

EQUIPMENT REVIEW

GoldenEar Technology Triton Seven loudspeakers

by Chris Martens

I enjoy über-high-end audio equipment as much as the next fellow, but I nevertheless have an abiding fondness for overachieving products that deliver high levels of performance for reasonable sums of money. I suppose this has to do with my conviction that the enjoyment of music is (or in an ideal world should be) something for all to enjoy—not just for an elite, well-heeled few. In turn, then, my wish is that high-end audio could be less of a ‘rich man’s game’ and more a sport for the common man. Happily, at least a few worthy high-end audio manufacturers share my vision in the matter and accordingly have developed products that are affordable yet offer compelling and, in the best cases, downright brilliant sound quality. One such product is the GoldenEar Technology Triton Seven floorstanding loudspeaker (£1,400/pair) that is the subject of this review.

Let me begin by supplying a bit of background. GoldenEar Technology is a US-based loudspeaker manufacturer founded several years ago by Sandy Gross, who was also the founder of Definitive Technology and co-founder of Polk Audio. Mr. Gross enjoys a well-deserved reputation as a serious, dyed-in-the-wool, high-end audiophile of the first rank, but what has made him a legend is his unflagging commitment to producing speakers that offer audiophile-worthy sound quality at down-to-earth prices (a hallmark of each of the speaker companies Gross helped create). Thus far, GoldenEar has offered several ranges of products, many of which have gone on to win critical acclaim and numerous industry awards.

In view of Sandy Gross’ enviable track record over the years, you might expect that that Triton Sevens would simply be chips off the old block and in some senses they are.



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The Triton Sevens stand, at present, as the smallest and least expensive of GoldenEar's Triton-series floorstanders and a casual stroll through technical specifications pages at the GoldenEar web site conveys the impression that, while Triton Sevens share some design features with the large Triton Twos and Threes, they are in essence 'Triton Lites.' This impression, however, is misleading because somewhere between the preparation of the specifications page and the creation of the actual product a wonderful thing happened: namely, the Triton Sevens wound up sounding different from and better than their bigger siblings in many of the ways likely to matter most to audiophiles. Let's get this straight: The Triton Sevens are smaller, less complex, and less expensive than their stable mates, yet actually sound all the better for it. How can this be?

In trying to assess what makes the Triton Sevens superior performers, I reflected on a line attributed to the late, great British sports car designer Colin Chapman. When asked how to make racing cars go faster on a consistent basis, Chapman is said to have quipped, "Simplify, and add lightness." Well, if asked what makes his new Triton Sevens sound so very good, Sandy Gross might smile and say that they, "Simplify and add (sonic) transparency"—and we are speaking, here, of transparency delivered by the bucket full. As a result, the Triton Seven sounds remarkably open, articulate, and revealing—ridiculously so for its modest price.

At first glance, the Triton Seven seems disarmingly simple. It is a compact tower-type speaker that stands just over a metre tall and that sports just three active drive elements: a small Heil-type HVFR (High Velocity Folded Ribbon) tweeter flanked by two wide-bandwidth, high-excursion 133mm mid/bass drivers. To provide necessary low-frequency reinforcement the Triton Seven also sports a pair of side-firing 200mm 'planar sub-bass radiators' (i.e., passive radiators). The speaker is housed in a svelte, gently swept-back, black fabric-clad enclosure that sports a gloss black trim cap on top and a matching black floor plinth embossed with a soft

gold-coloured GoldenEar logo. If this capsule description seems a little underwhelming at first, it helps to bear in mind that with the Triton Seven, as with so many other great loudspeakers, the genius is in the details.

As I suggested above, the Triton Seven combines several difficult-to-meld sonic virtues: It is quite detailed, offers plenty of resolution, high degrees of transparency, and demonstrates impressive transient quickness, yet also sounds smooth. GoldenEar achieved this result by carefully doing its homework in terms of melding the output of its lightning fast Heil-type HVFR tweeters with the output of its also very fast, wide-bandwidth piston-type mid-bass drivers. The result may well be the most accomplished hybrid mix of Heil-type plus piston-type drivers that I have yet heard in any loudspeaker, regardless of price. GoldenEar has succeeded where many other have tried and failed, partly by banishing apparent speed and textural discontinuities between the disparate driver types, but also—more importantly—by getting them to sing with one coherent voice.

What is more, GoldenEar has fitted the production version Triton Sevens with all-new, long-throw, 133mm mid-bass drivers—ones that dramatically up the performance ante vis-à-vis the firm's previous mid-bass drivers. Audio journalists and dealers who heard the prototype Triton Sevens at CES 2013 are in for a real surprise, because the difference these new mid-bass drivers make is a large one. They offer audibly higher resolution and quicker transient response than GoldenEar's previous mid-bass drivers did, which is saying a mouthful given that the original drivers were already quite good.

Second, the mid-bass drivers also offer superior dynamic performance across the board, not just in the sense of being able to play more loudly (although they certainly can do that), but also in the sense of revealing far subtler shadings of dynamic expression.

Third, the new drivers have significantly higher excursion limits than their precursors did, which means they not only play gracefully at higher output levels but also offer much more extended bass response than before. Unbelievable though this may seem, when augmented by the Triton Seven's passive radiators, those little mid-bass drivers produce authoritative (and I mean really authoritative) low-end response that extends well down into the 30Hz range.

Finally, the Triton Seven enclosure is special, too. The slender towers are designed to provide the desirable damping characteristics of a transmission line enclosure with the low-end weight, power, and efficiency of a sophisticated passive radiator-equipped system. To this end, GoldenEar strategically positions what are said to be very effective though costly damping materials directly behind the twin mid-bass drivers in the upper part of the tower. The



► damping materials give the speaker excellent driver control through the midrange, upper bass, and mid-bass regions. But, as frequencies descend, the damping materials allow the towers to ‘open up,’ permitting back-wave energy from the mid-bass drivers to couple with their associated passive radiators in an extremely efficient way. The result is bass that is taut, tuneful, and rhythmically correct, yet offers the kind of low-frequency weight and slam typically associated with much bigger speakers. Not a bad day’s work for a pair of 133mm mid-bass drivers, eh? (Hint: You can probably win wagers amongst audiophile friends by daring them to guess the size of the Triton Sevens’ “woofers”).

Put all of these factors together and you get what I think is—pound for pound, dollar for dollar and euro for euro—the finest affordable high-end loudspeaker I’ve yet heard (and I say this from the perspective of being an enthusiastic user of Magnepan 1.7 planar magnetic loudspeakers, which many of my American compatriots consider the greatest single bargain in all of high-end audio). Let me offer some observations based on real-world listening experiences to help support that statement.

One of best qualities of the Triton Seven is the almost eerie sense of focus it affords. This became clear for me as I listened to a series of tracks from Anne Bisson’s *Portraits & Perfumes* [Camillio Records]. Ms. Bisson has a distinctive voice that is light and breathy yet fully of underlying richness and full of hints of wry humour just waiting to be released. If you have ever heard Ms. Bisson speak or sing, you might agree that her voice is unforgettable. When I played *Portraits & Perfumes* through the Triton Sevens there was that voice—sounding palpable, present, richly textured, and real—looming between the loudspeakers and positioned just a few feet behind them. One might expect (or at least hope for) such moments of realism from loudspeakers carrying steep price tags, but it is a real rarity to hear them served up by speakers selling for just £1,400/pair. But with the Triton Sevens, moments of realism seem to occur early and often, which is good news for us all.

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Next, the Triton Sevens offered remarkably good imaging and three-dimensionality thanks, in large part, to their ability to retrieve very low-level textural and transient details and to capture subtle spatial cues in the music. To hear these qualities in action, try Jamey Haddad, Lenny White, and Mark Sherman’s *Explorations in Time and Space* [Chesky, Binaural+ series recording], which was recorded without compression or equalization from the interior of the Hirsch Center for the Performing Arts (formerly St. Elias’ Catholic Church) in Brooklyn, NY. The album features a series of highly inventive interchanges between three master percussionists, who perform on an impressive array of instruments. On ‘Explorations’, the GoldenEars generated exceptionally wide, deep, and precise soundstages, revealing the exact locations of each of the percussionists (and their various instruments) onstage. Even sounds emanating from the far rear corners of the soundstage remained beautifully focused, stable in their positions, and dynamically alive.

Finally, the Triton Sevens proved to be remarkably dynamically expressive—much more so than their size or configuration would lead you to expect. A good example would be the Gerard Schwarz/Royal Liverpool Philharmonic performance of Alan Hovhaness’s *Mount St. Helens* ►

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► **Symphony** [Alan Hovhaness, *Mysterious Mountains*, Telarc. SACD]—a piece that paints a vivid symphonic picture of the events leading up to the violent eruption of the Mount St. Helens volcano. When heard under ideal circumstances, this recording offers up moments of delicate beauty juxtaposed against majestic but at times quite explosive dynamic mood swings. Frankly, many speakers turn the composition into a compressed dynamic muddle, but the Triton Sevens did not. Instead, they effortlessly captured the depth and breadth of the orchestra sections arrayed upon the stage, rendering quieter passages with deft dynamic shadings. Yet when the eruption passage came along, the Sevens shifted dynamic gears instantly, showing the full, fierce, percussion and brass blast used to represent the sheer power of the volcano's eruption. If I hadn't experienced this with my own two ears, I would never have thought

speakers fitted with just two 133mm mid-bass drivers and a Heil-type tweeter could ever convey so much weight and grandeur. Who knew? Maybe less really is more.

Are there downsides here? Well, for those who want speakers that can serve double-duty in music and home theatre systems, or that can play rock or other forms of "power" music at high volume levels, GoldenEar's larger Triton Two and Three towers might be a better choice than the Sevens—largely because they feature built-in powered subwoofers that extend bass depth and clout whilst making the speakers easier to drive. I would also say that for those who prize uncanny top-to-bottom coherency and realistic image height and scale, the Magnepan 1.7s (or the new Magnepan Super MMG system) might be a better choice. But on the whole, the Triton Sevens can easily go toe-to-toe with any like-priced competitors and can also handily outperform any number of higher priced speakers. One last thought I will offer is that a "downside" of the Triton Seven is that it will make you want to acquire the best associated electronics and source components you can afford (but then, that's always been the way of things with truly great loudspeakers).

Here's the bottom line: If you want to find out just how much high-end goodness £1,400 can buy in a pair of loudspeakers, then you absolutely must audition the Triton Sevens. I consider this speaker a masterpiece of value-oriented audio engineering—one that sets a performance standard that will not easily be matched or surpassed. +

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Type: Two-way, three-driver floorstanding speaker with passive radiators

Driver complement: One Heil-type HVFR (high velocity folded ribbon) tweeter, two 133mm cast-basket mid-bass drivers, two 200mm planar passive radiators

Frequency response: 29Hz – 35kHz

Sensitivity: 89 dB

Dimensions: Tower (H x W x D): 101 x 18.3 x 29.9cm. Plinth (W x D): 26.5 x 36.9cm

Weight: 15kg

Price: £1,400/pair

Manufacturer: GoldenEar Technology

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