

Mark Craven assembles a 5.1.2 package from the Norwegian brand's multi-talented new speaker series

Arendal Sound bridges the gap

Norwegian brand Arendal Sound is relatively new – it launched in 2015 – and as such its product range isn't extensive. But in adding the new 1961 Series to the existing flagship 1723 fleet (which comes in full-size and S-for-small variants), it's adding two elements that will appeal to cinema system builders – its first height model, and lower price points.

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
Floorstanding
5.1.2 cinema
speaker system

POSITION:
Arendal Sound's
entry-level range

PEERS:
KEF Q Series;
Monitor Audio Silver;
Focal Chora

The full 1961 Series (named in honour of the year the Tromøy Bridge was completed in Arendal, Norway, we're told) is nothing if not comprehensive, comprising floorstander, monitor and bookshelf models, plus a centre channel, 'TriAxial' surround speaker, and the aforementioned height option.

There's therefore plenty of flexibility when it comes to assembling a multichannel setup. Here, we've opted for a 5.1.2 system with a retail price of approximately €4,300.

Arendal Sound uses a direct retail model, meaning orders are placed on its website and speakers shipped straight to the customer. There's a 60-day 'buy and try' period, during which speakers can be returned if they're not to your liking, although return shipping costs come into play.

Trickle-down tech

Standing front left and right in our system is the flagship 1961 Tower, a floorstander priced €1,500 per pair. Driver and cabinet design here crops up across the rest of the range, so let's investigate.

Arendal describes the 1961 as a 'trickle-down small-frame loudspeaker series.' While the latter part of that statement will depend on your frame of reference, these certainly are slim when compared to many floorstanders (and dwarfed by Arendal Sound's flagship 1723 Tower). The centre channel and surrounds are still the sort of speaker that will require some placement planning, tho.

As for the 'trickle-down' aspect, this applies to much of this series' overall design, first in the use of HDF (rather than MDF) for cabinet construction, and paint rather than vinyl finishes – two facets of Arendal's first 1723 models. They're very much a continuation of a style.

There are similar driver technologies in play too. The Tower's tweeter uses essentially the same 28mm dome as its costlier sibling, only with a ferrite magnet rather than

neodymium, and 'minor changes to the motor system.' Once again this high-frequency unit is mounted within a sizeable waveguide, for a claimed wide, even dispersion. It also leads to stylistic harmony with the speaker's other drivers.

There are four 5.5in 'woofers' arranged on the 1961 Tower's front baffle. One sits above the tweeter, the other three below. While they appear identical, this is a 2.5-way design with both 'bass' and 'midbass' drivers, and a 120Hz/1,500Hz crossover network.

These drivers, as with the tweeter, are custom in-house designs – again based on the 1723 series – with surrounds that hide their screw fixings. Each has a central dustcap within its pulp fibre cone.

Arendal believes that by channelling the engineering process and materials of its other range into this new lineup, the two will work well together. 'You get the same voicing, the same sounds,' explains company Product

Manager Thomas Gunvaldsen. 'You have timbre-matching between the larger series and the 1961 models, so you can mix and match.'

The 1961 Tower cabinet itself is a little unusual, as it angles backwards by about five degrees. This is not just for visual charm, but for a degree of physical time alignment to better integrate the output of its driver array. Frequency response is rated down to 49Hz if the speaker's rear vent is fitted with the supplied foam bung – which is recommended if you need to position them close to your wall. Run in 'vented' mode, and bass reach drops to a claimed 39Hz.

As for the other models in our system, Arendal's 1961 Centre, which is a sealed cabinet, uses two identical 5.5in midbass drivers, and a single tweeter. The Surround models feature single 5.5in midbass and tweeter units on their front baffles, plus side-firing 3in full-range drivers in a dipole configuration. The 1961 Height is a two-way



1. Arendal's full 1961 Series features two subwoofers and six different passive speakers

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model, with single 5.5in midbass and 1in tweeter, mounted in a baffle offset by 10 degrees. It's also designed to be mounted on a wall for height channel duty, angled downward. A small groove in its bottom plate channels speaker wire, allowing a flush-to-wall/speaker fit, but with terminals mounted at 90 degrees, you'll find a bare-wire connection works best.

We've previously auditioned the 1961 Subwoofer 1S [HCC #306], but here's a quick recap. Like its vented sibling, the Subwoofer 1V, it features a freshly minted 12.2in long fibre pulp woofer amidst a large isoprene rubber surround. Finite element analysis (FEA) and Klippel laser modelling have been used, says Arendal, in the design of the woofer, voice coil and motor assembly.

The sub's back panel offers no crossover, gain knob, or phase switch,

as all these options (and more) are set via its 1.8in hi-res colour LCD display. This is also the gateway to the three-band parametric EQ and two EQ presets (one designed for music/small room listening with attenuation from 40Hz) of the company's new Avalanche 550IQ internal amplifier. Power is rated, as the name suggests, at 550W.

Since launching the 1961 Series, Arendal has revamped its 1723 Series subwoofers, adding the EQ functionality and LCD display, plus Bluetooth integration for future app control. The latter seems particularly welcome, as delving deep into the setup features of the 1961 Subwoofer 1S via the back panel LCD menu can be incredibly fiddly.

All the 1961 models are supplied with magnetic cloth grilles, and are available in matte white or matte black finish. The Tower speakers are also supplied with plinth bar stands and spikes.

Getting down to business

With an Arcam AVR750 giving the Arendal speakers plenty of backup (they're only moderately sensitive – 87dB for the Tower, dropping to 84dB for the surround – and have a nominal 4 ohm rating), and with height models used atop the 1961 Towers, it takes little time at all to realise this system is pretty special. The unflustered way it goes about its business, and its neutral tonality, means that film soundtracks (and music) sound clean and detailed. It's a revealing, full-range performance that trades the warmth that some floorstanders offer for transparency. And while the soundstage generated isn't as big as that of Arendal's larger models, it's certainly big enough to fully engage you.

I began with some hooliganistic drum 'n' bass running in stereo to get the juices flowing, and the 1961 Towers seemed up for the party. The roiling, low-frequency waves of Moving Fusion's *Turbulence* (Tidal FLAC) revealed the speakers' grippy, propulsive nature, and hammered home the benefits of Arendal's four-strong woofer approach. When you're confronted by a loudspeaker whose front baffle is almost all driver, it's perhaps no surprise that it can sound bass-rich, no matter how slender it is.

Switching to movies and the full subwoofer-assisted 5.1.2 monty means those woofers have less work to do, but their presence – across the whole system – is always felt. It's there in the way the Subwoofer 1S and the passive

models dovetail together to handle explosive moments, and the authoritative heft the 1961 Centre gives to male voices; it's there in the Arendal system's adept handling of the metallic, grinding score of *Chernobyl* (Sky Atlantic, Dolby Atmos).

Full-bodied these speakers may be, but they never seem to overemphasise bass/lower mids at the expense of the rest of the frequency range. In the enjoyably daft Vin Diesel actioner *Bloodshot* (4K Blu-ray), when Guy Pearce is showing his new nanobot-boostered recruit around the rehabilitation centre, there's a tidy balance between lows and highs. The lift doors open and its mechanism slows with a subtle, low-end whoosh, yet the rest of the scene packs crisp Foley effects that slice through like a sharp knife. Pearce's dialogue is forthright and crystal clear, with all his nuances and inflections delivered; he sounds believable rather than boomy.

Cut to the Budapest road tunnel set-piece, and the full array gets to strut its stuff, first in the way it conveys the echoey location outside of the villains' car and the confined, almost airless interior within it. The scene is, at first, played to be tense, and the precision of Arendal's system adds to the effect. As flares are thrown, weapons are unholstered and footsteps nervously advance, these sound elements are dotted throughout the soundfield, creating an immersive, pulse-heightening experience. When, inevitably, the fighting starts, the soundmix shifts into an entire other gear, score and LFE channel bursting into life. Superheroic punches are thrown, concrete pillars crumble, bones crack with wince-inducing clarity and



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swirling nanobots rebuild our hero. The Arendals rise to the challenge easily.

With Atmos material the 1961 Height puts in a good show. I was a bit worried that the under-1m height of the Tower models wouldn't be an ideal pedestal for them, but the enclosures stand reasonably tall themselves, meaning drivers sat above my ear level.

These add-ons can create an effective height layer, with clean, distinct effects that have the same snappy attack as the rest of the system. For an authentic, all-encompassing Atmos experience a second pair for the rear of the soundfield would be ideal, but even with just two the system pulls off the magic trick of making sounds come from above. In the *Bloodshot* tunnel scene, ceiling lights blow out high up, while the storm sequence in *Unbroken* (4K Blu-ray) finds water raining down.

Helping to create the array's enveloping feel is Arendal's 'TriAxial' surrounds. Despite those additional 3in dipole drivers not being found elsewhere in the system, there's no sense of any timbral mismatch, and these models are potent enough to ensure that whenever a sound designer gets dramatic with the surround channel, you'll hear it. Depending on how your room is setup,

'Arendal Sound's slimmed-down 1961 series should give the brand even more mainstream appeal'

placement of these triple-faced speakers might be an issue – so for a traditional monopole design to partner the 1961 Towers, check out Arendal's €700-per-pair two-way Bookshelf model.

The Subwoofer 1S, meanwhile, is a rock-solid partner for this setup. It's feature-rich for an €800 woofer, and its performance is above-par too. Arendal's large driver and 550W amp stage combine to reach low and go loud. With *Interstellar* (4K Blu-ray), my seating position was given a wonderfully brutal pummelling as Matthew McConaughey went on his black hole joyride, the

SPECIFICATIONS

1961 Tower
DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 28mm tweeter; 2 x 5.5in midbass; 2 x 5.5in woofers **ENCLOSURE:** Rear-vented (supplied with vent bung for sealed operation) **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 39Hz-20kHz (vented); 49Hz-20kHz (sealed) **SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 87dB **POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED):** 350W **DIMENSIONS (OFF FEET):** 837(h) x 163(w) x 285(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 17.9kg

1961 Center
DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 28mm tweeter; 2 x 5.5in midbass **ENCLOSURE:** Sealed **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 73Hz-20kHz **SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 87dB **POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED):** 250W **DIMENSIONS:** 163(h) x 425(w) x 150(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 7.25kg

1961 Surround
DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 28mm tweeter; 1 x 5.5in midbass; 2 x 3in full-range **ENCLOSURE:** Sealed, TriAxial **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 75Hz-20kHz **SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 84dB **POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED):** 180W **DIMENSIONS:** 287(h) x 163(w) x 185(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 6kg

1961 Height
DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 28mm tweeter; 1 x 5.5in midbass **ENCLOSURE:** Sealed, with 10-degree baffle angle **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 75Hz-20kHz **SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 84dB **POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED):** 180W **DIMENSIONS:** 149(h) x 183(w) x 283(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 4.4kg

1961 Subwoofer 1S (subwoofer)
DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 12.2in long fibre pulp driver **ENCLOSURE:** Sealed **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 19Hz-200Hz (+/-3dB, EQ1); 26Hz-200Hz (+/-3dB, EQ2) **ONBOARD POWER (CLAIMED):** 550W RMS **REMOTE CONTROL:** No **DIMENSIONS (WITHOUT FEET):** 427(h) x 315(w) x 415(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 20kg **FEATURES:** Low-level stereo phono input; LFE phono input; low-level stereo phono output; Avalanche 550IQ digital amplifier; LCD display menu control; low-pass filter control with adjustable slopes; subsonic filter control with adjustable slopes; 2 x EQ modes and three-band parametric EQ with Q factor control; variable phase and signal invert; adjustable auto wake and on-time setting; 12V trigger

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BLOODSHOT: Vin Diesel's mid-budget comic book actioner has enough about it to fill the void while you wait for the delayed *Fast & Furious 9*, and the 4K Blu-ray's Dolby Atmos soundmix is worth cranking up your system for.

subwoofer creating a room-filling, low-end rumble that seemed to enlarge the soundstage tenfold.

A chip off the old block

Loudspeakers that don't dominate a room are always welcome, and Arendal's slimmed-down series should give the brand more mainstream appeal. Yet even while setting its sights a little lower price-wise, the company hasn't altered its approach. This system has the sonic maturity of its siblings, favouring neutrality and transparency, and is built to handle the dynamic, full-range approach of film soundtracks. The payoff is that they're power hungry, needing quality amplification to really wake them. Match them with sufficient power, though, and they'll leave you smiling ■

HCC VERDICT



Arendal Sound 1961 Series 5.1.2
 → €4,300 → www.arendalsound.eu

WE SAY: Entry-level for Arendal, but by no means a budget setup, the 1961 Series offers well balanced, dynamic and revealing sonics. Buyers won't be disappointed.

2. The 1961 Height is a perfect fit for the 1961 Tower

3. There's also a vented version of Arendal's 12.2in sub