

## Hi-Fi: Arendal Sound 1528 Bookshelf 8

### Powerful and Entertaining

**There's every reason to expect something special when Norwegian producer Arendal Sound releases new, more advanced, and costly speakers. We've taken a look at the model Bookshelf 8, which is an unconventional and rather large 3-way bookshelf speaker.**

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We've followed Arendal Sound from its humble beginnings, starting with the speaker series 1723—well-deserving of its EISA Award—then 1961, and now, finally, the 1528 series.

From what I can gather, 1528 marks the first time Arendal is mentioned as an important port in a customs account. The other dates are more obvious and well-known. 1723 is when Arendal received its town privileges, and 1961 is the year the bridge to the island of Tromøy was finally built. No kings visiting, no wars won, no grand heroic deeds, but still, historically significant events.

### Powerful Features

The new 1528 series, like the 1723 and 1961 series, includes both large and smaller speakers designed to satisfy both hi-fi and home cinema enthusiasts in search of great listening experiences.

In addition to the Bookshelf 8 reviewed here, the series includes a large floor-standing speaker (tower), a larger monitor, a slim wall-mounted speaker, and two center speakers—one of which is among the largest I've ever seen. It can best be described as a horizontal tower speaker with no less than four powerful 8-inch woofers and a tweeter/midrange unit integrated into the same assembly, featuring a perforated grill for the midrange and an integrated dispersion lens for the tweeter. It looks quite stylish, and the same smart design is found across the entire new series.

Bookshelf 8 features the aforementioned tweeter/midrange unit, as well as an 8-inch woofer, making it a powerful three-way design that's quite large. Measuring a full 55 cm in height, these are heavy speakers, weighing nearly 30 kilos each. While some bookshelf speakers can be placed on a shelf, it becomes clear as you unbox these that they belong on a sturdy stand.

The new series is available in polar (a light white) and basalt (dark grey). Both are finished in silk matte. Our test model in basalt is more than elegant enough to fit into a well-decorated living room. However, the focus has clearly been on making the design robust and straightforward, ensuring the total cost remains reasonable.

The drivers in this 3-way speaker include an 8-inch aluminum bass driver, a 5-inch midrange, and a 28mm tweeter. This is not what you typically expect in a bookshelf speaker, where most use 13–16 cm drivers that handle both bass and midrange. Together, these components create a massive, powerful speaker capable of handling all types of music—even at high volumes. The crossover frequencies are at 420 and 2800 Hz, and they perform almost flat down to around 40 Hz, with impressive response down to 30 Hz. Usually, bass is a challenge in bookshelf speakers, but with the Bookshelf 8, I never once felt like there was a lack of depth, and certainly not pressure. However, for the very lowest frequencies—around the 20 Hz range—you will need one of Arendal's subwoofers.

The cabinet is very sturdy and well-damped. Arendal has gone further than most by using HDF (high-density fiberboard), which has even better damping properties than MDF. This makes the cabinet inert and quiet, reducing any potential resonances. Additional internal damping is achieved by lining the interior with 4mm butyl and increasing the front baffle thickness to 8 cm. No wonder it sounds so clear, clean, and totally free of resonances!

## Setup and Placement

The speakers are relatively heavy and challenging to lift onto stands without some careful maneuvering. Fortunately, it's fairly easy to get them out of the box and onto our 40 cm high stands. Once in place, I must admit, they look pretty stylish.

On the back, you'll find solid terminals, as well as a connection that allows you to adjust the frequency curve to match your room or personal preferences by slightly raising or lowering the treble. For me, the regulation in the middle (or "reference," as Arendal calls it) worked perfectly.

The speakers are quite large in the room, but that's necessary to achieve the dynamic range, bass control, and excellent midrange of the Bookshelf 8—not to mention the impressive entertainment factor. Are there any similarly priced speakers that offer the same qualities and can play at high volumes without compression? I don't think so!

It quickly becomes clear that the speakers need some breaking in. Straight out of the box, the upper midrange felt a bit closed, and the bass a little reserved—uncharacteristic of Arendal. After some time and removing the supplied foam plugs

from the rear bass ports, the sound opened up significantly, and focus and perspective improved.

I placed the speakers about 60 cm from the wall and angled them inwards by 5–6 degrees. That's when I felt the soundstage and proportions really clicked into place. You can angle them even more for a more direct sound. I tried this in a setup where the speakers were only a few meters from the listening position. The result was akin to having a pair of high-quality studio monitors in your living room, with impressive detail and a very direct and dynamic midrange.

We used Electrocompaniet EC16 mkII and Hegel H600 amplifiers for testing, revealing that the speakers need a bit of power to "wake up" fully. A test with a weaker, more budget-friendly amplifier fell flat.

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## **Mighty and Impressive Sound**

Surprisingly, these speakers are not overly aggressive. Their somewhat rugged appearance might suggest heavy bass, a powerful midrange, lots of energy in the treble, and a preference for rhythmic music at high volumes. But the Bookshelf 8 speakers are surprisingly balanced and homogeneous. In fact, at normal volumes, you can really sit back and enjoy their clear hi-fi qualities. After the initial test tracks, I must say they're impressively versatile, as well as refined and precise.

There are, of course, competing speakers with similar resolution and refinement, but what makes the Bookshelf 8 unique is its ability to maintain these qualities even when things get really intense. Talk about dynamic headroom! If you're after a speaker with a focus on dynamics, energy handling, versatility, and engagement, while also being refined and airy, you should definitely take a close look at the Bookshelf 8.

In terms of focus and perspective, there's always room for improvement, but the holography and three-dimensionality Arendal has achieved right out of the box are excellent and improve further with break-in.

Arendal recommends amplifiers with up to a crazy 500 watts of power, and with full control from the amplifier, these speakers can deliver 105 dB of music—completely distortion-free. Absolute peak is 111 dB. Personally, I'm nowhere near that level for normal use, and even when playing at what feels like a very high volume, I'm somewhere between 96 and 100 dB.

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## **Conclusion**

It's rare for a bookshelf speaker to replace a medium-sized floor-standing model, but apart from a few notes in the bass, there's little the Bookshelf 8 lacks. The Bookshelf 8

offers excellent musical experiences, engagement, and superb entertainment with its rich and expansive soundstage. The speakers are surprisingly homogeneous, well-balanced, and very easy to live with. Despite their somewhat bold appearance, they play in a refined, detailed, and insightful manner without being overwhelmed by the highly capable 8-inch woofer.

Ultimately, it depends on what you're looking for. These speakers do take up space and won't easily blend into a room, but that's entirely up to you. If you have a home theater or even a dedicated room for music and movies, the Bookshelf 8 and a pair of subwoofers could be an intriguing and exciting choice. I hope we'll have the chance to test this setup later.

The Arendal Bookshelf 8 is one of those speakers that makes it fun, but also almost touchingly easy, to play all types of music, and will surely have you spending more time in front of your stereo system. A very engaging speaker!

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**Rating: 5 (recommended)**

**Price: NOK 47,000**

**Manufacturer: Arendal Sound**

**Link: [www.arendalsound.com](http://www.arendalsound.com)**

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**Pros:**

- Solid construction
- Handles extreme power
- Impressive dynamics
- Tight, solid bass
- Refined and well-balanced

**Cons:**

- Requires space in the room
- Needs a powerful amplifier to "wake up" properly

**User-friendliness/flexibility: 9**

**Build quality/design: 8**

**Sound/price: 10**

**Overall: 9.5**

**Stereo+ says:** Arendal Bookshelf 8 does so much right, to the point where it stands as a solid alternative to much more expensive speakers.

**Key Quotes:**

- *" The speakers are surprisingly not brash or aggressive... they are surprisingly homogeneous and well-balanced."*
- *" Arendal Bookshelf 8 is one of those speakers that makes it fun... and will certainly make you spend more time in front of your stereo."*
- *" The Arendal Bookshelf 8 does a lot right, to the point that it stands as a good alternative to far more expensive speakers."*