

Total Elegance

"Form follows function" is a common phrase in design to emphasize the technical necessities. However, the new "1528" series from Arendal shows us that both aspects can be treated equally and pushed to the limit.

Arendal may be familiar to some readers of our magazine HifiTest: We have already introduced the slightly older series from the small but excellent Norwegian company – and we have always been consistently impressed. The family-run business, led with a steady hand by founder Jan Ove Lassesen, operates sustainably and continuously – even in self-improvement. The new series represents a new highlight, despite the already high bar set by the two previous product lines.

Two factors allow Arendal to keep the sales prices in an almost unbelievably affordable range despite the impressive quality: Firstly, the speakers are developed in Norway but entirely manufactured by a very large manufacturer in China, which significantly reduces production costs – something that would not be possible in a high-wage country like Norway.

Secondly, Arendal speakers are sold directly through their own distribution network, eliminating various distribution stages and their associated margins, resulting in a highly attractive price for the end customer. For example, the "Monitor 8," which we selected for this test, costs only 5900 euros per pair – as we will soon see, that's a lot of speaker for the money. In addition to the tested model, there is also a smaller compact speaker with just one woofer, a matching rear speaker for wall mounting, a floor-standing speaker with four woofers, and two center speakers with two or four woofers. The mid-high unit is the same for all speakers, which, of course, greatly enhances a coherent sound in home theaters.

Cabinet

The 1528 series comes in two attractive color variants: One in the "Basalt" shade shown here, a type of dark gray satin metallic lacquer, and the other in a white called "Polar." The most striking feature of the entire series is certainly the completely concave-shaped front baffle, meaning each driver is angled towards the listening position to achieve phase and time-correct reproduction at the listening spot. The two-part HDF front baffle, with a total thickness of eight centimeters, eliminates any form of harmful resonance. As you can imagine, the construction process is quite labor-intensive given the elaborate design. It takes a long time to bond the inner and outer baffle under high pressure and without heat,

and then the second curve of the two-way curved baffle must be milled. In addition to the eight centimeters of material thickness, the woofers are also reinforced with a one-kilogram aluminum stiffening ring. The rest of the speaker still has a wall thickness of 25 mm and is also elaborately braced and additionally dampened with butyl sheets to avoid resonances in the cabinet. The large and long reflex port is angled inside the cabinet to achieve the required length. To prevent resonances in the long tube, it is perforated halfway along, a simple but highly effective method.

Drivers and Crossover

A similar, if not greater, effort was made in developing the custom speaker drivers.

The tweeter is a 28mm lithium-magnesium dome with an exceptionally low moving mass. The driver, with a large copper shorting ring and a powerful neodymium motor, ensures extremely low distortion. In combination with the ultra-light dome, it offers high sensitivity and also high power handling. The midrange driver is a 13-centimeter cone driver with a carbon fiber-graphene membrane. The carbon fiber layers do not have the well-known woven structure but consist of long strands that are bonded with graphene in extremely thin layers, making the membrane extremely rigid and lightweight, further reducing the usual resonances at the upper end of the transmission range. The driver's powerful motor also ensures an extremely high efficiency. The elliptically shaped waveguide was developed to mount the tweeter and midrange driver as close as possible to each other and to provide good vertical dispersion with minimal excursion. The waveguide's shape is optimized for uniform radiation, and unlike most solutions on the market, it exhibits linear behavior even in the upper frequency range. The grille in front of the tweeter was designed to enhance efficiency in the 7-15 kHz range while also improving off-axis behavior. It also protects the lithium-magnesium dome, a very sensitive material to touch. The waveguide assembly is mounted directly on a solid piece of steel, mainly to secure the midrange driver, whose magnet system is so large that it is impossible to screw it directly into the baffle. The woofers have a 20-centimeter aluminum membrane with very stable geometry and additionally embossed surrounds to achieve exceptional stiffness and precise reproduction of the bass and lower midrange. The driver is optimized so that even with high cone excursion – Arendal specifies 15 mm of travel – no distortions are produced. The crossover is built entirely with very high-quality components. The coils have a large wire gauge for minimal losses. The filtering between the three ways is steep: 18dB between the bass and midrange drivers and even 24dB between the midrange and tweeter.

Lab

Before starting my measurements, I listened to the speaker for a while – even in our well-damped home theater test room, the 1528 Monitor 8 produced an incredibly stable and ultra-deep bass, which I found excellent. But when I saw that this performance was achieved with sealed reflex ports, I initially got a bit worried because such speakers tend to produce too much bass when the ports are open. Not so with the Arendal: Yes, there is a bit more and slightly deeper bass, but everything remains so controlled that you have two real alternatives for daily use: sealed for demanding music playback and reflex for that extra bit of fun in home theater and TV use. In any case, the Arendal 1528 Monitor 8 offers the most sophisticated bass tuning I have ever encountered in a speaker, whether sealed or in bass reflex mode. The rest of the frequency response is also remarkably linear and wide-ranging, with excellent off-axis dispersion. Resonances are not an issue, nor are distortions, even at high volumes. And the impedance curve doesn't pose any problems even for less powerful amplifiers.

Practice

Thankfully, Arendal provided us with a matching stand for the Monitor 8, although it's not 100% the final production version yet. The speaker has a form factor somewhere between a low floor-standing speaker and a large bookshelf speaker and needs to be slightly elevated for optimal alignment with the listening position, but not as much as with a normal stand. With a listening distance of about 3 meters, an extremely balanced sound immediately emerges, which is not limited to the sweet spot but spreads evenly throughout the room. What's fascinating from the first moment is the almost cheeky effortlessness and airiness in the mid-high range, combined with extremely precise three-dimensional localization of individual voices and instruments. At every moment, you can hear that the main focus of the acoustic tuning was on an extremely uniform radiation pattern from top to bottom. Along with this high elegance comes a highly disciplined yet powerful reproduction in the lower ranges: sonorous male voices, the fundamental tones of wind and string instruments are reproduced with such natural authority that you can almost feel the vibrations. And then there's the mentioned bass performance of the Monitor 8, which plays sensationally deep into the low-end and always maintains full control. Especially impressive is the relaxed ease with which even the greatest dynamic impulses are reproduced 1:1. And all these merits across the frequency ranges combine into a larger, coherent whole – a technically extremely competent high-tech speaker that plays with stunning charm and dynamics. Absolutely top class!

Conclusion

The Arendal combines an exciting and timeless design, thoughtful acoustic tuning, and a fascinating sound – all at an unbeatable price.

Category: Stereo Speakers

Product: Arendal 1528 Monitor 8

Price: Around 5900 Euros