GOLDFINEAR TECHNOLOGY

TRITON THREE SPEAKERS $1,998/pair
BY BRENT BUTTERWORTH

A compact power tower with punch.

Serious bass at an awesome price.
GoldenEar Technology may have had the listener rise to the top of any speaker manufacturer in history. The company started less than 2 years ago. Yet its very first product, the Triton Two tower speaker, was named Sound + Vision’s 2010 Audio Product of the Year — and practically every other audio publication raved about it, too.

It shouldn’t have come as too big a surprise, though. GoldenEar is the creation of Sandy Gross, a co-founder of Polk Audio and Definitive Technology, and engineer Don Giovoge, the other co-founder of Def Tech. Still, to have people comparing your $2,000 per pair speaker to $10,000 per-pair models is an accomplishment.

GoldenEar designed the new Triton Three for those who found the Triton Two too large or pricey. At $999 each, the Three sells for $1,000 less per pair than the Two (which just went up to $1,499 each) and stands 4 inches shorter. So it’s not a radical change from the original.

Nor do the guts represent a radical change. The Three uses the same High-Velocity Folded Ribbon tweeter found throughout GoldenEar’s speaker lineup. The HVFR employs a thin ribbon diaphragm that’s folded about 20 times. It works sort of like an accordion, squeezing the folds in the diaphragm to force air in and out, thus making sound. The midrange driver is the same 4.5-inch cone, but where the Two has a pair, the Three has just one.

Like the Two, the Three incorporates a powered subwoofer, although it’s got less oomph. The Three has just one oval-shaped woofer to the Two’s two. Also, the Three’s dual passive radiators are smaller, and its 800-watt internal amplifier is only two-thirds as powerful.

The powered sub section presents some advantages over using a separate subwoofer. Because the woofer has its own amp, Giovoge and his team could use a digital low-pass filter on the woofer to fine-tune the blend between the woofer and the midrange driver. The digital filter is a complex series of first-order filters at different frequencies, while the midrange uses a passive, second-order high-pass filter. (The midrange/tweeter crossover is also passive.) A knob on the back lets you adjust the level of the subwoofer section so that it balances perfectly with the midrange and tweeter, and an LFE line-level input lets you get optional added oomph when playing movies.

The disadvantage of the powered sub section is that you have to position the towers where the midrange and tweeter drivers work best, at least a couple of feet from any nearby wall. (With a subwoofer, you’re free to position the sub as well as the satellite speakers wherever they work best with your room’s acoustics.)

If you’ve hung on my every word here, you now know what a fascinating and complex engineering exercise the GoldenEar Triton Three is. Now it’s time to take a seat in the listening chair and see if the engineering worked.
Three into a full home theater system can add the matching SuperSat 50C center speaker and SuperSat 3 surround speakers.

**PERFORMANCE**

I didn’t have some grand plan in mind when I chose Donald Fagen’s *The Nightfly* LP as the first thing to play through the Triton Threes; it just happened to be the first record in the stack. But *The Nightfly* turned out to be an ideal test of GoldenEar’s claim that its internal subwoofer integrates better with the midwoofer than a standalone subwoofer could. Bassist Anthony Jackson’s lines in “I.G.Y.” sail above and below the Triton Three’s crossover point, yet no matter what notes he hit, his playful timing subtleties came through perfectly.

As the record continued to play, I noticed that all the instruments in the lush production were reproduced with unusual specificity — i.e., they seemed to come from more precise positions than I’m used to hearing. In “I.G.Y.”, for example, the background vocals were spread from speaker to speaker but no further, while the synthesizer washes wrapped around and behind me. Fagen’s voice and the cheesy-sounding “synth blues harp” he plays on the track sounded as perfectly placed as they would have if I had gone into the studio, pushed engineer Elliot Scheiner out of his chair at the mixing board, and done all the panning of each voice and instrument myself.

I suspect the Triton Three’s broad soundstage will help it blend well with center and surround speakers in a 5.1 or 7.1 setup. In fact, when I streamed the racing documentary *Senna* from Netflix, I heard sound effects of racing cars coming from the sides of the room several feet behind me, even though only the Triton Threes were playing. I also noticed when streaming *Flat Top*, an old mono WWII flick, that the dialogue centered perfectly in the midst of my screen, even when the Threes were 9 feet apart.

Seems time to add some comments about voice reproduction, but even though my test CD is loaded with vocal tracks chosen because they reveal flaws in speakers, I found little on which I could fault the Triton Three. I did note that the speaker added a little emphasis to Brazilian singer Bebel Gilberto’s voice in the lower treble, around 3 kHz, and the same held true for Chancellor Palpatine’s voice in *Star Wars, Episode II: Attack of the Clones*. But by and large, the vocal reproduction is so good that you’ll probably never even notice this. And that’s the way it ought to be.

The bass delivered by the 5-by-9-inch woofer isn’t going to knock you out of your chair, but it’s deep and satisfying enough that I think most people would be happy without a sub. Home theater enthusiasts, though, will almost surely want to add a sub or two. As I stated above, the middle and upper bass registers were beautifully blended and flawlessly tuneful. However, the bottom octave-and-a-half wasn’t as smooth and even as I can get it in my room using standalone subwoofers. Such is the nature of tower speakers.

**BOTTOM LINE**

Whenever I strongly recommend a product, I often worry that a *Sound + Vision* reader might buy it and not like it despite its strengths, but I have no such concerns with the Triton Three. It’s simply one of the best tower speakers I’ve reviewed at any price. The fact that it sounds this good at just below $2,000 per pair makes it a truly outstanding buy.

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**Test Bench**

Set the Triton Three’s subwoofer level control right and you’ll get smooth response all the way from 29 Hz to 20 kHz. Off-axis response is great even at ±45° and ±60°, with nothing but a nice, clean treble roll-off at frequencies above 15 kHz. Output of the subwoofer section is modest but deep, averaging 108.7 dB in the low bass (40-63 Hz) and 97.5 dB in the ultra-low bass (20-31.5 Hz). That’s just for one speaker, though — the second speaker will add an average of +6 dB to the bass output, although the effects will vary with frequency because of room acoustics. — B.B.

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**Frequency Response**

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<th>Frequency (hertz)</th>
<th>decibels</th>
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<tr>
<td>20 Hz</td>
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<td>100 Hz</td>
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<td>20 kHz</td>
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29 Hz to 20 kHz ±3.6 dB

Full Test Bench data at soundandvisionmag.com/goldenear-technology-triton-three

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Donald Fagen  *The Nightfly*