

First Listen: GoldenEar Technology Triton Two Loudspeakers

Posted by: Chris Martens at 9:09 pm, December 29th, 2010



GoldenEar Technology is the third loudspeaker company that Sandy Gross has helped to found (the first two were Polk Audio and Definitive Technology), and it is one that will surely enhance Mr. Gross' well-deserved reputation for building speaker systems that offer astonishing level of performance at sane prices.

GoldenEar's flagship product, and the technical centerpiece of its entire product line, is the new Triton Two floorstanding speaker (\$2500/pair), which I'll soon be reviewing — first in a 2-channel configuration for *The Absolute Sound*, and later on reviewing as part of a 5.1-channel system (known as the "Triton Cinema System") for *The Perfect Vision*.

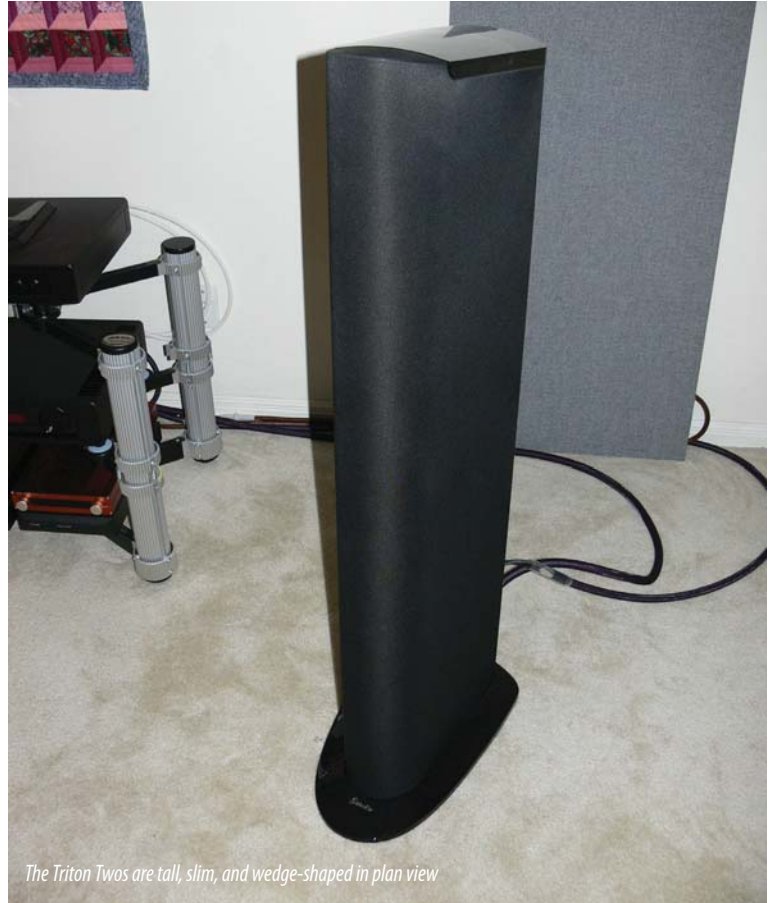
The impressions I'll share with you in this blog are, then, based on hearing the Triton Twos as used in a very high-quality, audiophile-oriented stereo system — one in which, until quite recently, I had been evaluating the superb (but also quite costly) YG Acoustics Carmel loudspeakers.

You might think that it would be painful to step down from the \$18,000/pair Carmels to the \$2500/pair Triton Twos, but in truth I did not find it a terribly jarring transition at all. Granted, the Carmels are without a doubt the more accomplished and better-sounding speakers (as you would expect, given the enormous price disparity), but the fact is that the Triton Twos do so many things well (and I mean really well) for such a sensible price that I find myself smiling and shaking my head in disbelief every time I sit down to listen to them. When it comes to considerations of value for money, I think the Triton Two sets the bar as high if

The Triton Two beneath the grill cloth

not higher than any other speaker I've yet heard. In fact, I think that in its own way the Triton Two represents as big a bargain as (or for some listeners, perhaps an even bigger bargain than) Magnepan's crazy-good MG1.7 (which I also have on hand for comparison).

In short, Sandy Gross and his partner Don Givogue (who guided the technical development effort behind the Triton Two) have really outdone themselves with this speaker, as I'll explain in more detail below. But first, let me provide some technical background for those of you who have not yet been introduced to the Triton Twos (for more information, visit: www.goldenear.com).



The Triton Twos are tall, slim, and wedge-shaped in plan view



GoldenEar Triton Two's in the author's two-channel listening room

The Triton Two is a slim, 48"-tall tower type speaker that features five active and two passive drive units, and that includes what amounts to a full-on, built-in, self-powered (1200-watt) woofer/subwoofer system. Up top, the Triton Two sports a D'Appolito array comprising two 4.5-inch mid-bass drivers fitted with "multi-vented phase plugs" plus a small, rectangular Heil-type "high velocity folded ribbon" tweeter. Down below, in a separate chamber, there are two oblong long-throw 5-inch x 8-inch "quadratic" woofers, a pair of also oblong 7-inch x 10-inch "planar" passive radiators, and a built-in 1200-watt subwoofer amplifier, which uses DSP circuitry to ensure optimal matching between the upper range of the woofer section and the lower range of the D'Appolito array.

On one level, it's tempting to think of the Triton Two as offering an evolutionary step forward from the popular (and excellent) Definitive Technology Mythos ST and Mythos STS loudspeaker that Mr. Gross helped develop a few years back. And there are, to be sure, certain basic similarities between the Mythos towers and the Triton Twos.

But God, as they say, is in the details, and at the level where details matter most it turns out that the Triton Two is significantly different from any of the other speaker systems that Gross and Givogue have developed in the past.

Rather than try and provide a fully fleshed-out review, let me instead offer some "snapshot" impressions that will help to show what makes the Triton Two such a special loudspeaker.

In a nutshell, the Triton Two offers:

- **Extremely “fast” and detailed treble response**, but without so much as hint of roughness, edginess, glare, or overshoot. I put this down, first and foremost, to the excellent job that GoldenEar has done with its new Heil-type tweeter, but also to the expert way in which the tweeter’s output is blended with GoldenEar’s dual, piston-type midrange drivers.
- **Open, effortless midrange response, offering the best blend between piston-type midrange drivers and Heil-type tweeters that I’ve yet heard.** Bluntly, the trouble with using Heil-type tweeters is that they generally sound almost too good for their own good, so that — to one degree or another — you can usually pick out textural discontinuities between the hyper-responsive Heil tweeter and the not-quite-so-responsive piston-type midrange drivers next door. The GoldenEar team, however, went to extraordinary lengths to tackle this problem, coming up with an unusually light, fast midrange driver that offers, I am told, frequency response that remains almost perfectly flat clear on up to around 20kHz (!). Of course, the midrange driver doesn’t have to go that high, but the point is that it is light and fast enough to do so, so that lower in its operating range it offers the kind of transient speed that really “clicks” with Heil-type tweeter in an astonishingly seamless way. See what I mean about God being in the details?



- **Killer imaging and soundstaging.** One of the very first things I noticed about the Triton Two was that it immediately produced an enormously wide and deep soundstage in my room, yet was also capable of very tightly focused imaging. If you buy these speakers, expect to be wowed by their spatial characteristics, but also plan on spending a fair amount of time dialing-in their position in your room to get a just-right combination of stage width and depth vis-à-vis image specificity and focus. Depending on where/how you place the Triton Twos, I found that it was possible to get more of one quality (stage size) at the expense of the other (image specificity), so that it is important to take your time and to find an optimally realistic compromise. One further note is that the Triton Two tends, for whatever reason, to cast an image that floats at or even a bit above the tops of the towers, which I found very realistic (true, it’s not quite the same as the floor-to-ceiling image presentation that you get with Magnepans, but it’s not too far off from that standard).

The Triton Two’s speaker binding postss, woofer controls, and power connections (shown with exquisite Furutech Powerflux power cords, which really do make a difference with this highly revealing loudspeaker)

- **Resolution to rival the big boys.** The Triton Two offer plenty of detail and resolution, though in a casual, naturalistic, and almost “offhand” way — this in contrast to, say, MartinLogan speakers, where details tend in a sense to draw attention to themselves (albeit in a breathtakingly pure and focused way).



- **Real live, no jive, full-range bass.** The Triton Two goes very, very low, and with real authority. This is, however, something of a double-edged sword, in that not all rooms can deal with speakers that can provide significant bass output below 30Hz.
- **Very good woofer-to-midrange driver integration.** The Triton Two does a much better than average job of handling the tricky region where output from the woofers and the midrange drivers must blend. GoldenEar’s DSP-controlled woofer amp section really helps out here, I think. Even so, great two-way speakers (e.g., the YG Carmels) can in my opinion handle the transition from upper bass to lower midrange frequencies even more coherently than the Triton Twos do.
- **Terrific flexibility and ease of use.** Unlike most other speakers capable of such high overall levels of sound quality, the Triton Twos are capable of playing quite loudly, yet are ridiculously easy to drive. This is true in large part because the entire woofer section of the speaker is self-powered. Thus, your amp never really has to drive the woofers; instead, it has only to drive the input section of the subwoofer amp. What does this buy you? Well, for starters it means you can use pretty much any type of amp you wish, yet get consistently good results. You could, for example, quite reasonably choose to drive the Triton Twos with a small, low output tube amp, yet without sacrificing serious bass performance (something you could never, ever do with, say, the Magnepan MG1.7’s). While the Triton Two’s sound fine when driven by high-powered amps, they in no way require them, which is an important distinction to grasp. But here’s a further observation: the Triton Two is one of the very few true audiophile-grade speakers that would also be perfectly at home in a high-end home theater context — where, please note, the Triton Two would absolutely not require separate subwoofers (because the subwoofers are already built in — cool, no?).



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I believe the GoldenEar Triton Two will in due time earn a reputation as a watershed product, largely because it places very high-level sound quality within reach for those of us who must operate within the often tight constraints of real-world, Everyman budgets. I also suspect the Triton Two will serve as a thrown gauntlet of sorts vis-à-vis any number of high-end poseurs, forcing them either to put up, shut up, or figure out a way to deliver greater performance per dollar. And from my point of view, that’s a wonderful thing.