

ROBERT DEUTSCH

GoldenEar Technology Triton Two

LOUDSPEAKER

Visiting the high-end audio exhibits at a Consumer Electronics Show, it's easy to get desensitized to the price of equipment. A nice-looking, two-way, stand-mounted loudspeaker costing \$10,000/pair. Yes, it sounds very good. Here's another one, for only \$5000/pair. Seems like a bargain in comparison.

At the 2011 CES, I wander into the GoldenEar Technology room. Sandy Gross, cofounder of Polk Audio and Definitive Technology, who started up this new company with former Definitive partner Don Givogue, welcomes me. The speakers are the GoldenEar Triton Twos: slim floorstanders, their cabinets covered in black cloth, and somehow reminding me of the original DCM Time Windows.

Gross is about to play an excerpt from a recording of John Rutter's *Requiem*. It's a piece that challenges just about every aspect of sound reproduction: there's an orchestra, a soprano soloist, a chorus, a pipe organ, and the acoustics of a large concert hall. Wimpy speakers need not apply. I listen, expecting to be underwhelmed.

Whoa! The low bass of the organ so fills the room that I look for subwoofers in the corners. The orchestra and chorus have great presence. There's a believable sense of space. These are some speakers! How much?

\$1249.99 each. \$2499.98/pair. That includes built-in powered subwoofers.

I gotta review them.

Description and design

When it comes to the priority of a product's appearance in deciding on a purchase, audiophiles—at least the male cohort that comprises the vast majority of those devoted to this hobby—are



SPECIFICATIONS

Description Three-way floorstanding loudspeaker. Drive-units: 1.06" by 1.31" High-Velocity Folded Ribbon (HVFR) tweeter, two 4.5" cone midrange units, two 5" by 9" cone woofers powered by an internal amplifier, two 7" by 10" passive radiators. Crossover frequencies: 150Hz, 3.5kHz.

Frequency range: 16Hz–35kHz. Sensitivity: 91dB/2.83V/m. Nominal impedance: 8 ohms. Recommended amplifier power: 20–500W. Built-in subwoofer amplifier: class-D, 1200W.

Dimensions 48" (1230mm) H (with base, no spikes) by 5.25" (135mm) W front by

7.5" (190mm) W rear by 15" (385mm) D. Weight: 60 lbs (27.3kg).

Finish Glossy piano black with black cloth.

Serial Numbers Of Units Reviewed 1010 00235, 1010 00273 (auditioning); 1010 0961, 1010 0979 (measuring).

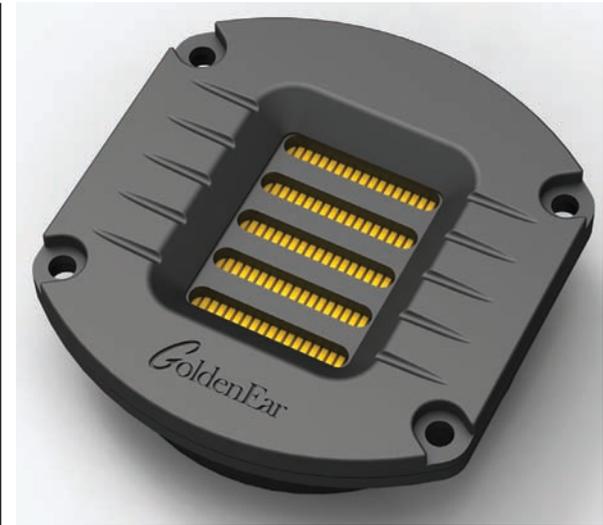
Price \$2499.98/pair. Approximate number of dealers: 150.

Manufacturer GoldenEar Technology, PO Box 141, Stevenson, MD 21153. Tel: (410) 998-9134. Fax: (410) 356-0808. www.goldenear.com.

a strange lot. We like to say that the only thing that matters is sound quality; what a product *looks* like is relegated to the somewhat pejorative Wife Acceptance Factor. Yet more than one audio designer has told me that, whatever people may say, a product's appearance is of profound importance in determining its appeal—and not just because of “the little woman.” One designer said, “If I somehow managed to design the perfect speaker but it was ugly, nobody would buy it, no matter how good it sounded.” Contrast this with the “form follows function” principle of industrial design, and you have a potential conflict between appearance and functionality.

The GoldenEar Triton Two strikes me as representing an unusually felicitous combination of appearance and function. Eschewing the “fine furniture” look of some high-end speakers, and not likely to attract attention solely for its appearance, the Triton Two has an elegance of its own: streamlined, with a curved, tapered shape, a small footprint, and a base plinth and top plate finished in shiny piano black. The narrowness of its front baffle not only contributes to its slim appearance, but is functional in reducing the effects of diffraction. The sidewalls are nonparallel, to reduce internal standing waves. According to Sandy Gross, the cloth “sock” that covers the speaker is not just for appearance, and/or a cost-effective way of finishing the cabinet, but serves an acoustical purpose, providing additional damping of the cabinet walls. The cabinet itself is made of high-density Medite, a form of fiberboard, with considerable internal bracing, and features a separate subenclosure for the midrange drivers. This subenclosure is itself divided, by an angled board, into two sub-subenclosures of unequal size.

The Triton Two uses high-tech drivers of GoldenEar's own design, made especially for them. The tweeter, which GoldenEar calls a High-Velocity Folded Ribbon (HVFR), is a variation of an accordion-like ribbon transducer, the Air Motion Transformer, invented by Oscar Heil. The claimed



The Triton Two's tweeter is a development of the Heil Air Motion Transformer.

advantages of such a design include a smooth, extended frequency response, extremely low distortion, superb dispersion characteristics, excellent dynamic range and detail, and superior impedance match of its diaphragm to the air. The tweeter is vertically flanked by two 4.5" midrange units, each of which has a Multi-Vaned Phase Plug (MVPP) and a proprietary computer-optimized cone topology. These drivers are crossed over to the tweeter at 3.5kHz, but the HVFR's frequency response is specified as extending to 35kHz. The midrange-to-tweeter crossover is basically 12dB/octave, but has additional components to provide phase alignment. There is also a Zobel network across the tweeter.

Then there's the bass section. Low on each side panel is

MEASUREMENTS

The GoldenEar Triton Two's B-weighted sensitivity on its tweeter axis was 91dB/2.83V/m, which both agrees with the specified figure and is significantly higher than the norm. The electrical impedance (fig.1) drops below 4 ohms in the midrange and above the audioband. Though there is a combination of 4.2 ohms magnitude and -45° electrical phase angle at 150Hz, due to the high-pass filter in the feed to the midrange units, the speaker will not be too difficult for the partnering amplifier to drive.

Although the traces in fig.1 are free from the small discontinuities that would imply the existence of cabinet resonances, there is a small peak of unknown origin in the magnitude trace between 500 and 600Hz. Investigating the vibrational behavior of the enclosure walls with a simple plastic-tape accelerometer, I found a strong resonant mode at 664Hz on both the rear panel and on the side

panels of the speaker level with the midrange units (fig.2). I would have thought this mode too high in frequency and of too high a Quality factor (Q) to have audible consequences. In addition, taking this measurement required removing the cloth “sock,” which will provide some damping for higher-frequency cabinet

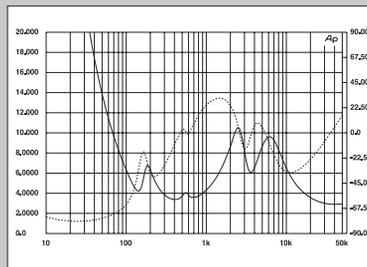


Fig.1 GoldenEar Triton Two, electrical impedance (solid) and phase (dashed). (2 ohms/vertical div.)

vibrations. However, RD did comment on some occasional coloration in the midrange at high playback levels that might be the result of this behavior.

Fig.3 separately plots the acoustic outputs of the Triton Two's passive section (black trace) and its powered woofer section. The blue trace in the left of fig.3

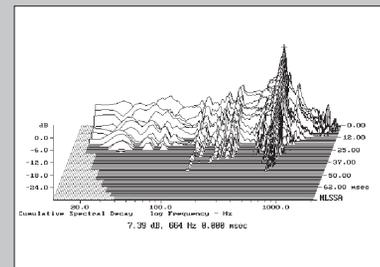


Fig.2 GoldenEar Triton Two, cumulative spectral-decay plot calculated from output of accelerometer fastened to center of side panel adjacent to lower midrange unit (MLS driving voltage to speaker, 7.55V; measurement bandwidth, 2kHz).

what looks like a KEF B139 oval bass driver. These are actually 7" by 10" passive devices called Quadratic Planar Infrasonic Radiators, said to function like a transmission line but with superior transient performance and control. These subbass radiators, mounted low on the side panels, take advantage of floor coupling as well as acoustical coupling with each other.

The actual bass heavy lifting is carried out by the two 5" by 9", ultra-long-throw Quadratic Sub-Bass drivers mounted on the front baffle. These are driven by a 1200W class-D amplifier, also of GoldenEar's design. The intrinsic total harmonic distortion of the amplifier circuit before the application of negative feedback is said to be less than 0.1%. The crossover frequency to the subwoofer section is fixed at about 150Hz, with the low-pass itself and the subwoofer equalization done in the digital domain, allowing for greater accuracy of filter points compared to an analog crossover. The crossover parameters were developed through both measurement and critical listening. There's a knob on the back panel for setting the subwoofer level.

The design of the Triton Two was refined by an engineering team of nine in Arnprior, outside Ottawa, Ontario, utilizing a development facility with a full-sized calibrated anechoic chamber of the same size as the one at Canada's National Research Council, also in Ottawa. The speakers themselves are made in China.

Setup

The Triton Twos were delivered by Sandy Gross and Matt Grant, a member of the engineering staff at GoldenEar's development facility, and set up with their help. The base plinth comes separate from the speaker itself, to which it is attached with bolts. Spikes are supplied, but we first listened to the speakers without them, which eased the tweaking of the speaker positions.

Gross, Grant, and I spent a couple of hours listening to the

speakers, measuring and adjusting the speaker-to-listener distance so that it was the same for each speaker, then adjusting the toe-in angles to get the smoothest lateral spread of sound and the most precise imaging. The final positions of the speakers turned out to be similar to what I've found optimal with other speakers in my listening room: a nearly perfect equilateral triangle formed by the speakers and the listening position. The speakers were toed in slightly, so that their tweeter axes pointed just a few inches to the sides of my head when I sat in the listening chair. Although the Triton Twos turned out not to be the sort of speakers with which the tiniest adjustment of position causes the soundstage to either collapse or come into perfect focus, they definitely benefited from careful adjustment of the setup parameters. Once all three of us were satisfied with the setup, we installed the spikes, which produced a worthwhile improvement in imaging focus.

A major advantage of having a built-in subwoofer with a level control is that you can set up the speakers for optimal imaging with no trade-off in bass response: If the sound with the speakers positioned for best imaging is somewhat bass-shy, you can just turn up the subwoofer levels, at least up to the point where the subs start to distort. But this still leaves the question of exactly how high the subwoofer level should be set. We listened to several CDs that provide not only a good test of bass exten-

A major advantage of having a built-in subwoofer with a level control is that you can set up the speakers for optimal imaging with no trade-off in bass response.

is the nearfield output of the woofers; it peaks between 50 and 90Hz, and rolls off sharply above 125Hz. There is a vestigial notch in the woofer output at 32Hz that I assume coincides with the tuning frequency of the mass-loaded passive radiators on the Triton Two's sides; indeed, the radiators' output (green trace) does

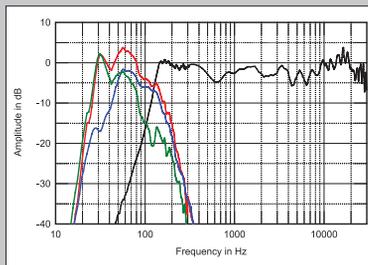


Fig.3 GoldenEar Triton Two, anechoic response on tweeter axis at 50", averaged across 30° horizontal window and corrected for microphone response, with nearfield response of midrange units, plotted below 350Hz (black); and nearfield woofer (blue) and passive radiator (green) responses and their complex sum (red), plotted below 350Hz.

peak at this frequency, but it also has significant output in the octave above that frequency. Both the woofers and the passive radiators roll off quickly below the latter's tuning frequency. The complex sum of the powered section's nearfield outputs (red trace) basically covers the two octaves between 25 and 100Hz.

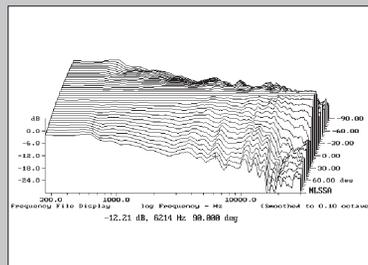


Fig.4 GoldenEar Triton Two, lateral response family at 50", normalized to response on tweeter axis, from back to front: differences in response 90-5° off axis, reference response, differences in response 5-90° off axis.

The response of the Triton Two's midrange units (fig.3, black trace) rolls off rapidly below 150Hz with what appears to be a fourth-order slope. The upper-frequency balance is fairly uniform, but with slight lacks of energy in the mid-range and mid-treble. The ripples in the Triton Two's high-frequency output will be due to reflections from the perforated cage in front of the drive-units. They will not be audible. I repeated this measurement without the speaker's cloth covering. The difference (not shown) was a slight increase in the tweeter's output.

While fig.3 suggests that even with the cloth cover in place, the tweeter's output is a bit hot in the top octave, this will add a little air to the sound rather than sounding tipped up. However, the Triton Two's lateral dispersion (fig.4) suggests that, in a typical room, this slight excess will also be offset by the fact that the tweeter becomes more directional in the same region, the result being a neutrally balanced

sion but also the blend of the mid- and low bass. I let Sandy Gross, who of course has extensive experience with these speakers, set the subwoofer levels, and the results sounded fine to me. However, after he and Grant had left, I did some more of tweaking of the subwoofer levels, using the test tones on *Stereophile's* first *Test CD* (Stereophile STPH002-2) and the AudioTools app for the iPhone4. Adjusting the subwoofer level to produce a more nearly flat measured response down to 20Hz resulted in the Triton Twos' level controls being set at 12 o'clock—considerably higher than Gross's 9 o'clock setting.

While the bass with these settings was certainly impressive, over time I came to feel that it was *too* generous, too bass-heavy. I then turned down the sub-level control a little at a time, each time listening for the change in sound, eventually ending up about halfway between the level that Gross had set and the one based on my measurements.

Amplification

I used three amplifiers in my evaluation of the Triton Two: the Audiodax Model 88 Mk.II (30Wpc, tubed) and the Simaudio Moon Evolution W-7 (150Wpc, solid-state) power amplifiers, both paired with Convergent Audio Technology's SL-1 Renaissance tubed preamplifier; and, as a "real world" alternative, the PrimaLuna ProLogue Premium integrated amplifier (35Wpc, tubed; review in the works). My observations of the Triton Two's sound represent a sort of averaging of what I heard across the three amplifiers, with differences as noted.

Sound

I think of loudspeakers—and of audio systems in general—as potentially providing two sorts of sonic illusion: transporting me to the concert hall or recording studio in which the recording was made ("I am there"), and bringing the performers into my listening room ("They are here"). The Triton Twos



The midrange unit's phase plug features small fins.

were able to conjure up both, but were particularly adept at the first. Listening to *Live*, a familiar disc of 10 operatic arias and duets recording in concert with Luciano Pavarotti and Mirella Freni (CD, London 421 862-2), I found that, with my eyes closed, it was easy to imagine that I was at that concert, sitting well back from the stage, the voices precisely focused in space with a quite stunning sense of realism—and this is by no means an audiophile recording.

The "General Image and Resolution Test" on the *Chesky Jazz Sampler & Audiophile Test CD, Vol.2* (JD68) has four musicians entering a church, playing a shaker, maraca, hand drum, and wooden block. They march around, circling the micro-

measurements, continued

treble, as RD found in his auditioning. Overall, this speaker's off-axis behavior is smooth and even. In the vertical plane (fig.5), suckouts develop in the mid-treble for extreme off-axis angles, but the Triton Two maintains its balance over quite a wide window centered on the tweeter axis, which is 39" from the floor.

In the time domain, the GoldenEar's step response on the tweeter axis (fig.6)

suggests that the tweeter and the two midrange units are all connected in positive acoustic polarity, and that the decay of the tweeter's step blends smoothly into the start of the midrange units' step. This indicates optimal crossover design. Although it can't be seen in this graph, the powered woofer is also connected in positive polarity. The cumulative spectral-decay plot (fig.7) is commend-

ably clean, though the reflections from the grille give a rather hashy-looking picture in the top octave.

Its measured performance indicates that GoldenEar's Triton Two is a well-engineered loudspeaker with a neutral balance and extended low frequencies. I will be holding on to the review samples so that I can write a Follow-Up review on how they sound in my own listening room.—**John Atkinson**

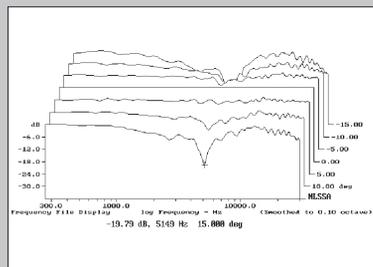


Fig.5 GoldenEar Triton Two, vertical response family at 50°, normalized to response on tweeter axis, from back to front: differences in response 15–5° above axis, reference response, differences in response 5–15° below axis.

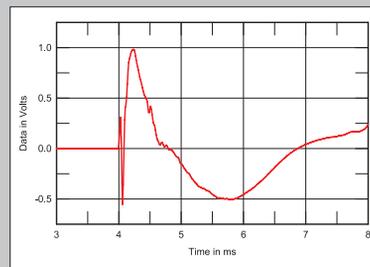


Fig.6 GoldenEar Triton Two, step response on tweeter axis at 50° (5ms time window, 30kHz bandwidth).

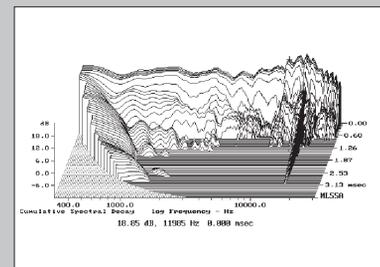


Fig.7 GoldenEar Triton Two, cumulative spectral-decay plot on tweeter axis at 50° (0.15ms risetime).

phone three times, playing their instruments, whooping and hollering along the way. It's a lot of fun, even if it isn't great music. Played at a realistic level (*ie*, fairly loud), this recording was almost scary in its presence, the sound of these percussion instruments precisely located in space and the movements of the musicians unambiguous in their clarity—at one point the musicians seemed to cross the room *behind* me, producing the “They are here” illusion.

This is outstanding performance for any loudspeaker, particularly one with a relatively modest price. The soundstage was quite high: more than a foot above the 48"-high top of the speakers, which is just the way I like it. Depth was dependent on the recording, but didn't seem to be limited by the speakers. Playing the image depth test from the Chesky disc, which has clickers recorded from 5' to 70' from the mike, I could hear clear differentiations between the clicks recorded at 50', 60', and 70'. This is as good as or better than I've heard from any speakers in my room.

In terms of tonal balance, the Triton Two was pretty well spot-on, neither emphasizing nor neglecting any part of the frequency range. Ribbon tweeters have a reputation for being highly detailed but tending toward extra brightness, as I'd found with the ribbon of the Monitor Audio Platinum PL200 (see my review in the April 2010 issue). However, GoldenEar's folded-ribbon tweeter was detailed without sounding too bright. Treble emphasis can show up in a variety of ways, the most annoying for me being a hardening of vocal sibilants. Thankfully, this problem was absent with the Triton Two, except for recordings that were miked too closely and/or used microphones with a pronounced treble peak. If anything, the highs were a touch on the soft, sweet side.

The Triton Two's midrange was fundamentally neutral. For me, the most important test of midrange neutrality is the reproduction of voices. Some people can tell whether a pianist is playing a Steinway or a Bösendorfer, or whether a violin is a Stradivari or a Guarneri. I can't—and as long as I like the music and the musician's playing, I don't really care about the instrument. (Well, within reason.) But each human voice is unique, and I want a speaker (and, of course, the rest of the system) to maintain each voice's unique timbre. Sometimes I'm familiar with a singer's voice from live performances, which provides a point of reference. In those cases, the Triton Two was uncommonly successful at producing sounds that resembled what I remembered hearing from the singer in concert.

Rod Gilfry is a baritone whose repertoire ranges from Mozart to Sondheim, and, unlike most opera singers, he sings musicals with the appropriate style and vocal production, not afraid to sing softly when the material requires it. I heard him last summer as Frank Butler in a production of *Amie Get Your Gun* at the Glimmerglass Festival, a production that also starred the great dramatic soprano Deborah Voigt in a charming performance that did not for a moment sound like a slumming opera diva. Gilfry sounded great, singing with appropriate swagger in “I'm a Bad, Bad Man,” and romantic tenderness in “The Girl That I Marry.” I bought his recording



My Heart Is So Full of You (CD, Narratus Productions, 07), and when I played it at home, I was struck by how much the sound of his voice resembled what I had heard from the Glimmerglass stage. (Look for this recording in my “Records To Die For” listing elsewhere in this issue.) Sylvia McNair is another opera singer who can manage to not sound like one; her album *Sure Thing* (CD, Philips 442 129-2), featuring the music of Jerome Kern, is a longtime favorite of mine, and though I haven't heard McNair live, listening to this disc through the Triton Twos, I had the feeling that this is just what she must sound like in person.

Another major strength of the Triton Two was its bass: extended and powerful to a degree that was hard to credit to such modestly sized enclosures, with a good match of the low to midbass. For speakers of this size, regardless of the driver complement, I normally expect in-room bass extension to 40Hz, or a few Hz lower if you have a room mode that boosts the lower frequencies. GoldenEar Technology claims 16Hz for the Triton Two; that may be a bit optimistic, but still, the speaker's bass extension was impressive. With the subwoofer level adjusted to produce the most optimal match with the rest of the audioband, bass drums and organ-pedal notes came over with authority, and string basses were neither lightweight nor overemphasized (apart from a 50Hz emphasis that I've found with a number of speakers, and which I believe is a room mode). When I tested with the low-frequency tones on Nordost Corporation's *System Set-Up & Tuning Disc* (CD, Nordost CD NOR 101), the 24Hz note was clearly there, 21Hz was weaker but still audible, but 18Hz was not. I'll

be interested in John Atkinson's measurements of the Triton Two's bass extension.

Depending on the amplifier driving it, the Triton Two could play loud without sounding discomfited. As expected, the 150Wpc Simaudio W-7 amplifier was the best performer in this respect, but the Audiopax and PrimaLuna amps were both able to drive the GoldenEars to levels as high as I would want. Eiji Oue and the Minnesota Orchestra's recording of Mussorgsky-Ravel's *Pictures at an Exhibition* (HDCD, Reference RR-79CD) came across with real authority, the bass drum and organ providing an underpinning that's merely hinted at by speakers lacking the bottom octave. Even though the Triton Two's subwoofer has its own amplifier, it sounded different depending on the main amplifier being used, the Simaudio producing the tightest, most extended bass. By contrast, the two tube amplifiers, especially the Audiopax, were ahead in terms of harmonic accuracy.

As well as having more-than-respectable high-level dynamics, the Triton Two also excelled at microdynamics: the music's subtle ebb and flow. I greatly admire the musicianship of Sylvia McNair and André Previn on *Sure Thing*. McNair is at one with the music and lyrics, and Previn gives a lesson in the art of accompaniment. In a number like “The Folks Who Live on the Hill,” the interplay of singer and pia-

nist is exquisite, and I was able to follow it all easily through the Triton Twos.

Is it possible for a speaker (or other audio component) to be *too* detailed, to have *too* much resolution? I've seen this question debated in audio forums; my answer is No—with some qualifiers. In general, I want a speaker that lets me hear more of the music that's encoded in the digital data or in the LP groove, but that may also let in more of the noise, and if that noise (*ie*, nonmusical sounds) is too prominent, then it becomes difficult to enjoy the music. There are speakers on the market that have a reputation for being highly detailed, of being able to resolve the tiniest of differences, but that are rejected by many audiophiles, who find them too fatiguing to listen to in the long run. At the other end of the spectrum are speakers that have an easy-on-the-ears, "musical" tonal balance, but are weak at resolving the music's fine detail.

The Triton Two maintained a high level of resolution while never sounding hyperresolving or clinical.

Whether by deliberate decision or as a byproduct of component choices and other aspects of the design process, the Triton Two maintained a high level of resolution while never sounding hyperresolving

or clinical. There's a point about five seconds into Cilèa's "Lamento di Federico," from Mario Lanza's *Live from London* (CD, RCA 61884-2), at which someone—perhaps Lanza himself—hums a note that's part of Constantin Callinicos's piano introduction. The note is faint, but it's there, and the Triton Two let me hear it. Through the Triton Two it was also easy to hear the effects of various system tweaks, such as Nordost's Platinum Sort Kones *vs* the wooden blocks under my Ayre Acoustics CX-7e^{MP} CD player.

I've tried to catalogue the Triton Two's many sonic virtues, but I would be remiss if I didn't mention that it had one characteristic that sometimes detracted from the illusion of the sound being produced by actual musicians and singers in my room. Some "box" colorations sometimes made me aware that I was listening to speakers. These were mostly when music was being played quite loud, and were more apparent when I listened from off axis rather than in the sweet spot. This was by no means a deal-breaker, and it was evident only occasionally, but this is one area of performance in which the Triton Two could be improved. At what price that improvement, however, is a different question. Speaker manufacturers like Wilson Audio, Hansen, YG Acoustics, and Magico have gone all out in their efforts to subdue box colorations, but their speakers are in a price range an order of magnitude higher than the Triton Two's!

Comparisons

The last two speakers I reviewed were the Monitor Audio Platinum PL200 (\$8000/pair, April 2010) and the Focal Chorus 826W Anniversary Edition (\$3495/pair, November 2010), both floorstanders of about the same size as the Triton Two. The obvious question was how the GoldenEars Triton Two would compare with these more expensive speakers.

Not an easy question to answer. The Monitors and Focals were returned to their distributors some time ago, so I wasn't able to make direct comparisons with the GoldenEars. Although I don't think auditory memory is quite as unreliable

as some people claim, I wouldn't want to bet the farm on the accuracy of my recollection of sounds I heard a year ago. Perhaps an even greater problem is presented by subsequent changes in my system. Since I reviewed the PL200 and Chorus 826W, I have replaced PS Audio's Power Plant Premier AC regenerator with their PerfectWave Power Plant 5, now use Nordost Platinum Sort Kones rather than wood blocks under the Ayre CX-7e^{MP}, and have substituted a Hi-Fi Tuning Supreme fuse for the stock fuse in the CAT SL-1 Renaissance preamp. These changes add up to a very significant overall sonic improvement that would present a confounding variable for comparisons with the Triton Two even if my auditory memory were perfect. This is not a copout, but reality.

But there are a few things I can say without going out too far on a limb. Of the three speakers, the Triton Two had by far the most extended and powerful bass. The ported woofers of the PL200 and the Chorus 826W, while certainly respectable in their performance, simply couldn't match the bass from the powered built-in subwoofer of the Triton Two.

As for the more subtle and subjective aspects of sound quality, and for the moment putting aside the confounding variables of system changes, the GoldenEar was very much in the same sonic league as the other two speakers, the Monitor having perhaps a notch higher resolution, at the cost of a touch of brightness. In soundstage depth and width and precision of imaging, the Triton Twos were easily a match for the other two speaker pairs—neither of which is exactly a slouch in this department.

Judgments of a product's appearance are also subjective, but the Monitor Audio Platinum PL200, with its hand-rubbed wood veneer, was the most beautiful of the three to my eye, though I find the Triton Two attractive as well. But if you want your speakers to look like pieces of furniture, the

PL200—and, to a lesser extent, the Focal Chorus 826W—will be more to your taste.

I *was* able to directly compare the Triton Two with my reference speaker, the Avantgarde Uno Nano, a horn hybrid with a powered subwoofer (\$17,000/pair when last available; the German company is currently having problems with North American distribution). The Uno Nano is, overall, the "better" speaker: it's able to produce the illusion of live music more successfully than the Triton Two, with high-level dynamics that the GoldenEar can't match. This, of course, comes at a cost: you could buy six pairs of Triton Twos



Woofers are driven by a 1000W amp.

for the price of a pair of Uno Nanos, and still have money left over for some *really* good interconnects. But if price is not a deterrent, the Avantgardes will give you a closer approximation of live music.

The fact is, I was quite content to listen to music through the Triton Twos. In my high-end system, whose speaker cables cost more than the GoldenEars, there was no indication that the speakers were a weak link in the chain. I was in no hurry to switch back to my Avantgardes.

Conclusions

Given the technology that these speakers represent, not to mention their sound quality, I would not be surprised if they retailed at around \$10,000/pair. But they cost only a fourth of that: \$2499.98/pair. I don't know how GoldenEar can sell the Triton Two at that price and still make money for themselves and their dealers. Having the speaker being made in China certainly helps—but nowadays most speakers, even ones with pedigreed names, are made there. Sandy Gross wrote, in an e-mail, "We lavish the same care, expertise and experience that is usually reserved for the highest-priced high-end speakers on every GoldenEar speaker we create. We do it because we can—and because we know that you will enjoy and appreciate the result."

Finally, a caveat about auditioning these speakers at a dealer: The Triton Twos' relatively low price means that dealers will likely combine them with electronics and source components of similarly modest prices. This will not bring out these speakers' best. One audiophile told me that he'd

ASSOCIATED EQUIPMENT

Digital sources Ayre Acoustics CX-7e^{MP} CD player.

Preamplifiers Simaudio Moon Evolution P-7, Convergent Audio Technology SL-1 Renaissance.

Power Amplifiers Audiopax Model 88 Mk.II monoblocks, Simaudio Moon Evolution W-7.

Loudspeakers Avantgarde Uno Nano, Focal Chorus 826W Anniversary Edition, Monitor Audio Platinum PL200.

Cables Interconnect, speaker, AC: Nordost Valhalla.

Accessories Totem Acoustic Beaks, PS Audio PerfectWave Power Plant 5 power conditioner, Arcici Suspense Rack, PolyCrystal amplifier stands, Furutech RD-2 CD demagnetizer, Nordost AC and TC Sort Kones.—Robert Deutsch

heard the Triton Twos at a dealer driven by a midpriced home-theater receiver (with who-knows-what source) and was not that impressed with the sound. I'm not surprised. A speaker can reproduce only the signal it's fed; if you give it a mediocre signal, it can produce, at best, mediocre sound. The Triton Two is good enough to deserve associated equipment of high quality—which doesn't necessarily mean high price. Combine it with something like a PrimaLuna ProLogue Premium integrated amp, an Oppo BDP-95 universal Blu-ray player, and Nordost Leif cables, and you have a seriously good system for less than \$7000 that will take you through these recession-prone times. ■