

CE PRODUCTS

FIELD TEST

Small Speakers, Big Versatility BY ROBERT ARCHER

THOUGH IT'S BEEN around a little over a decade, electronics manufacturer Audience has a wide range of offerings, including DIY parts like caps and drivers, cables and power conditioners. The company also has a line of loudspeaker products that includes floorstanding and bookshelf products.

Audience's newest offering is the ClairAudient The One, a compact bookshelf speaker designed for use within desktop computer systems, home theaters and other traditional audio systems. At the heart of the speaker is Audience's proprietary A3-S crossoverless full-range driver.



Audience's ClairAudient The One is so clear, despite its size, that it could be used as a recording monitor.

Features

The One is a basic speaker. It is available in a choice of gloss blue or gloss black, and it measures 7-inches tall by 5.5-inches wide by 7-inches deep. The single A3-S

driver sits in the middle of the speaker's baffle and the driver is covered by a magnetic grille that protects the cone from dust, dirt and curious little fingers.

Audience says the speaker has a rated impedance of 8 ohms, but dealers can order 4-ohm and 16-ohm versions. The speaker is also stated to be 84dB efficient, and the Calif.-based company says the speaker reproduces a flat frequency response up to 22kHz -3dB at 80Hz.

Setup

Using a set of Audience's cables and the desktop stands that help to position the speakers at a good listening position I connected the speakers to an NAD M3 integrated amplifier.

The next step was to run an interconnect cable (a 3.5mm-to-RCA) from the NAD amp to Meridian's Explorer DAC which was connected to my work computer (a MacBook Pro). Finalizing the setup, I set the MIDI option on the Mac to output 24/192 and went into system preferences to select the Explorer as my output device. Then I flanked my Mac with the speakers toed-in on my desktop.

Performance

To break the speakers in I listened to a variety of music and a lot of sports-talk radio over the span of a few weeks.

Before getting through the break-in period I felt the speakers provided clean midrange and fast transient response capabilities. The upper midrange/lower treble regions were a little lacking, however.

With the speakers broken in I started my formal listening with albums like Kid

SPECS

Audience ClairAudient The One

- ▷ Impedance: 8 ohms
- ▷ Efficiency: 84dB
- ▷ Max RMS Continuous
- ▷ Output Per Pair: 98dB
- ▷ Power/Speaker: 25 watts

MSRP is \$995 per pair

- ▷ Optional desktop stands are \$75 per pair
- ▷ Optional Ohno speaker cables are \$199 for a pair of 3-foot cables; \$249 for a pair of 5-foot speaker cables.

audience-av.com

The speakers provided an **extremely detailed midrange and top end.**

CE PRO VERDICT

PROS: The One's small size and clarity make it an appealing solution for a variety of customers that range from style-conscious lifestyle consumers, to opinionated audiophiles.

CONS: Due to the speaker's small size users will have to realize the playback limitations of the product—it cannot reproduce low- and mid-bass frequencies. If expectations are managed this shouldn't be an issue however.

FEATURES	1	2	3	4	5
SETUP	1	2	3	4	5
PERFORMANCE	1	2	3	4	5
OVERALL	1	2	3	4	5



Rock's "Devil Without a Cause," John Petrucci's "Suspended Animation," AC/DC's "Back in Black" and Frank Sinatra's "Live at the Sands." I chose these albums for their various features: high compression (Kid Rock), intense musicality (Petrucci), a classic sonic masterpiece (AC/DC), and a timeless live recording (Sinatra). Consequently, I was able to put the speakers to the test with a variety of production styles.

From my mostly near-field listening position I found that the speakers were extremely fast and detailed. They also imaged exceptionally well, but due to the time and phase characteristics of a single-driver speaker, a change in listening positions (turning your head for example) caused the soundstage to collapse.

In terms of resolution and detail, the speakers provided an extremely detailed midrange and top end. The resolution was ribbon-like without the sometimes-false airiness of a typical ribbon driver.

In fact, I think the speaker's overall detail and tonal accuracy is so good that it could be used as a recording monitor. The only caveat with that type of application is that its low-frequency extension is limited and it could be difficult to find a subwoofer to properly match up with the speaker because the sub would need a fairly high crossover point. This means that anyone mixing with the speaker would have to compensate for that in mixes.

In a home theater application this shouldn't be an issue because in all

likelihood the speaker will be part of a multichannel system with at least one subwoofer.

Conclusions

With today's new generation of integrated amps, the passive One bookshelf speaker could easily be set up in a computer-based audio system. In addition, the speaker can be used in small apartment, 2.1 or 3.1 systems or as rear surrounds in larger home theaters without a compromise in quality. ■



ROBERT ARCHER is CE Pro's senior editor. Reach him at rarcher@ehpub.com.
 @bobarcher2010
 #goodsound