



# Norwegian goods

Arendal's 1961 range is a compact intro to the company's philosophy. **Ed Selley** checks out what this bookshelf can do

**S**ome audio products have names where their origin point is entirely obvious; you don't need to be terribly invested in a company to know that the use of 'Ultima' or 'Titan' is down to them being range toppers. Arendal is a company where such designations can require a bit more explanation. Each commemorates a significant date in the history of the Norwegian town of Arendal. In this case 1961 was the year the nearby Tromøy Bridge was completed, connecting the island of Tromøy to the mainland near Arendal; not the most obvious thing, but now you know.

The 1961 range is almost entirely built around two drivers. The first is a 28mm soft dome tweeter, which is closely related (but not identical as

the magnet is different) to the one in the more expensive 1723 Series. This is placed in a large and very prominent waveguide. Repeated across the 1961 series, it's clear that it and the tweeter should be considered a single entity. The intention is to provide even and consistent dispersion from the tweeter to improve perceived clarity.

The waveguide is quite unusual. There is one very prominent angled step relatively close to the dome itself and another gentler angle change about two thirds out. The final section is not for sonic purposes, but is instead an NBR rubber ring that terminates the guide and covers the screw holes. The shape has not been decided on by accident and reflects that a considerable amount of care has been directed at its design. From

## DETAILS

**PRODUCT**  
Arendal 1961 Bookshelf

**ORIGIN**  
Norway/China

**TYPE**  
2-way standmount loudspeaker

**WEIGHT**  
4.9kg each

**DIMENSIONS**  
(WxHxD)  
163 x 287 x 150mm

**FEATURES**  
• 28mm soft dome tweeter  
• 140mm mid/bass driver  
• Quoted sensitivity: 84dB/1m/1W(4ohm)

**DISTRIBUTOR**  
Arendal Sound

**WEBSITE**  
arendalsound.com

an aesthetic standpoint, it's also the same size as the mid/bass driver, which helps with the appearance.

This is a 140mm 'long fibre' pulp cone. It is a continuous profile design with a relatively slender surround. The whole unit has been engineered to allow for a long throw to maximise low-end extension and it employs aluminium wiring in the coil to reduce moving mass. The reason for this effort is because there is no bass port to augment the driver's activities,

## The fluency and cohesion on offer brings to mind the old BBC LS3/5A monitor

so extracting the maximum from the bass driver is extremely important.

The cabinet is sealed and boasts an extremely substantial build quality. It's made of HDF sections and feels entirely non-resonant in construction. You'll find a pair of sturdy terminals recessed in the rear panel and a keyhole mount that allows you to wall-mount the 1961 (a feature that, thanks to the lack of bass port, is of more than academic interest). Arendal tops off the cabinet's aesthetic appeal by spray finishing rather than lacquering it. The result is that it feels different to almost anything else on the market.

Simply labelling the Arendal as 'Scandinavian' in terms of design is lazy, but there is a cleanliness to the appearance and sense of proportion that combines with the excellent build quality and standard of finish to ensure that the 1961 Bookshelf will sit in most spaces perfectly happily. This is not a large, ornate speaker but it feels impressively well engineered and substantial for the money.

## Sound quality

The caveat to this is that the Arendal is likely to prove challenging for some affordable amplifiers. Sensitivity is quoted as 84dB and frequency response as 75Hz-20kHz at +/-3dB (admittedly this is an anechoic measurement and one bettered in room), meaning this is unlikely to be a hugely hard-hitting speaker and one that will do its best work with a bit of power behind it. It's worth noting that, for the bass extension part of this at least, Arendal makes a complete range of subwoofers that will happily augment the 1961 Bookshelf should you require it.

It's worth trying it without a subwoofer, though, at least initially. If your enjoyment of music lives or dies on spleen-rattling low-end, this is unlikely to be the speaker for you but there is enough on offer to ensure that the lovely laid-back bassline of Ewan Currie's *Strange Vacation* underpins the track convincingly. Used on a pair of sturdy Custom Design stands, I find that the Arendal running unassisted by a sub is easy to dial into pretty quickly. The caveat to this is that the best low-end is extracted using amplification that



It's possible to track down Q Acoustics' Concept 30 (HFC 513) for about £700 if you shop around, which makes it one of a very small number of speakers that can keep the Arendal honest at the price. The Concept 30 has more bass extension and a cabinet that is every bit as inert. It struggles to match the exceptional tonal realism of the Arendal, though, and the stereo image, while still extremely good, isn't quite up to the same standard. One other big area where the Arendal has an advantage is that, thanks to the lack of bass port, it's happier close to walls and in confined spaces. Both speakers are quite superb, but many will find the flexibility of the Arendal better.

costs a fair bit more. This is not a quick fix for a more affordable system, although the performance on the end of a roughly equivalently priced Musical Fidelity B1xi (HFC 533) is effective.

And with the lower registers dealt with acceptably, the Arendal begins to impress rather more from 100Hz and up. All of the basics are handled in fine style; the 1.5kHz crossover is utterly seamless and suggests that both drivers are well within their comfort zone at the point where they hand over. The tonal realism and accuracy on offer here are also absolutely outstanding. Listening to Duke Garwood's sublime *Satin Warrior*, the Arendal captures these deceptively complex pieces in a way that allows you to hear everything that goes into them without the experience feeling like a dissection.

This considered, effortless realism brings to mind the old BBC LS3/5A monitor at times thanks to the fluency and cohesion on offer. Garwood himself is a tangible presence in the centre of a soundstage that the Arendal effortlessly builds around him – the effect is like wearing a pair of incredible open-back headphones, the impression enhanced by the extremely low cabinet colouration that the 1961 Bookshelf also possesses. This is a level of transparency and sheer realism that I don't recall hearing under £1,000.

For all the resolving power on offer, the Arendal manages to be both forgiving and genuinely good fun. If you give it a dreadful recording, it will have little choice but to tell you that there are limitations to the quality, but it never makes the result feel like something you need to turn

down – or indeed off. There is also an inarguable sense of joy to what the 1961 Bookshelf does that I haven't always found to be present in some of Arendal's larger models. Their time here coincides with the re-release of Feeder's *Comfort In Sound* and the sheer euphoria that they demonstrate with *Find The Colour* is the perfect boost to the technical proficiency that they demonstrate as a matter of course.

## Conclusion

The upshot of this is that the 1961 Bookshelf shouldn't be seen as a home cinema satellite with ambition, but a genuinely capable compact standmount that combines realism with joy in a wholly compelling way. This is not going to be a perfect fit for all systems – there are rivals with greater low-end and rather higher sensitivity that might be a better bet for some users – but the Arendal manages to deliver a level of performance that many people will find irresistible and very possibly a bridge to other members of the range ●



## Hi-FiChoice

### OUR VERDICT

<b>SOUND QUALITY</b> ★★★★★	<b>LIKE:</b> Exceptional tonal realism and imaging; well made; attractive
<b>VALUE FOR MONEY</b> ★★★★★	<b>DISLIKE:</b> Limits to bass extension; needs plenty of power
<b>BUILD QUALITY</b> ★★★★★	<b>WE SAY:</b> A talented and effective little speaker with more poke than you might at first expect
<b>EASE OF DRIVE</b> ★★★★★	

### OVERALL

