



Steve Withers admires the power and poise of these 'small' speakers

Norwegian wood

Arendal Sound, a Norwegian company established in 2016, reckons it can lure more customers by offering a slimmed down version of its debut 1723 range. Those cabinets were seriously big. And, in truth, this 'S for small' update is hardly a compact setup either. But it'd be churlish to complain.

The ethos behind the original 1723 lineup of speakers and subwoofers was, says Arendal, simple: to create well-made and great-sounding speakers at an affordable price. If you've heard the 1723 Series you'll know it succeeded in this ambition. The 1723 S Series aims to offer many of the same benefits as the larger speakers but using a smaller footprint.

It mirrors the bigger series with Monitor, Center, and Surround models, but also includes Tower and Bookshelf options. The latter is a welcome addition because while the 1723 S speakers are smaller than their stablemates, the Monitor S, for example, still stands 57cm high and weighs in at 18.7kg. It's not the sort of speaker you'll easily hide away in a living room.

The 5.1 system auditioned here is composed of the €1,600-per-pair Monitor S standmount speakers either side of the €800 Center S speaker, with Surround S (€1,300p/p) models at the rear, and a Subwoofer 1 (€900) to provide the low-end foundation.

Our prices are in euros as Arendal Sound operates a direct distribution model. The speakers are shipped to you, and the company offers a 60-day 'buy and try' period – speakers can be returned within this window, but shipping costs are not refunded.

HDF heroes

Despite the smaller size there's still an emphasis on build quality, with cabinets constructed from thick layers of high-density fibreboard and extensive internal bracing. The range employs the same custom waveguide and 1in tweeter as Arendal's more expensive models, and the only major difference is the use of 6.5in pulp fibre bass drivers instead of the original 8in version.

In the case of the Monitor and Center models the cabinets include two rear vents with foam plugs for a degree of bass tuning. As a result they claim a frequency response of 46Hz-20kHz. However, these 4 ohm speakers aren't the most sensitive at 88.7dB, and will take some

amplifier grunt to get the best out of them. The Monitor S uses two 6in bass drivers either side of a tweeter, and the Center S an identical configuration but orientated horizontally. The 'triaxial' Surround S uses a forward-firing tweeter and woofer, combined with two angled 4in full-range drivers for a dipolar arrangement.

The entire package is THX Ultra certified, and features magnetic fabric-wrapped perforated metal grilles and dual binding posts made from Rhodium-plated copper. There's a choice of matte black and white or gloss black and white finishes, with the latter two options costing an extra €100. Our system is matte white, but with a gloss sub.

Arendal's subwoofer naming convention is as imaginative as the rest of the lineup, comprising the Subwoofer 1, Subwoofer 2, Subwoofer 3, and Subwoofer 1.5 (which I'm guessing was an afterthought).

The Subwoofer 1 used here features the same tank-like HDF construction as its passive brethren. Its 13.8in forward-firing pulp/fibreglass woofer gets a claimed 500W of digital amplification and a 48-bit DSP engine. There are two different EQ settings on the sub, and low-frequency response is rated at a deep 20Hz.

'Valhalla, I am coming!'

The speakers are marketed as an alternative to Arendal's larger models, but there's nothing smallscale about the performance. As long as you give them enough amplifier power, you'll be rewarded with a soundstage that's incredibly dynamic and enjoyable.

With Norway on my mind, I kicked things off with a blast of Led Zeppelin's *Immigrant Song* (CD). The Monitors demonstrate some excellent stereo imaging, and in combination with the active subwoofer they give that justly famous opening salvo of drums and guitars a driving urgency that's immediately captivating. These speakers can go deep, but hand off to the subwoofer seamlessly.

As soon as the vocals join this pagan party, the woofers and tweeters produce a beautifully defined mid-range

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
5.1-channel
speaker system

POSITION:
Smaller version of
Arendal's flagship
1723 range

PEERS:
Monitor Audio
Silver 500;
Bowers & Wilkins
700 Series;
M&K Sound IW150

1. All cabinets
are made from
high-density
fibreboard (HDF)
and internally braced

and some lovely higher frequencies to accompany Robert Plant's falsetto delivery. You can almost see the massed Viking hordes heading for Valhalla as they wield the Hammer of the Gods...

Convinced the system is capable of delivering the goods in the unbridled joy department, I spun up *Gravity* (Blu-ray), with its highly directional 5.1 soundmix, to test its tonal balance and detail retrieval. The sound design here shuffles audio effects from speaker to speaker in conjunction with the onscreen action, and in general the Arendal system handles this in a largely seamless fashion, courtesy of those identical tweeters and woofers.

'Dunkirk's explosions hit with a visceral LFE impact. The Subwoofer 1 attacks without overstaying its welcome'

However, there's a change in tone as effects are steered across the LCR stage, due to the centre speaker using a different orientation. It isn't an option in my cinema because of the projection screen, but since the Center is identical to the Monitors you could install it vertically, rather than horizontally, in a bid for better cohesion at the front of the room.

With the opening scene of *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes* (Ultra HD Blu-ray), the Arendals make light work of unearthing the smallest of sonic details. Breathing is clearly heard amongst falling rain drops, followed by the subtle sound of apes moving through trees and Michael Giacchino's choral arrangement rising in the background. All five speakers play their part here, creating an encapsulating, realistic-feeling soundfield.

It's dynamic too. Partnered with my Arcam AVR850, this system's ability to handle soundtrack theatrics is tested as a herd of deer are startled and the mix bursts into life. The speakers prove more responsive and nimble than I was expecting, handling the sudden transient changes with ease.

In *Dunkirk* (Ultra HD Blu-ray), sudden bursts of gunfire tear through the room, while sounds are well dispersed from all the speakers when the action moves into the

SPECIFICATIONS

Arendal 1723 Monitor S THX

DRIVE UNITS: 2 x 6.5in woofers; 1 x 1in tweeter **ENCLOSURE:** Sealed/vented **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 46Hz-20kHz **SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 88.7dB **POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED):** 300W **DIMENSIONS:** 245(w) x 570(h) x 320(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 18.7kg

Arendal 1723 Center S THX

DRIVE UNITS: 2 x 6.5in woofers; 1 x 1in tweeter **ENCLOSURE:** Sealed/vented **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 46Hz-20kHz **SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 88.7dB **POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED):** 300W **DIMENSIONS:** 570(w) x 245(h) x 320(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 18.7kg

Arendal 1723 Surround S THX

DRIVE UNITS: 2 x 4in full-range drivers; 1 x 6.5in woofer; 1 x 1in tweeter **ENCLOSURE:** Sealed **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 59Hz-20kHz **SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 84dB **POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED):** 300W **DIMENSIONS:** 371(w) x 385(h) x 175(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 13.7kg

Arendal 1723 Subwoofer 1 (subwoofer)

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 13.8in forward-firing woofer **ENCLOSURE:** Sealed **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 20Hz-160Hz **ONBOARD POWER (CLAIMED):** 500W **REMOTE CONTROL:** No **DIMENSIONS:** 335(w) x 492(h) x 450(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 24.5kg **FEATURES:** LFE and line inputs; XLR balanced input; XLR direct passthrough; volume, crossover and phase controls; two EQ settings; auto standby mode

PARTNER WITH



IOTA AVXPI: These speakers enjoy strong amplification, and IOTA's dedicated seven-channel power amp fits the bill. Available for £1,050, this delivers a claimed 7 x 170W into 4 ohms; in use its effortlessly dynamic and powerful.

Spitfire cockpits. The high-pitched wails of Stuka dive bombers are incredibly loud and genuinely frightening, while the explosions that follow hit with a visceral LFE impact. The Subwoofer 1 attacks bass without overstaying its welcome.

The ability of the Arendals to create scale is best exemplified by the *Dunkirk* scene inside the sinking destroyer. I felt the torpedo tearing through the hull, and as the ship fills with water there's a terrifying sense of immersion. Without realising it you'll be holding your breath.

Big(ish) and bold

There's a degree of blunt force trauma to the overall delivery of this 1723 S 5.1 system, and I mean that in the best possible way. These speakers might use a smaller footprint compared to Arendal's flagship range, but they still boast beefy, well-constructed cabinets and sound monstrous when driven hard. If you have the room and you can partner them with some commensurate amplification, you shouldn't be disappointed ■

2. Got spare channels on your AVR? All Arendal's speakers support bi-amping



HCC VERDICT



Arendal 1723 S THX 5.1

→ €4,600 → www.arendalsound.eu

WE SAY: Not as small as its name suggests, this superbly-built 5.1 system can be driven hard to deliver a dynamic and enjoyable performance.