

GOLDENEAR TECHNOLOGY

Triton Seven Speakers

By Mark Marcantonio


 GoldenEar

Boom! Ba-boom! The shock of thunderous bass waves is what the GoldenEar Triton Seven speakers greet me with to start a surprising review experience. Put away your preconceived notions of what slim, budget mini-towers should sound like—these are the first such speakers that don't prompt me to add a subwoofer, even just to see if any bass response is missing. Unless you're trying to out-thump the teenage neighbor with the 15-inch woofers in the back of his hatchback, the Sevens provide as much bass as you could ever want from a \$1,400 pair of speakers.

Thanks to their dual passive radiators, the Sevens go down to 29 Hz, which is plenty of low-frequency extension for most listeners. From the instrumental thunderclap in James Taylor's "Gaia" and the cannons in Tchaikovsky's "1812 Overture," to Dire Straits' "The Man's Too Strong" and non-ear-bleeding hip-hop or techno dance music, these speakers easily provide the necessary weight to get the job done.

If imaging floats your boat, the Sevens flood the room with that characteristic—so much so that my small man cave (about 9 by 12 feet) isn't quite large enough to let them breathe. In my 14-by-18-foot living room, the speakers thrive, with instrument placement that reminds me of much more expensive speakers.



The individual percussion whacks of the Indigo Girls' "Three Hits" rotate around the outside of each speaker, with the individual voices placed far left and right, and the magical harmony point placed well in front of the mini-towers.

Aerosmith's classic "Dream On" is a stress-test song. Steven Tyler's vocals can push many tweeters in the sub-\$1,500 range into screechy crunchiness. Triton's High-Velocity Folded-Ribbon (HVFR) tweeter keeps the high frequencies clear and dynamics strong. A testament to their driver design, the Sevens manage to keep even dense recordings well sorted.

Tech and Setup

Optimizing the Sevens takes very little effort. In my room, I achieve the best results using an equal triangular measurement, with the speakers toed-in directly to the listening position and placed four feet out from the wall. If you place the speakers too far apart, male vocals will hollow out and the center image will collapse. During setup, I suggest moving them apart a few inches at a time until you've gone too far, and then move them a touch closer.

With an 89 dB sensitivity rating at 8 ohms, the Sevens get jumping pretty easily. Though they thrive with the 150 watts per channel of my reference Simaudio Moon i-7 integrated, the 35-wpc Vista Audio i35 tube integrated still delivers plenty of punch though with a slightly softer presentation than the Sim. These speakers are truly amplifier-friendly, as they work equally well with class-D amps. *(continued)*

Compatible Predictable Optimized



Yes, There Is a Best Cable for Your Speakers

And, yes, you *can* find that cable. Or, you *could*—if you borrowed every cable ever made and used it in a bypass comparison. OK, so borrowing every cable is kind of a pain, but an easy bypass comparison is the only way to truly understand the "sound" of a speaker cable, or, better yet, to verify its desired neutrality, its lack of character or sonic signature. When we compare the sound of one component with that of another, we are almost always comparing one version of not-quite-right with another version of not-quite-right, and then choosing the component that seems most compatible with our system.

However, *true* compatibility, with any one speaker or with *every* speaker, is only achieved by using the cable that does the least damage, allowing the music and its emotion to pass freely from the system to the listener. This is all about damage control: A cable can never improve the sound of the source, but the nature of what it does wrong makes all the difference in the world. For instance, in any system, a cable with a slightly soft focus, or "coloring" the sound like a neutral gray filter, won't get in the way of the music. In an imperfect world, these are comparatively acceptable compromises. However, in any system, a cable that creates perceived resolution due to upper-midrange irritation, or a perceived bass boost that sacrifices midbass control and overall bass definition, *does* get in the way of the music. That kind of distortion is *never* acceptable.

How can you distinguish a perceived short-term enhancement from real long-lasting quality? It's surprisingly easy! There are always multiple cables in the circuit path. There's wire and/or circuit trace inside the amplifier, there's wire inside the loudspeakers, and there's a wire between the amp and speaker. If all three of these links are treated as constants, an additional speaker cable can be added between the amp and the existing speaker cable. The result will always be more damage and reduced sound quality, and, beyond that, the change will reveal the character flaws of the cable being evaluated. Whether the overall system is lean and irritating or fat and warm, this simple bypass test will reveal the nature of the evaluated cable.

But, Which Path To Take?

If it's that easy to determine a cable's absolute character, or, better yet, verify its *lack* of character, then why does AudioQuest offer more than one series of cables? Shouldn't one cable or the other always be better or worse?

Yes and no. Context is everything. Driving inefficient speakers on the other side of the room is very different from driving a pair of desktop speakers close to the amp. As a baseline, it's important to understand that all speaker cables cause sonic degradation that accumulates with length. Though several other distortion mechanisms are also cumulative, inductance, and its smearing of time integrity, is the primary culprit causing an increasing loss of focus.

A low-level audio interconnect doesn't carry power and doesn't have to manage strong magnetic fields, so we almost always recommend putting the amp as close as possible to the speakers and, if required, running a long interconnect. With a very few easy-to-predict exceptions (a few tube preamps, passive preamps, and low-input impedance amps), interconnect performance is far less susceptible to sonic degradation that accumulates with length.

It's About Power

No, it's not all about resistance (or impedance)! A normal 18 AWG lamp cord is rated to safely carry 10 amps—enough to kill you. Getting power to a speaker is easy. Getting it there *undistorted* is complicated. AudioQuest makes some very large speaker cables because diluting the energy and resulting magnetic fields across more metal is an effective brute-force way to reduce a number of distortion-causing mechanisms. The lower impedance of such large cables does allow some amplifiers to better "control" the motion of the bass driver. However, this effect is usually much smaller than the overall full-bandwidth improvement that results from causing less distortion *within* the cable.

If all else is equal, and the sound is just enough louder for anyone to agree, "OK, that's definitely louder," then it's probably about a 3dB difference, which requires twice as much power to the speaker. When each strand or conductor has to carry twice as much power, the interaction between any two internal elements is exponentially greater—that is, four times as great. Using a value of 1 for the lower power, the interaction is $1 \times 1 = 1$, but for a signal that's 3dB louder, the interaction is $2 \times 2 = 4$. If two different speakers are 3dB more or less efficient, and the volume is the same, the formula for internal cable interaction is exactly the same.

The very effective Counter-Spiral Geometry of AudioQuest's Tree Series is made possible by a bigger cable with more conductors. However, in the more moderately sized AudioQuest Flat Rock Series, the money that didn't go into more metal and the more expensive geometry is used for *higher-quality* metal, making it possible for our Comet and Meteor Flat Rock models (fantastic in my desk system!) to take full advantage of the openness made possible by AQ's PSS silver conductors.

It's Up To You

So, while it's still possible to tailor a cable to fit your specific needs, it is also possible to reasonably and rationally choose a cable that will bring you closer to your music.

Sincerely, 
William E. Low CEO / Designer



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REVIEW

Standing just under 40 inches tall, 7.25 inches wide, and 10.5 inches deep, the Triton Sevens appear quite ordinary from a distance. Step up close and the first difference becomes apparent: A black grill sock topped with a shiny black plastic cap covers each speaker—no veneer or vinyl anywhere. Why the grill sock? It provides a sleek and uniform look and covers the dual passive 8-inch radiator bass drivers located near the base on either side panel. This old-school usage of the passive radiators comes from Golden Ear president Sandy Gross's experience as cofounder of Polk Audio. The result is an impressively detailed bass response down to 29 Hz.

The two midrange drivers and the Heil-inspired HVFR tweeter are mounted in a D'Appolito mid-tweeter-mid array. Incorporating the passive radiators requires only a single third-order crossover set at 3 kHz. Other speakers I've reviewed with a Heil-type tweeter have a much lower crossover point, but 3 kHz works just fine in the Sevens. The speakers come with a sturdy piano gloss covered medite base, and four spiked or rubber-tipped feet are provided, for those desiring such floor coupling. *(continued)*



Further Listening

Never one to shy away from testing a speaker's limits, I play a multitude of symphonic recordings and discover that the Sevens will expose poorly recorded performances. Two versions of Gustav Holst's *The Planets* aptly demonstrate this characteristic: One recording gives a muddy, undefined soundstage during the thunderous "Jupiter" movement, while the other recording is open and enveloping.

Through the Sevens, powerful vocals appear dead center and about a foot out in front of the speakers. Adele's "Daydreamer" shows off her conversational singing style between the powerful moments, with the Sevens picking up her soft accent. On "Best for Last," the second track of her debut album *19*, there is a background chorus humming that I've never heard from similarly priced speakers—and the Sevens present it with ample clarity. When Adele lets loose with full-thrust vocals, these speakers don't shrink; they stay faithful to the performance.

Getting timbre right in the listening sweet spot is one step, but getting it right off center is another level altogether. Even with the toe-in, I find reasonable timbral accuracy in off-angle listening spots. Achieving faithful tonal character of unique vocalists is something I always look for, especially when it comes to James Taylor. Many speakers in the sub-\$2,000 range either embellish his nasal sweetness or thin out his voice. The Sevens lay off the sugar just a bit, thus keeping his vocal character intact.

The Seven's most stunning musical performance during my review



comes from live small jazz ensembles. On Bill Frisell's *East/West [Live]*, all the characteristics mentioned above come together. The soundstage presented is a three-dimensional revelation—an audiophile nirvana experience, where the listener gets totally lost in the music. Every instrument has a place but at the same time comes from everywhere; it's stereo reproduction at its best. For a \$1,400 pair of speakers to so strongly recreate a live performance is a remarkable auditory feat.

Solo piano recordings are notorious for showing speaker flaws. The Sevens perform admirably here, producing a very natural-sounding piano. George Winston's "Ike La Ladana" does show a bit of midrange congestion, but not as much as a pair of Totem Rainmakers, another pair of speakers in this price category with fine imaging. Other George Winston albums and songs don't show the same level of congestion, though on a couple of occasions a slight hint can be detected.

For head bangers on a budget or limited in real estate, the Sevens will make you toss your hair with abandon. My ears fly the white flag of surrender numerous times at the 103 dB mark, while the speakers continue to provide a solid soundstage. The instrumental layering on "Stairway to Heaven" doesn't muddy up the overall sound that the speakers present. Instead, the 5.25-inch midrange drivers create ample acoustical space without limiting the multiple instruments. Good speakers recreate the strength of individual instruments, and that is what the Sevens do consistently.

(continued)

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REVIEW

Triton Seven Speakers
MSRP: \$1,400 per pair

MANUFACTURER

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PERIPHERALS

Amplification

SimAudio Moon i7 integrated amplifier, Vista Audio i35 integrated tube amplifier, Virtue Audio Sensation M451 Tripath/hybrid integrated amplifier

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Wires/Cabling

Shunyata Venom 3 power cord, AudioArt IC-3 interconnects, AudioArt SC-5 speaker wire

During my last weekend with the speakers, I hook them up to my 2.0 home theater set-up and am not disappointed. Dialogue is clear, sound effects during car chase are well placed, and gunshots make me feel like I'm in the middle of the violence. Most importantly, I never need to reach for the remote to turn the volume up or down, as I neither strain nor feel sonically overwhelmed.

Final Tally

For speakers that do so many things well for just \$1,400 a pair, one might ask what was sacrificed? The Triton Sevens don't have the level of resolution of my reference Harbeth Compact 7ES3 speakers, but the extra 15 Hz on the bottom end earns some serious points, especially when the speakers are used in a home theater set-up. The Sevens do the basics well and add in the treats of outstanding imaging and real, prodigious bass.

These are speakers that a family with myriad musical tastes can enjoy. Watch out competition: Sandy Gross has a winner in his lineup. ●

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