

Audience ClairAudient The ONE loudspeaker

by Alan Sircom

Audience's The ONE is a desktop loudspeaker, with ideas way above its station. It's a crossoverless, single full-range loudspeaker design (albeit with a rear-firing driver in passive radiator mode). There's also a little wedge-shaped riser to point it upwards if sitting on a desk, or can be used without when on speaker stands. Although it obviously has limits in the bass due to its size and size of speakers, it is the kind of loudspeaker that is best used without anything like a subwoofer, because it will never be fast enough. Instead, just either sit very close or learn how to make bass not so important to you.

Audience has 'form' in full-range drivers. The brand's ClairAudient speaker system sports line arrays of custom made full-range 76mm drivers known as the A3S. But this is the purist form of the concept, with just a single low-mass, high-excursion titanium alloy A3S drive unit to the front of the speaker and a 90mm bass driver to the rear, sitting just above the twin speaker terminals (even if there was a need for it, there isn't room for bi-wire terminals, the cabinet is that small). It's internally wired with Audience's Ohno Continuous Cast monocrystal copper cable, and have magnetically attached grilles.

It's a solid little beastie, too. The piano gloss finish might be a bit of a pig to photograph, but looks good and doesn't pick up fingerprints too much. They feel very dead to the knuckle-rap test. It doesn't weigh much because the speaker is about the size of a large coffee cup, but on the other hand given the small size of the speaker, it's surprisingly weighty.

We are perhaps more used to the idea of a one-driver, point-source solution than our American counterparts, thanks to the likes of Ted Jordan and Bandor on the UK doorstep,



and the popularity of Eclipse TD speakers here in Europe. So, we know almost instinctively that it's possible to create a 'full-range' loudspeaker driver that covers everything from upper-bass to lower-treble without a problem, and that the treble and the high treble can be a problem (they get extremely directional), which can be resolved by a dustcap-shaped phase plug acting as de facto tweeter.

However, this means a loudspeaker that has a 84dB sensitivity, maxes out at around 98dB and places a recommended maximum power output of about 25W. Running in is also a lengthy procedure, with improvements still taking place after 100+ hours. However, it's an easy eight ohm loudspeaker as standard (it can be specified with higher ►

► nominal impedance, if you are using the device with a low-heat amplifier). I used the speaker with a Sugden A21se, and the combination of the right power envelope and no crossover distortion from the Class A operation of that excellent amplifier made this a perfect partnership. I also used Audience's solid-core monocrystal copper AU24e speaker wire to good effect.

The Audience speaker has the same fundamental limitations of all point source speakers – frequency extension, loudness headroom and both efficiency and power handling. In other words, it doesn't go deep (although a lot deeper than you might expect if you put them close to a rear wall as recommended), and it won't play that loud. And, if you get what it does, you won't care!

It sounds like you have direct-coupled your ears to the amplifier terminals. Active or passive, we are used to a crossover in the signal chain and through the Audience The ONE you begin to discover just how much that gets in the way of the sound. The midrange is fluid and sublime, creating a sound far wider and far bigger than these boxes have any right to deliver... and they disappear. Close your eyes and listen; you will not be able to point to the loudspeaker box within the soundstage. Piano in particular is astonishingly 'there' and real.

The curious thing here is, you'd expect it to work well with small scale music (and it does – Beck's *Sea Change* sounds

uncannily like you have a living, breathing pained musician and his band physically sitting in front of you), but what you don't expect is how well the sound works with bigger, orchestral works (the slow build of Ravel's *Bolero* played by Barenboim and the Orchestra de Paris on DG is an acid test). It doesn't break up under such stress; it simply hones the sound down at the extremes (the increase in dynamics comes to a halt about three minutes before the end of the *Bolero*). OK, so those who judge a system by the sound of tympani and piccolo will never be impressed, but the rest of us will find real music played here.

This is an extremely cogent and potent loudspeaker that will confidently upturn a lot of what many will hold as self-evident about audio. It might be a controversial statement in the high-end, but if more treble or bass comes at the expense of that midrange clarity, I'd take The ONE in an eye-blink!

The ONE has been receiving positive comments from pundits around the world. Almost all have begun by using the ClairAudient speakers as a desktop system and moved it into a full-blown setting. And almost all have come away wondering if full-range is vital, when something this small creates something this fantastic. The ONE isn't going to be for everyone, but those who like it will struggle to find better from any loudspeaker with a crossover 'in the way'. This isn't just another small loudspeaker, it's the start of a revolution! +

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Sealed box loudspeaker with passive radiator

Main driver: 76mm full-range A3S unit.

90mm passive radiator to rear

Sensitivity: 84dB

Impedance: 8 ohms

(optional 4 or 16 ohm models)

Frequency Response: -3dB at 80Hz, flat to 22kHz (in room listening position)

Dimensions (HxWxD): 17.8x14x17.8cm

Weight: 1.81kg (per speaker)

Price: £695 per pair (£745 per pair including loudspeaker riser)

Manufactured by: Audience

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