



Over the last 15 years my system has been on an ever-upward trajectory of both performance and unfortunately, price. Needless to say, \$50k here, \$50k, and we're talking real money. Along with these expenditures has come a pretty refined level of performance, to the point where I have lost the upgrade bug and have spent the last several months just kicking back and discovering new music through my Krell Connect streamer, enjoying my old familiar chestnuts.

Yes, I have been pretty content, and you know what that means- a perfect time to turn the whole equation on its head! What if I downshifted and tried a component at a much lower price point? And what if that component was the speaker? With this perilous endeavor stuck in my craw, I began to scour the internet for reviews and commentaries on as many reasonably priced speakers that would fill the bill. \$10K, \$8K? Still too high. I needed to go really low while avoiding the sonic bends. In the end, after reading several flat out raves, I settled on pursuing the Golden Ear Triton One speaker from the soul of Sandy Gross, founder of Polk Audio and Definitive Technologies. How about those for credentials?

The Golden Ear Triton Ones cost \$5K- Yes, that's for the pair! There are five models in the Triton lineup to fit any budget.

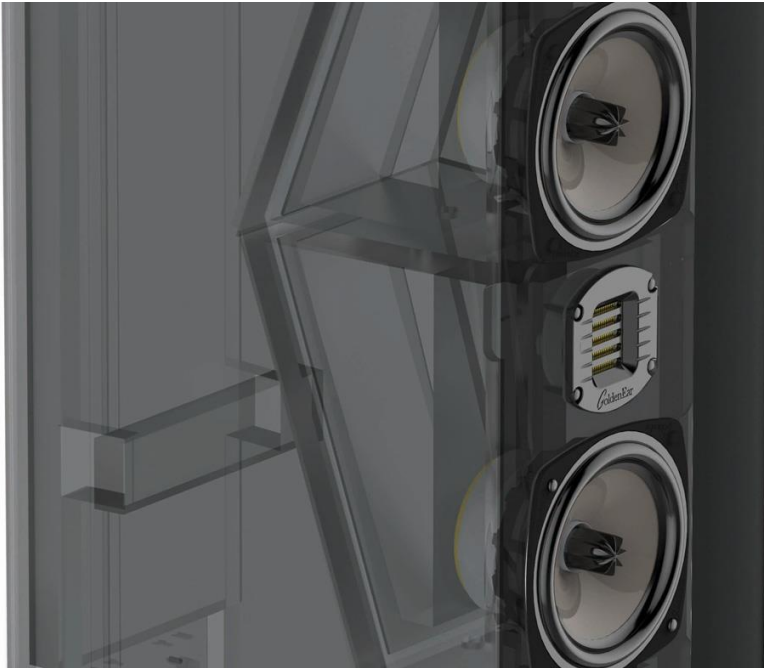
Along with Sandy, we moved the refrigerator sized cartons into my loft and then scampered off to dinner. Just based on the size-to-price ratio, you can do no better! Perhaps I forgot to mention that I put on as brave a face as possible enjoying our conversation while inhaling my parpadella with lamb shank reduction. Deep down, I was dying to get home and tear open the cartons and get on with the long planned experiment.

Since the cartons open from the long side, I had both speakers wriggled out of the boxes, set up and playing within 10 minutes. No, the Triton One is not clad in my favorite exotic endangered woods from some far off rainforest. A simple yet reasonable fabric sock snugles the contours and fits without a bump or seam showing anywhere. They cut a very slim elegant profile and passed my wife's critical eye for anything taking up space in our very dear Manhattan real estate.

A little Technology. According to Sandy: "The construction is very solid and inspires confidence. The cabinet is constructed from high-density medite. The side cabinet walls are non-parallel which has benefits both acoustically and visually. This spreads out the peaks due to internal standing waves as well as results in a stiffer cabinet structure. There is considerable internal bracing. The grill sock construction is utilized for both industrial design as well as acoustical reasons. It provides additional sheer dampening to the cabinet walls. Most importantly, for imaging reasons, is the narrow front baffle. It has long been observed that small mini-monitor type loudspeakers have outstanding imaging. Much of this has to do with the narrow front baffle and the resulting benefits relative to diffraction effects.

With a loudspeaker with drivers mounted on a baffle, you get a primary radiation of sound from the drivers and then a secondary radiation from diffraction at the edges of the baffle. The wider the baffle, the greater the time delay between the primary and secondary radiation. The shorter the time delay,

the better, as the two signals will psychoacoustically blend together into one if the delay is short enough. On the other hand, with a wide baffle, the listener subliminally hears the secondly radiation as a cue which caused them to identify the radiator as a box, rather than allowing the speaker to disappear.”



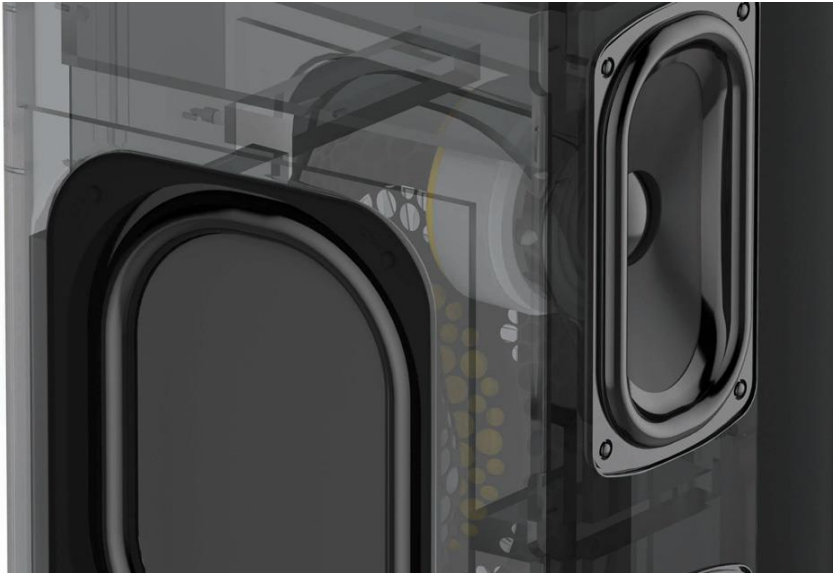
“In the bass range, the entire speaker and the cabinet, in particular, is designed to optimally couple with the room and deliver exceptional low frequency performance. We have sometimes noted a disparity in bass response test measurements and the bass performance that a listener actually hears and experiences in a room. This sort of anomaly is due to the inexact science of how to do bass measurements, that are usually anechoic or quasi-anechoic in nature (for consistencies sake, which is certainly understandable), which properly correlate with in-room response, which is the result of many variables.

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 that by having the radiators in four different room positions, helps to break up standing waves, due to the rooms’ eigenmodes. 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.

“Also, of course, since a Triton system would put two subwoofers in a room, you also get bass output that is not only the additive result of the two sub-woofers, but also delivers additional gain due to the acoustic coupling of the two subwoofers plus the additional advantage of the two subs smoother interaction with the room because they are coupled to different room modes.

“The reason for building in the powered subwoofers has all to do with superior integration of the subwoofers, especially for music. 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, which 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. Even with two subwoofers in a room, the adjustment of all factors to properly integrate them with the speakers is very difficult. In fact, 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.”

As this particular pair has been touring reviewers and trade shows, there was no need for break in. From the first note of Billy Cobham Best Hits, *Red and Yellow Cabriolet*, I was, I was, um, what was I? Gobsmaacked? Shocked into drooling and mumbling to myself? The thought of being the one reviewer to find the Golden Ear Triton One somehow lacking vaporized amongst the liquid, pulse pounding chaos of the track. Could it be this good? The imaging, the texture, the dynamics both large scale and small offered by the Triton One, were projected with an enthusiasm and life that was totally engrossing. The [D'Agostino Momentum](#) integrated amplifier really had the attention of the Triton One. The absolute control exhibited by the Momentum allowed the Triton One to perform at an exalted level.



I had some reservation about the folded ribbon tweeter, as I have heard them sound a little rough around the edges. Not the case in the hands of Mr. Gross. While I would not call the top end overly silky, it is clean, fast as hell and capable of great power-handling. Cymbals sounded lifelike and present, with life and energy to spare. These are ears that have been made love to by the singular Lansche Corona ion plasma tweeter, arguably one of the finest transducers in the world, and you might think I would be running back to them. After all the speaker they inhabit, the Lansche 4.1 is a \$50K speaker and is capable of great audiophillary (I think I just made up a new term!) Yet, I am walking hand in hand with the Triton One comfortably down the musical highway, not looking back to often..... well, I do glance over my shoulder once in a while. The Corona ion plasma tweeter is burned in my consciousness and will remain my ultimate reference.

It is the heart of the mid-range where the Triton One really struts. Listening to Tracy Chapman Give Me One Reason, an intimate blues song in terms of its sparse arrangement that gives her voice all the room it needs to breath and come alive, and come alive it does. There is as close to zero coloration as you can expect in any speaker. At the same time there is subtle warmth, a semi-golden glow that is so engaging. Earl Klugh Midnight In San Juan is a midrange-dense recording and the Golden Ear Triton One allows the D'Agostino Momentum integrated amplifier to show how well organized its musical lines and how iron fisted in control it can be. In addition, the tonality is smooth, rich and proper. Richard Elliot Chill Factor features some smooth ass sax and trumpet work, and wow, the horns sound just right with bite, but not too much! This is Smooth Jazz at its best. That's right, I said it, I like Smooth Jazz. Moving on to more traditional Jazz forms we have Valery Ponomarev Sale On Love featuring some great twisting and turning horn solos. The horns have wonderful presence and play extremely dynamically with no strain or overt brightness. This is great stuff.

Staying with the Chill Factor track, the bottom end, O the bottom end! Fast, punchy, and textured-the Golden Ear Triton One really puts distance between it and its competitors here. As if all that goes on above 70 cycles wasn't enough for a \$5K speaker, the Triton One just kills it in the bass. I have heard bass from \$50K speakers that would run away in tears compared to the Triton One. Dense and full. Wild Horses from The Rolling Stones suddenly had a new drive and momentum. I cannot count how many excuses I have heard from manufactures about why their latest and greatest roll off the power

region. Not so with the Triton One. With a volume knob on the back panel allowing the user to dial in just the right amount of bottom end heft, the Triton One will work in a variety of rooms. Paranoid from Black Sabbath pounded its way out of the Triton One in a way I have not heard since I played bass to the song in my crappy high school cover band.

I believe the powered sub-amplifiers should get a nod as well. According to Sandy-“The Triton One amplifier utilizes many small, separate, power supplies for each circuit section to provide isolation, so there is little opportunity for coupling through the power supplies. Past designs relied on single larger supplies to power everything and this can lead to signal coupling between sections. For the most part, only the very top of high-end amplifiers opt for this many-small-power-supply architecture. Also, the reconstruction filters have been redone, which results in improved damping factor.”

Beautiful Girls from Van Halen shows another great strength of the Triton One. The sense of scale is just awe inspiring. My large listening space can engulf a speaker not up to the task of moving copious amounts of air making lesser designs sound small and strained. Here the Triton1throws an enormous sense of scale and image. Filling the room as if it is some smoky club from the early days of Van Halen’s storied past has been resurrected and reconstructed just for me.



The sense that the music is totally detached from the narrow curved baffles of the Golden Ear Triton One is stunning. With the speakers nearly 13 feet apart, with no side walls anywhere nearby, the speakers are more in my peripheral vision and the music just fills the space between them with great accuracy and freedom giving the illusion of musicians performing in real space. Putting on Earl Wilde playing the Greig Piano concerto from Chesky Records was as if a jackhammer was employed, the front wall just gets obliterated leaving nothing but depth and space... and my neighbor’s living room exposed. Miss You from the Rolling Stones has so much freaking swagger. This turns out to be, in the hands of the Triton One, one very live sounding recording.

The Golden Ear Triton One is one of the least constricted sounding speakers I have heard at any price. Notes just fly off the drivers with great freedom and coherency giving everything it plays an engaging sense of openness and verve. Take It Easy from the Eagles will get you two stepping in no time! The frantic banjo picking cuts through the mix like never before changing the entire swing factor of the song. Seriously, you want to dance to these speakers. The Zombies She’s Not There, while a fatally flawed recording, still comes through with some real sonic treats starting with the vocals and the keyboard. Both are really in the room with great truth and beauty. If you are looking for a speaker with the laid back veneer that colors or mellows all recordings, the Triton One is not for you.

Any Downside? The Golden Ear Triton One can’t be perfect, can it? Well, it’s pretty close, but there are a couple of notes to make here. As powerful and impactful as the bass is, it is a tad warm and full compared to the Lansche 4.1’s more linear and ultimately neutral presentation; even with the volume turned down on the bass level, it remains a bit on the full side of neutral. I much prefer this choice at this price to the lean anemia-stricken bass you will usually find in an “audiophile speaker” at the price point of the Triton One. The looks? I will stay out of that one. It is totally up to the purchaser’s tastes, soul mate and decor. Also, with my ears squinting way down, there is a little less quiet between notes as there may be in the ultimate transducer. “Silence” is the word used to describe this phenomenon. I’m really stretching on this one, but to hear it or not hear it as the case may be is the only way to really understand this aspect of sound reproduction. The result is ever so slightly less resolved an image or less mid band detail if you will. That’s about it!

At some point you have to ask yourself as an audiophile, and as a human being for that matter, "Who am I? Where am I going? And what am I doing right now to get there?" It is so easy to fall into snobbery in this hobby, never mind how easy it is to get lost in the vast canyons of system building hell. I've been there and it ain't no fun.

This experience has been a real eye, ear and mind opener. The Golden Ear Triton One will not appeal to the audiophile that wears his system like some kind of cloak of self-esteem, making up for other shortcomings. The Triton One is for the music lover who trusts his or her ears while possessing enough fortitude to shake off the turned-up noses from the multitude of snobs that populate this hobby.

Unbelievably capable, accessible to the music lover of nearly any realistic budget and from the lineage of true audiophile royalty, stating the Golden Ear Triton One is a no brainer simply does not go far enough. I will go out on a limb and state the Golden Ear Triton One may be the finest deal in all of high-end audio.

Manufacturer's Comment:

There is not much that I can say, except a great big thank you to Greg for all the kind words, and for taking the time to really get into the speakers and convey their heart, soul, and gestalt so well in his review. As many know, I am as crazed as Greg is about high-end equipment and state-of-the-art sound and performance. I got involved in audio so many years ago, when I was at college, because I loved music, wanted to bring the performances to life at home, and loved the gear also. My 40+ years in the audio world have been focussed on bringing the musical perfection of very high-end equipment, into loudspeakers that are reasonably affordable, and that really sing. The Triton One is something that was always a personal goal: a speaker that can be compared with virtually anything, irregardless of price, and I am very proud of it.

One other interesting point, the plasma ionic corona tweeter: Actually, this has always been my reference as well, and it was also the reference of Jon Dahlquist, one of the great loudspeaker designers of the past and a good friend. I have a small collection of Ionovacs and Ionofanes at home. Back when I was at Polk, my crazed audiophilia, in addition to marketing audiophile products like the Oasis fluid drive turntable, Formula Four tonearm, and the first commercially successful specialized speaker wire (and some say still one of the best) had us meeting in our offices with Dr. Sigfried Klein, a major inventor and innovator of ionic tweeters. Dr. Klein had come up with a new design, and we were poised with an open check book, ready to take on the project. I was salivating, however, at the last minute I said wait! As I knew that we could never achieve the sales level that Dr. Klein envisioned, I realized that it made no sense. Yes, ionic tweeters are the best, but I honestly think that the folded ribbon approaches them, but obviously more affordable and with fewer drawbacks.

Sandy Gross