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HRAC Approved Review — Speakers of the Year: GoldenEar Technology Triton One Floorstanding Loudspeakers With Built-In Powered Subwoofers



Speakers are *the* most important component of any system, especially when it comes to the playback of hi-res audio discs and files. If I'm not hearing every little detail of a recording like I'm right there in the room the musicians cut them in, then, honestly, the speakers just aren't doing their job.

So when speaker guru Sandy Gross asked me if I'd like to evaluate [GoldenEar Technology's Triton One](#) floorstanding loudspeakers with built-in powered subwoofers earlier this year, I more than jumped at the chance to do so. But this was *not* going to be one of those quick-and-out kind of reviews, no siree. To do the Triton Ones justice, I felt this review was going need the balance of 2015 to evaluate properly. And now that we've arrived at the very cusp of 2016, I'm ready to share what I found, and heard.

Features & Specs

First, the specs! The Triton One (\$2,500 each) is a 54-inch tall tower that houses a built-in powered subwoofer with a 1,600-watt ForceField digital amplifier. The upper-bass/midrange and high frequencies are handled by a D'Appolito Array of two GoldenEar-engineered spider-leg cast-basket 5¼-inch drivers surrounding the signature High Velocity Folded Ribbon (HVFR) tweeter. The HVFR tweeter is said to generate high-pressure by squeezing the air, rather than pushing and pulling it like conventional domes or ribbons.



The One's narrow cabinet, with its non-parallel walls — said to reduce internal reflections and standing waves — is constructed from high-density medite. Observes Gross, "In the bass range, the entire speaker — and the cabinet, in particular — is designed to optimally couple with the room and deliver exceptional low-frequency performance. In the case of the Triton One, we have three active bass drivers. In addition, we have four low-frequency sub-bass radiators,

which are located on either side of the cabinet, very close to the floor. This takes full advantage of the floor coupling as well as having the radiators in four different room positions to help break up standing waves due to the rooms' eigenmodes [i.e., the normal vibrating modes of an oscillating system]. In addition, the four bass radiators take advantage of the phenomenon of acoustic coupling, which provides additional gain and bass radiation into the room beyond just the simple additive sum of their outputs. In this case, 1+1 doesn't equal 2, but rather 3 or 4."

Gross is no stranger to the concept of integrating powered subwoofers, having helped pioneer the idea in the '90s. "The reason for building in the powered subwoofers has all to do with superior integration of the subwoofers, especially for music," he says. "This was the driving *raison d'être* when Don Givogue and I developed and introduced the concept back in 1995. It is very hard to properly integrate a single subwoofer to a pair of freestanding speakers. There are many variables, including physical locations, which require adjustments that few listeners are able to accurately perform.



"In fact, if you have a single subwoofer, unless you have it equidistant from the two speakers, it is impossible to set it up so that it is properly blended with both," Gross continues. "Even with two subwoofers in a room, the adjustment of all factors to properly integrate them with the speakers is very difficult. The low-frequency section of the Tritons is actually a powered woofer section whose response goes down deep into the sub-bass region. It is engineered as an

integrated part of each speaker." After hearing that detailed explanation from the man himself, I was eager to hook up the Triton Ones and get down to art of listening.

My Reference Gear

My current reference system includes a Pioneer VSX-1021-K 7.1-channel receiver and Oppo's almighty BDP-105 universal player as my source unit. Amplification is provided by a McIntosh MC207 multichannel amplifier. Besides the Triton Ones, my 7.1 speaker array consists of a Paradigm CC v2 for my center channel, a Thiel SS1 SmartSub subwoofer for the low end, and a quartet of Thiel SCS4 bookshelf speakers as my rear channels. For the purposes of this review, however, I evaluated the Triton Ones' performance as a stereo pair — although I do have to say they performed beautifully whenever I did extensive surround-sound listening via Comcast on-demand and cable broadcasts, movie and TV DVDs and Blu-rays, and audio-only 5.1 mixes on Blu-ray, SACD, and DVD-Audio discs.

Listening Sessions

As always, for me, when it comes to evaluating speakers, it's all about the Ds — that is, the deeply discernible details. I listened to literally hundreds of albums via LP, CD, Blu-ray, and hi-res digital download with the Triton Ones, and here are some of the many highlights.



I cued up the title track of Paul Simon's 1986 worldly wise classic *Graceland* on 180-gram vinyl, the 25th-anniversary reissue overseen by original recording engineer Roy Halee, who went back to the original analog master tapes for this top-shelf pressing. Initially, I was most interested in zeroing in on The Everly Brothers' harmonies that first come in to support Paul's lead vocal at 2:13 of the track, but I also found myself marveling at Bakithi Kumalo's taut walking bass line that follows a millisecond or so behind each syllable when Paul sings the lines, "I'm going to Graceland/Graceland/Memphis, Tennessee" a few times back to back. (Kumalo is also the man responsible for that killer forward/backward bass

break on "You Can Call Me Al.") And speaking of syllables, I was beyond pleased at the way I could distinguish the difference in volume and emphasis of each one of them in the phrase, "my trav-el-ing com-pan-ion," as well as catch the brief but telling linger when Paul punches the "t" sound at the end of the phrase, "everybody sees you're blown apart" — and again in the following verse at the end of the word "heart," where he pauses ever-so-briefly after singing "harr" before the landed emphasis on the "t." When the lyrics are this good and they're sung by the person who wrote them, it's worth multiple listens to uncover all the layers of the artist's subtleties and intentions. Lesser speakers wouldn't even enable such delicate distinctions, but the Triton Ones sure did — and how.



To see how the Triton Ones handled more modern sounds, I put on the CD for Miami Horror's 2015 post-disco electronic-driven offering, *All Possible Futures*, the brainchild of Australian expat DJ Benjamin Plant. Lead cut "American Dream" unfolds like the perfect club track in waiting, commencing with sampled boops and burbles as the preface to the arrival of a clean acoustic-guitar-figure-and-chimes combo that sets up the melody. This sonic bed is followed by a crisp, soundstage-sweeping shaker alongside handclaps and piano support ahead of the entry of the percussion and funky bass line. A male/female vocal blend repeats the phrase "American dream, won't choo listen to yourself" multiple times

throughout the track, and only on the last pass is the word after "won't" enunciated specifically as "to." It's a fine example of how each element plays a key role in the way a mix like this one builds to a satisfying crescendo.

Immediately after a few passes on the Tritons, I then listened to "American Dream" on my Sony headphones via Spotify, and the dynamic range and scope of its mix as intended by Plant was sorely and quite severely in absence. It sounded like I had wax in both ears that I couldn't quite clean out sufficiently, no matter how hard I tried. I quickly played "American Dream" again on the Triton Ones to cleanse away that streaming anomaly.

Next, I dialed myself into the '70s by cuing up the 96kHz/24-bit download of "Long Distance Runaround," from Yes' early-1972 prog benchmark *Fragile*. Keyboard maestro Rick Wakeman's ping-ponging left-right intro is instantly grabbing, and the Tritons' integrated powered subs really deliver Chris Squire's throbbing, melodic bass — a shining example of a major design goal in action, and

executed marvelously. The reverb on Jon Anderson's lead vocal is very distinct, buttressed by drummer Bill Bruford's deft cymbal work and Wakeman's insistent, albeit subtle piano in the right channel during the verses. Steve Howe's melodic lead guitar takes root in the left channel, expertly countered by Wakeman in the right. "Hot *cull-ah* melting the anger to stone," indeed.

I had no choice but to immediately follow "Runaround" with its usual partner track "The Fish (Schindleria Praematurus)," Squire's magnum low-end opus that churns right along with fine percussion detail from Bruford. I also love the vibrancy of Howe's lead-guitar line wafting across the soundstage while the band soldiers on swimmingly around him, including the right-channel-centric tambourine. These two Yes tracks are bursting with much recorded detail, and the Triton Ones made sure I could bask in them all.

TIME OUT TAKE FIVE
REMASTERED
BLUE RONDO A LA TURK
THE DAVE BRUBECK QUARTET
STRANGE MEADOW LAKE • THREE TO GET READY • KATHY'S WALTZ • EVERYBODY'S JUMPIN' • PICK UP STICKS



As the months went on, I found the Tritons handled everything I fed them. I admired Steven Wilson's new stereo mix of "Minstrel in the Gallery," the title track to Jethro Tull's grand work of 1975, where I could detect the puffs of breath Ian Anderson took before and during his various flute breaks and solos, as well as the resonant thuds of the cowbell near the song's midpoint. Or the clarity of the cymbal-and-snare master class courtesy of drummer Joe Morello on The Dave Brubeck Quartet's "Take Five," the critical cut at the end of Side 1 on their 1959 jazz masterpiece, *Time Out*. Or the resonance of the chords Tommy Shaw strums on acoustic guitar before his lead vocal kicks in right after the intro fades on "Lights,"

the lead track to Styx's 1979 multiplatinum-selling *Cornerstone*. Or the sheer majesty of the woodwinds and strings on the 176/24 HDtracks download of Tchaikovsky's "Hopak" from *Mazeppa*, performed by the Minnesota Orchestra as conducted by Eiji Oue (culled from Reference Recordings' *Exotic Dances From the Opera*).

Or... well, you get the idea. I could go on for days. More often than not, my regular appointment listening night of the week, Friday, would often extend into the wee hours of Saturday morning as I found myself continually saying, "I think I can do just *one* more..." Hmm, looks like we may have to call that binge-listening!

Conclusions

Like fine wine, thoroughly evaluating great speakers takes time. My original year-long review plan for GoldenEar Technology's Triton Ones bore much great aural fruit, as these are the absolute best speakers I've ever had the pleasure to listen to day in and day out — and isn't that ultimately what you really want with your transducers? The Triton Ones deliver exactly what I want to hear with everything I play through them, no matter the genre or recording media accessed. Frankly, they deliver *more* than I've expected. I'm constantly amazed at the "I never heard that before!" response elicited with material I've listened to countless times on other speakers, as well as the overall wowness factor whenever I cue up something brand new.



Could you ask for anything more? The GoldenEar Triton One floorstanding loudspeakers are most emphatically **HRAC Approved**, and, in fact, they're my favorite speakers to date. So thank you, Sandy Gross, and thank you, GoldenEar Technology, for making my daily listening experiences very merry ones indeed, and something I look forward to doing time and time again. Now, let's see, what should I put on and listen to next...?