

# Golden Ear Triton Reference

Lately, telling stories in a non-linear fashion seems to be the norm, so we'll do the same here. Hang with me, it all makes sense. While this review started out being somewhat linear, half way through the process, I found out our New York columnist, Greg Petan, scored a pair of Triton References for evaluation and planned on using them for sound reinforcement at his annual holiday party. Greg's place is huge, with incredibly high ceilings, so if the Tritons could fill *that* space, it would be a torture test indeed. If his non-audiophile guests would dig the Tritons, that would be more powerful than specs, charts and measurements could ever convey. Fast forward the clock a little further and

**Maximizing  
Music, Performance,  
and Value.**

*By Greg Petan,  
Michael Corsentino  
and  
Jeff Dorgay*

I find out during the vetting process that our newest reviewer, Michael Corsentino has a pair of Tritons that he's purchased (sans industry discount) for his system. Once you all get to know Michael, you'll find his enthusiasm infectious, but when someone pays retail for a product and is still bubbling over it, there's no greater endorsement. As we were discussing his first few reviews for TONE, he happily agreed to share his perspective on living with these speakers for a few months now, linked to a Schiit DAC, VPI Prime turntable and PrimaLuna DiaLogue HP Premium integrated amplifier. All components I'm very familiar with.



## *How often do two audio enthusiasts agree on anything? How often do three?*

I've always been a huge fan of Golden Ear's Sandy Gross, and his ability to produce speakers offering tremendous performance and value. It only took about 90 seconds at last year's Rocky Mountain Audio Fest with his masterpiece, the \$8,500/pair Triton Reference to get my attention.

So with both of these guys, on opposite ends of the country, with completely different systems arriving at the same conclusion I did – i.e. the Triton Reference is one of the top speakers we've all heard for anything near this price. That's something to celebrate. As a result, this is possibly one of the longest reviews we've ever done; expect to see more end users chiming in in the future.

### **First take**

Even in the small RMAF room, Gross was getting an expansive soundstage and some serious low frequency energy. He tells me "I like to keep the speakers somewhat widely spaced, with a bit more than normal toe-in. That's the secret to setting these up." Those visiting Golden Ear at shows, know they usually exhibit with Pass electronics, but this time, it happened to be an integrated from Hegel. No matter, this was great sound, and the buzz in the hallways was excellent. This was some of the most enjoyable sound I experienced at RMAF.

Following Sandy's lead, this is exactly how I set the Triton Reference speakers up in my 16 x 26 foot listening room – on the long wall. Finally placing the speakers about 12 feet apart, more than usual in this room, with that "extra toe-in," the Golden Ear speakers are stunning.

All of my initial listening was done with my usual trio of Pass Labs components: the XS Pre, XS Phono and the XA200.8 monoblocks. As any veteran hifi salesperson will tell you, there's no better way to make a modestly pair of speaker light up than to connect them to a couple hundred thousand dollars worth of reference components. Not exactly a fair fight, but this combination certainly shows off just how capable the Triton Reference speakers are.

Combining the power of the XA200.8s with the 93db/1-watt sensitivity and built-in powered woofers, this system offers staggering dynamic range. I couldn't play it loud enough to break up without doing serious ear damage; that box is easily ticked.

### **Back to the real world**

Knowing Michael had the HP Premium, it made sense to double check that perspective in room two with the HP Premium/KT150 combination. Double check. The new guy's system not only sounds great, he is achieving similar results. Again, how often does that happen? A good sign, indeed. Talking to both Michael and Greg on the phone, not only does their enthusiasm shine through, they are both hearing the same things I'm hearing: great dynamic range, excellent detail retrieval, massive soundstage and of course killer bass response.

Keeping this in context, a suite of real-world, budget appropriate amplifiers were used with the Tritons to see what a music enthusiast that isn't going to take a second mortgage can expect.

I'll always tell you to fall in love with a pair of speakers and build a system around them for three reasons. It doesn't matter what electronics you love if they won't work with your speakers, and it doesn't matter how much you love a pair of speakers if they won't work with your room.

The slender profile of the Tritons and their ability to blend together easily in a room makes them easy to cuddle up to. And they only come in one color – black. (Not that I wouldn't love to see these in white, but that's personal. Black goes with everything and makes it easy to keep costs down – always a Golden Ear priority)

Finally, if you invest heavily in a pair of speakers you love, every time you make an upgrade to your electronics, it's like you bought a new system again. Because the Triton Reference is so efficient and the powered woofers take the LF demand away from your power amplifier, you can explore a range of low to moderate tube amplifiers and achieve excellent results. The first amp on the list is the \$899 Rega Brio, with 50 watts per channel.

If I were starting over in the audio game, this would be at the top of the list for beginning on my Golden Ear journey on a budget. The Brio offers up high resolution and drive, along with an excellent MM phono section. Add your favorite turntable/cartridge combo and you can get a ton of musical enjoyment until you can afford the amp of your dreams. Another excellent option if you can find a clean one is a vintage tube amp from HH Scott, or Dynaco.

## FEATURE REVIEW: Golden Ear Triton Reference

Borrowing Mr. O'Brien's recently restored 15 watt per channel Dynaco HCA-35 was a revelation. Though it lacks the LF grip the Rega offers, it brings a high level of tonal saturation, albeit slightly warm in character. Finally, my original EL-34 based PrimaLuna ProLogue One with about 25 watts per channel is a thoroughly modern tube amp with more resolution than the vintage stuff. The best news is neither of these amplifiers will set you back more than a thousand bucks, offering a high level of enjoyment.

Further up the food chain, the Simaudio Ace also proves an excellent combo, as does the new Anthem integrated. (review in process) with a built in DAC, MM/MC phono stage and Anthem Room Correction, this is a 100 watt per channel that could offer you an excellent system anchor that you might never need to replace. Ever.

Needless to say, we tried about 20 amplifiers, from 3 watt per channel SET's to the magnificent Pass monoblocks. (The recently reviewed \$4,900 Pass XA 25 makes a particularly sweet combination)

The Tritons are more than resolving enough to allow you to discern the individual sonic footprint of each amplifier, yet proved easy to drive with any source.

### Common characteristics

Regardless of amplifier chosen, the feel of the Tritons always comes through. Their latest generation HVFR (high velocity folded ribbon) tweeter is both more efficient and more refined, along with improvements to the crossover network makes for an even smoother transition from the midrange than past Golden Ear designs. They've always been incredible, but the current iteration is on a completely new level of excellence. Impressive as the bass performance of these speakers is, this refined coherence was what pulled me into the Golden Ear demo in the first place. This excitement did not fade after hundreds of hours of listening.

The combination of three 6 x 10 inch woofers and four 10.5 x 9.5 inch passive bass radiators (two on each side of the cabinet) powered by an 1800 watt amplifier and DSP crossover per channel makes for a speaker that moves tremendous air. Running a set of test tones shows linear, solid bass down to 20hz, and the LF spec is 12hz. The last speakers I've listened to in my room extending that far have been the \$125k/pair Sonus faber Aida, The \$80k/pair MartinLogan Neolith and the \$70k/pair Focal Stella Utopia, so this is indeed impressive.

The only thing required is to set the bass level with care. Just like with a subwoofer, you don't want the woofer to overpower the speakers, and similarly, when you have it set right, the Tritons feel like mini monitors with killer bass. Follow "Sandy's Tips" on the website, and as he mentions, the woofers will tighten up after the first 100 hours or so, requiring only slight fine tuning after.



## FEATURE REVIEW: Golden Ear Triton Reference

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A suite of bass heavy tracks from Pink Floyd, Snoop Dogg and Sbrkt served double duty; first, breaking in the woofer surrounds, and then fine tuning the bass to rest of speaker balance. After that it was just fun to bass out on the Tritons. Near the end of the review, I did fire up my Epson projector in the listening room, using the Tritons as a stereo only system for movie sound, galloping through all the race cars, gun shots and explosions I could muster. Suffice that these speakers will make an awesome anchor for a multichannel or theater system. Staffer Ken Mercereau has done just that, (combining Golden Ear satellites and in ceiling models) with fantastic effect.

Thanks to that ribbon tweeter, these speakers have a clarity and resolving power, providing a vivid and enveloping musical experience. The massive front to back soundfield they generate feels almost like a surround system, whether listening to classic rock with a lot of built – in separation, like Santana’s *Abraxas*, or modern atmospheric pieces, like Brian Eno’s *Small Craft on a Milk Sea*.

### Precious little they won’t do

Every speaker has compromises, and the Tritons are no exception. The recently reviewed \$10k/pair Focal Kanta no.2 renders finer detail than the Tritons and the \$7k/pair MartinLogan ESP9s offer slightly more transparency. The virtue of the Tritons is that they serve up incredibly compelling midrange, HF detail/smoothness, coherence that closely rivals ESL designs (Mr. Gross has a huge pair of Sound Labs ESLs in his home as one of his reference speakers) and mega bass performance. No speaker we’ve reviewed at the \$10k price point does as much overall as the Triton Reference and that’s their magic.

This is a complete speaker solution that will not leave you in the listening chair wishing for what’s lacking. Of course, everyone has different taste when it comes to choosing their speaker. However, if you’re the person looking to spend \$7k - \$12k and wants speakers that do everything well, I can think of no better choice than Golden Ear’s Triton Reference.

As Marti DeBergi said in *Spinal Tap*, “Enough of my yapping.” Here’s what Greg and Michael have to add.

### A funny thing happened on the way to reviewing the GoldenEar Triton Reference.

*By Greg Petan*

Every year my wife and I host a big holiday party. Delivered a week prior, the arrival of the GoldenEar Triton Reference speakers coincided perfectly with our event. Once installed and tweaked, the Tritons were fed a steady diet of ambient music as we transformed our loft into party central for 75 guests and a band – the Tixier Brothers.

Day to day work on a commissioned painting and holiday madness left no time for any initial critical listening, and little did I know I was about to discover an entirely fresh perspective on a speaker review. In no time, the party was upon us and after a scorching set from the evening’s headliner, accompanied by yours truly on guitar for Buddy Guy’s “Damn Right I got the Blues,” and “I Got My Eyes on You,” we moved to phase two of the evening; the dance party featuring my wife, Diane’s playlists.



## FEATURE REVIEW: Golden Ear Triton Reference

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Parliament's "Brick House" got things started, and though this is a track that can get even the most timid out on the dance floor, regardless of music system, the Tritons took charge of the room, launching a rush to the dance floor that I haven't seen in 25 years of parties at the Petan residence.

That live sound, that certain something we had just experienced with the band was still there. These speakers excite the air, offering a full, extended frequency response, with no distortion, thanks in part to the massive Pass Labs XA200.5 amplifiers. Watching our guests faces, song after song brought more insight, taking the experience to a feeling deep in my feet and soul, forgetting about the gear. These speakers have the ability to connect the listener on a visceral, emotional level – even in a huge space like my listening/living room.

The Triton Reference speakers deliver so much music for under \$10K that it's silly to find pause. I'd certainly love to own a pair. Very well done Sandy Gross and team at Golden Ear. Thanks for helping make this year's party by far, the best we have ever had.

### Buyer Perspective

By Michael Corsentino

It's been 6 months since I purchased my pair of Golden Ear Triton Reference speakers and I'm happy to report that they continue to deliver an incredible musical experience – every day. Replaced were a set of KEF R700's and a Rythmik Audio F12 Direct Servo subwoofer which had served me well.

Purchasing a new set of speakers is an exciting yet potentially daunting experience. There are so many brands worthy of consideration and so many opinions. Add to that finding speakers compatible with your budget, the size of your listening room, the kinds of music you listen to, and a local dealer who can demo your candidates and the process can be downright dizzying.

I'd been considering Focal Aria's 948's, Magnapan 1.7i's, Sonus Faber Venere 3.0's, and Golden Ear Triton One's. The fabric sock covering the entire enclosure of the Triton One was a deal breaker for me so I ruled them out early on. When the Triton Reference was released to wide acclaim and sporting a sexy new piano black finish, my interest was renewed. Initially I considered the Triton REF's out of my price range, hoping the demo wouldn't live up to the buzz, letting me off the hook. But it didn't work that way.

I have a wide range of musical taste. Cinemascope wide. The Triton Reference immediately grabbed me with their ability to play everything well. And it's a rare bird that can pull this off. These speakers produce an expansive soundstage with precise imaging that clearly defines instruments in three-dimensional space. The powered woofers offer prodigious bass without getting loose.



## FEATURE REVIEW: Golden Ear Triton Reference

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The newly improved tweeter is detailed, yet devoid of fatigue. The midrange and the blend with the other drivers is spot on, allowing vocal performances to come alive.

The powered woofers offer an extra bonus – no more subwoofers cluttering the listening area. Whether space is at a premium, or you just like a minimalist configuration, it's like having bi-amped speakers at your disposal.

Finally, because of my expansive music collection, I value wide dynamic range so I can enjoy music at the volume level the piece demands - low or mind bendingly loud. Whether listening at everyday levels or approaching arena rock rauciousness, my PrimaLuna HP DiaLogue Integrated with KT150 tubes fills the bill, and in my room, the sweet spot is usually between one half to two thirds of maximum volume.

Measuring 54 inches tall the Tritons are tall but not domineering in a 14 x 20 foot listening room. The piano black finish is sexy as hell, but also a dust magnet. Be prepared to dust them often if that bothers you. Alcohol free Windex blotted on a lint free cloth is great way to keep piano black finishes looking polished. A little tip I picked up from the folks at KEF, thank you!

At the end of the day I was so impressed with the demo I dug deep, adjusted my budget, and purchased the Triton Reference. No regrets.

### **The Golden Ear Triton Reference**

MSRP: \$4,249.99 ea

[www.goldenear.com](http://www.goldenear.com)

### **Peripherals**

Analog Source    Grand Prix Audio Monaco 2.0

Digital Source    dCS Rossini player/clock

Amplification    Pass Labs XS Pre/Power/Phono

Cable              Cardas Clear

