hard) that I have to remove its grill to alleviate a bit of rattle.

Even when pushed to its limits, the ForceField 3 never sounds sloppy or overly boomy, though. In fact, for such a little guy, it's shockingly musical, as is the system as a whole. You'd expect a good satellite-sub combo to perform well with movies — and this one laps up the rowdiest of action scenes and begs for more — but I found myself drawn more and more to music while getting to know the system. Not two-channel music, mind you (in 2.1 mode the size of the speakers starts to reveal itself a little) but the even-keeled response and startling-for-its-size fidelity of the SuperCinema 3 system has me digging through my DVD-Audio collection in a way I haven't in years.

The title track from the Eagle's *Hotel California* is a beautiful example of everything the system does well, with loping bass notes blending fluidly with piercing guitars and rich vocals. Felder and Walsh's blistering dueling solo dances back and forth across the front soundstage without sounding ping-pongy, no matter how far I spread the front left and right speakers.

But no disc, to my ears, demonstrates the SuperCinema 3's strengths quite so well as The Beatles: *Love* on DVD-A. Owing to the beautiful dispersion and effortlessness of the speakers, the *a capella* harmonies of "Because" weave an ephemeral web through the air that seems less a product of the speakers than the room itself, with tendrils of echo and ambience that waft and evaporate with chilling effect. And while the rocking red-lining riffs of "Revolution" don't quite — ahem — carry the same weight with this system as they do through the full-range towers in my larger media room, they come a heck of a lot closer than you'd have any right to expect.

Quite frankly, that's my only genuine reservation about the system: it sounds so much like a larger setup that I tend to want to push it a little harder than it ought to be pushed. But in my small-to-medium-sized secondary listening room (13-by-15 feet), the SuperCinema 3 system delivers an incredible amount of bang for ridiculously little buck. Seriously, I defy you to put together a better-sounding system for the coin (\$249 each for the satellites and center; \$499 for the ForceField 3 sub).



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