GoldenEar
Triton Five

This slim column hides its light under a bushel – or at least a sock – but is an addictively attractive performer.

**Review:** Andrew Everard  Lab: Keith Howard

You might seem to be setting yourself up for a fall if you call your company GoldenEar Technology. It’s a cue for all those jokes about effects heard only by those claiming such aural ability, grist to the mill of the ‘design them properly and they all sound the same’ brigade. Fortunately for the team behind the GoldenEar Triton range – including the £2300 Triton Five we have here – the product lives up to its billing, for the Five is perhaps the most striking speaker I have heard at this price level for a very long time.

Led by company founders Sandy Gross and Don Gouge, GoldenEar claim involvement in some highly successful speakers of the past. After all, Gross co-founded Definitive Technology with Canadian Gouge, and Polk Audio with Mark Levinson, both before giving up semi-retirement in 2010 to kickstart GoldenEar.

**SOCK IT TO ‘EM**

Based in Stoneville, Maryland, just north of Baltimore, and with its engineering facilities in Ampriour, Canada, a short distance from Ottawa, the company’s resources include a full-size anechoic chamber the equal of Canada’s famous National Research Council facility. Its resources include a full-size anechoic chamber the equal of Canada’s famous National Research Council facility. Its ‘sound first’ engineering philosophy is immediately apparent when you encounter the slim columns, just over 112cm tall with the entry-level Triton Seven, at just under £1650 a pair, all the way up to the flagship Triton Reference, at a sniff below £9500.

With the typical GoldenEar design, the drivers are shared across the entire range, from the entry-level Triton Seven, at just under £1650 a pair, all the way up to the flagship Triton Reference, at a sniff below £9500. The drivers are clearly visible from the seating position, and having run the speakers hard for a while to get them loosened up and warmed through, I was ready to start listening. I was less ready, however, for just how impressive the Triton Fives sound, despite having read rave reviews of other models in this price level at the listening position.’

**REAL WORLD VALUES**

In common with the speakers from the GoldenEar founders’ past, the Triton range is designed as a ‘real world’ lineup for use with relatively modest amplification as well as the more serious stuff. The promotional material also suggests the Fives’ use with an AVR receiver and the company’s series of centre/surround speakers, surrounds and active subwoofers to create multichannel audio/home cinema systems.

Set-up is simple, the speakers coming with both spikes and carpeted feet to suit most surfaces. The company founder Gross has some simple tips on how to get the best from the Fives: ‘I like the Tritons (all of them) up against something – I’ve used them under the skin of a product – get real, it’s only listening and writing – then you’d enjoy the fact that the Triton Fives are not just critically good for the money but also remarkably easy to enjoy. After the first track I played – the Trondheim Soloists’ recording of Tchaikovsky’s Serenade, from the Souvenir set [2L 2L-090, 192kHz/24-bit] – I was already hooked by the wide-open sound, the weight and power of the bass and the way they seem completely invisible in acoustic terms, leaving the listener...”

**BASS GAIN, NO PAIN**

Given that a plastic moulding or two, a tube and a hole are cheaper, most loudspeaker designers prefer conventional reflex loading to the passive radiator alternative. In this case the moving mass of a diaphragm replaces the air mass within a port tube to form a Helmhotlz resonator with the compliance of the air within the cabinet. But air moving back and forth within a reflex port can give rise to ‘chuffing’ or ‘windage’ noises, and at high velocities can result in compression and distortion. Plus a hole in the cabinet can allow egress of reflections and resonances within the enclosed air. The passive radiator (or ABR, auxiliary bass radiator) – of which there are four in the Triton Five – provides relief from some of these problems. In a floorstanding speaker, the sensitive place to put them is exactly where GoldenEar does, on the side panels close to the floor, as this gets them near at least one room boundary (the floor) and perhaps two if the speaker is designed for use with its back wall. Boundary gain then assists the bass without causing major response irregularities. KH

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GoldenEar Triton Five

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The larger drivers venting into a cabinet designed with a slanted baffle and non-parallel panels for the avoidance of standing waves. The midbass drivers themselves are long-throw six units with cast baskets for rigidity, developed at the company’s Canadian engineering facility. The enclosure behind them vents into a lower chamber where sits a quartet of fin ABRS, two on each side of the cabinet and mounted low to make the most of reinforcement from the floor. Meanwhile the HVR, found across the Triton range, is described as ‘pressurising the air; rather than pushing and pulling it, for better impedance matching with the air in the room’. The crossover network, again mounted high up in the cabinet, behind the drivers, is designed to augment the slanted baffle to time-align the drivers for a coherent wave-launch directed at ear level at the listening position.”

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The ABRs are non-parallel panels for the avoidance of reflections and resonances within the enclosed air. The passive radiator (or ABR, auxiliary bass radiator) – of which there are four in the Triton Five – provides relief from some of these problems. In a floorstanding speaker, the sensible place to put them is exactly where GoldenEar does, on the side panels close to the floor, as this gets them near at least one room boundary (the floor) and perhaps two if the speaker is designed for use with its back to the wall. Boundary gain then assists the bass without causing major response irregularities.

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Given that a plastic moulding or two, a tube and a hole are cheaper, most loudspeaker designers prefer conventional reflex loading to the passive radiator alternative. In this case the moving mass of a diaphragm replaces the air mass within a port tube to form a Helmholz resonator with the compliance of the air within the cabinet. But air moving back and forth within a reflex port can give rise to ‘chuffing’ or ‘windage’ noises, and at high velocities can result in compression and distortion. Plus a hole in the cabinet can allow egress of reflections and resonances within the enclosed air. The passive radiator (or ABR, auxiliary bass radiator) – of which there are four in the Triton Five – provides relief from some of these problems. In a floorstanding speaker, the sensible place to put them is exactly where GoldenEar does, on the side panels close to the floor, as this gets them near at least one room boundary (the floor) and perhaps two if the speaker is designed for use with its back to the wall. Boundary gain then assists the bass without causing major response irregularities.

SOCK IT TO ‘EM

Like all the speakers in the company’s range, it eschews elaborate woodwork, expensive veneers and glitzy trim. Instead the speaker is wrapped in a simple black ‘sock’, capped top and bottom with high-quality gloss-finished plastic mouldings, thus leaving money to be spent on the sound-critical elements of the design.

The basic configuration, up at the top of the front baffle, comprises a Diapole Array of two fin bass/mid drivers above and below a proprietary ‘High Velocity Folded Ribbon’ tweeter (HVR). Four fin ABRS add the bass.

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Set-up is simple, the speakers coming with both spikes and carpet feet for more delicate surfaces. And company founder Gross has some simple tips on how to get the best from the Fives: ‘I like the Tritons (all of them) quality if possible, at least as far apart as you are from each, or even further. This is not absolutely necessary, but they will sound their best. I find any good speaker, not just the Tritons, if they have good centre-fill sound best like this. I also like them toed in right at the last.’

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As with the Triton Five, the HW Range is all about avoiding reflections, and I found a quite a severe toe-in gave the best results – not quite 45o, but getting there – and that a good space between the speakers and the side and rear walls avoided the ABRS over exciting the room. Thus set up, with the side panels clearly visible from the seating position, and having run the speakers hard for a while to get them loosened up and warmed through, I was ready to start listening. I was less ready, however, for just how impressive the Triton Fives sound, despite having read rave reviews of other models in the range. Quite simply, these are speakers that just sound ‘right’ as soon as you listen, creating a soundstage picture completely free from those slim towers, unearthling starting detail in the midrange and treble, and with bass to make some much larger – and much more expensive – loudspeakers sound just plain silly.

If you’ve ever read one of those reviews in which the writer seems to suggest a process of toiling at the coalface to get under the skin of a product – get real. It’s only writing and listening – then you’ll enjoy the fact that the Triton Fives are not just ridiculously good for the money, but also remarkably easy to enjoy. After the first track I played – the Trombone Solos’ recording of Tchaikovsky’s ‘Serenade’, from the Souvenir set [2L 2L-090, 192kHz/24-bit] – I was already hooked by the wide-open sound, the weight and power of the bass and the way they seem completely invisible in acoustic terms, leaving the listener...
with nothing more than the music floating in the room. It's a magical effect, like almost no other speakers I've heard at this level, and entirely addictive – I could hardly load music fast enough to hear how the Triton Fives would handle it!

With Gregory Porter's 'When Love Was King' from Liquid Spirit [Blue Note 0602537410538; 96kHz/24-bit], the speakers open up with a beautifully nuanced view of the depth, richness and slightly recessed quality of the singer's voice. Then, when the jazz trio accompaniment kicks in, it's delivered with the bass

PERFECT BALANCE

With a different accompanied voice – in Britten's Serenade for Tenor, Horn and Strings [Linn CKD 478; 192kHz/24-bit] – the Triton Fives display the same attributes: offering up the voice and brass in perfect balance with the orchestra in the resonant Snape Maltings acoustic for a brilliantly atmospheric sound.

But then that's what the sound here is all about, and these very magical speakers present it whatever you play. Rounding off listening with ZZ Top's 'La Grange' [from Tres Hombres; Warner Bros 8122-78966-2] shows that these speakers really can boogie, with fabulous snarl to the guitar, thudding bass and a heart-thudding drum figure just before the solo howls out.

By any standards these are simply wonderfully well-balanced speakers, and a delight to review.

HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

Superb speakers for sensible money? Yes – and then some! The Triton Fives live up to their ethos by putting the engineering budget where it counts – into the sound. The open, focused soundstaging, powerful, punchy bass and remarkably handling of voices and acoustic instruments all contribute to the very special sound on offer, making these slender black columns remarkable value and a must-listen.

Sound Quality: 87%