



GoldenEar Technology Triton Two+ Review

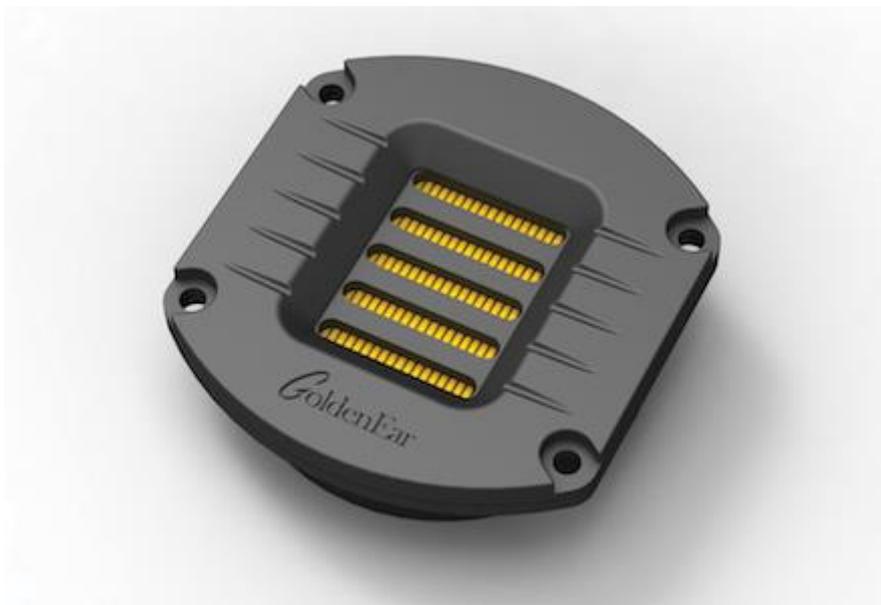


A defining audio moment can sear itself into one's collective memory like the taste of a flavorful food. It can't be shaken and the desire to experience it again can be downright maddening. I had such a moment, last fall, after entering GoldenEar Technology's demo room at CEDIA 2015. Sandy Gross, GoldenEar's founder and former co-founder of Polk Audio and Definitive Technology, was proudly sitting to the side as his Invisa HTR 7000 speakers and a single Super Sub XXL were delivering a superb Atmos driven demo, all (save for the sub) singing from the ceiling above. Following a brief Q&A, Gross switched to a two-channel demonstration of GoldenEar's flagship Triton One and the room immediately became engulfed with luscious sound. My "moment" came as Pink Floyd's *The Wall* washed over my ears with a textured sonic attack that dropped my jaw to the floor. I'd never heard the song's bass-line delivered with such accuracy and punch, imaging was off the charts, and vocal definition was purely electric.

I'd heard GoldenEar's seductive sound before, but that demo made me want to hear it again, badly. This time, however, I wanted to hear it on my home turf.

Roots and Design

GoldenEar has been existence since 2010, originally debuting with a mysteriously narrow looking tower called the Triton Two. Tightly wrapped in black material, the Triton Two exploded onto the scene and quickly garnered praise from all reaches of the audiophile universe. The company has since thrived and now offers five different Triton floorstanding models, center channels, in-ceiling and satellite speakers, bookshelf models, both small and large subwoofers, and several different high-performance soundbars; Google GoldenEar's speakers and you'll find nothing but validation and praise for the company's integration of high-end technologies into speakers that hit top level performance with wallet-friendly pricing.



GoldenEar's proprietary HVFR tweeter.

The all-new Triton Two+ Tower (released February 2016 and subject of this review) sits one notch below the company's flagship speaker: the Triton One. It's a full-range floorstander that's locked-and-loaded with exotic sound-producing weaponry. The topside of the speaker features two 4.5-inch cast-basket midrange/bass drivers in a D'Appolito array, placed above and below a proprietary High-Velocity Folded Ribbon (HVFR) tweeter. Each midrange driver relies on a Multi-Vaned Phase Plug (MVPP) and a computer optimized cone topology to achieve a frequency response that extends well above 3.5 kHz. This results in effortless transitional performance at the drivers' upper-end crossover point. GoldenEar says its HVFR tweeter design also has an extended response (up to 35 kHz) and a dramatically improved dynamic range. Its design is a spin-off of the Air Motion Transformer driver, employing a high temperature film diaphragm that's folded like an accordion and positioned within a neodymium magnetic field. The tweeter develops high pressure and velocity by *squeezing* air through the pleats of its diaphragm.

Just below the speaker's M-T-M arrangement are two front-firing quadratic 5-in x 9-in long-throw subwoofer drivers, paired with two side-firing 7-in x 10-in quadratic planar

infrasonic bass radiators. The sub drivers are powered by a 1200 Watt GoldenEar ForceField digital amplifier. Stated more succinctly, each Triton Two+ Tower has dual-driver powered subwoofers built in to the cabinet. This is a great advantage for buyers looking to eliminate the need for a large stand-alone subwoofer cabinet, while providing the performance output and benefits of a dual subwoofer arrangement. It does mean, however, that the speakers need access to wall plugs (something some owners might find inconvenient).



The Triton Two+ features bass radiators on either side of the speaker.

GoldenEar spent hundreds of hours reshaping the Triton Two into its “+” form. Much of the work was completed at the company’s own Arnprior engineering facility that houses a full-size anechoic chamber designed to mirror the world-famous facility at NRC. This fully suspended chamber allowed GoldenEar’s team to make amazingly precise measurements without worrying about external vibrations or contamination. In addition, the company tapped the power of new development software along with the talents of a new senior acoustics engineer (who worked under the leadership of lead engineer Bob Johnston).



In the company’s anechoic chamber.

Many of the new tweaks and technologies incorporated into the “+” series of Triton Two Towers can also be found on the flagship Triton One. These include a new fully balanced crossover design with polypropylene film capacitors, a redesigned midrange/bass driver (all-new cone, surround, spider, and voice coil), and a reprogrammed subwoofer DSP. In fact, when arranging this review, Sandy Gross assured me that the Two+ would deliver sound similar to that of the Triton One, with the added benefit of being sized to better fit my 13x18 home theater listening space. That kind of a guarantee certainly piqued my curiosity and left me dreaming of a GoldenEar – Pink Floyd sonic reunion.

Unboxing and First Impressions

Perhaps the old adage “never judge a book by its cover” is inapplicable to products in the audio/video world, as it always seems that quality AV gear is consistently boxed and shipped in high-quality packaging. Not to wax poetic about the importance of a box and its protective innards, but they set a tone and mark the beginning of a journey. They can instantly calm any notion of buyer’s remorse and certainly prime the pump of anticipation. In the case of GoldenEar, packaging and box quality hit the spot.



GoldenEar delivers on the packaging front.

The Triton Two+ Towers were delivered to my home in two large, rather robust, boxes, tastefully tattooed with GoldenEar imagery and product descriptors. Each box weighed a smidgen over 70-pounds, making them manageable enough for one person to handle. I was able to move them through my home, solo, with several heave-ho moments of lifting, but primarily relied on sliding them along my home’s floors and steps.

Unboxing the speakers was a cinch. The boxes’ large overlapping side flaps easily flipped open, revealing durable form-fitting Styrofoam shells. I removed the shells by carefully rolling the boxes on their sides. Internally, each speaker was bagged with two levels of cloth and plastic coverings; each box also contained a glossy owner’s manual, power cord, screws, washers, carpet spikes, and a pedestal base. Some assembly was required, as GoldenEar ships the speakers with the bases detached. Attaching a base required laying the speaker on its side (I laid them across a couch and ottoman) and using a Philips screwdriver to drive four screws. Simple, quick, and no sweat. Once assembled, the speaker’s overall weight was a very manageable 60 lbs.



A look at the Triton Two+ with its speaker covering removed.

Physically speaking, the Tritons have an eye-catching aerodynamic design that looks somewhat like an elongated submarine Conning Tower. The entire outside of the speaker is wrapped in a tightly fitted speaker cloth sock, save for a top rear portion of the speaker that features a piano-gloss black cap and a lower backside plate (which houses two 5-way binding posts, a single LFE input, a subwoofer level dial control, and an AC power plug). Dropping the outer covering reveals a rigid rounded mesh edge that protects the speaker's front firing drivers (the side-firing radiators do not have any type of protective covering). The speaker's pedestal base has the appearance of an oblong guitar pick and also features a piano-gloss finish. Overall fit and finish is top-notch and the touch and feel of materials is exceptional.



A peek at the backside offerings of the Triton Two+.

As they sit, the Triton Two+ Towers have a mysterious look. There's something about the speaker's narrow front edge and slanted top that strikes a visual curiosity. That notion is propagated by the speaker's unlimited black appearance. It's worth mentioning that the black exterior is a dead-perfect match for light controlled projector-based theater rooms (which, perhaps, is the reason I find them so appealing). The speaker's external material is a mop that soaks up light and allows it to disappear into the shadows – exactly what you want if your room is a blackout zone.

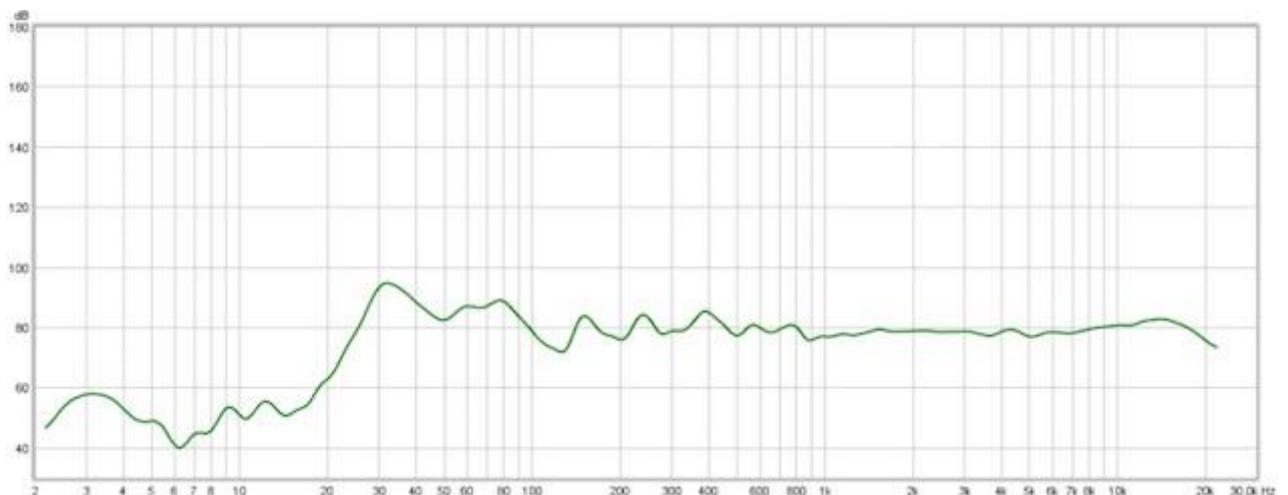
In terms of size, the Triton Two+ Towers are anything but small. The speaker's sloped top edge measures 48-in high and the base is 12-3/8-in wide and 19-3/4-in deep. The cabinet, itself, is made from a type of fiberboard, featuring internal bracing and a chambered enclosure for the midrange/bass drivers.

Installation and Set Up

Once assembled, I moved the Tritons into general positioning within my dedicated (and fully treated) theater room, plugged them in, and began a break-in period that lasted roughly 40 hours. Once that period was finished, it was time to dial them in and let the music reign.

Sandy Gross recommended that I spread the speakers fairly wide apart (equilateral triangle or wider) with a toe-in aimed directly at the middle listening position. Final resting positions placed them about 120-inches apart (1-1/2 to 2-feet from room boundaries), with a toe-in angle pointing at the MLP. Toe-in positioning seemed to have a fairly significant effect on the breadth and clarity of the soundstage. A tighter toe-in led to a collapse of the sound stage, while a wider angle stretched and smeared imaging.

I chose to run the speakers speaker-level, which forced the accompanying internal crossover networks to run the show. GoldenEar recommends starting with the speakers' low frequency level controls at the 12 o'clock position. Following extensive listening sessions and measurements by Room EQ Wizard, I settled on setting each level control one notch higher than 12 o'clock.



Post calibration measurement taken at the MLP.

The Tritons are a fairly efficient speaker (91 dB), which allowed me to test them with both a Yamaha RX-A3050 AVR and an Emotiva XPA-5 amp. I chose to use an RX-A3050 / XPA-5 combination for the review (but didn't note any striking difference between listening with the RX-A3050 / XPA-5 combo versus the RX-A3050 solo). Also, I did run, and engage, YPAO room correction on the Yamaha A3050. Other associated equipment included an Oppo BD-103 Blu-ray player.

Performance

Non-enthusiast friends of mine often question the existence of a stereo experience that can make you weak in the knees and pause with awe. It can happen, I've explained, and the best of the best can throw a sound stage that hardly sounds real, mesmerizing your mind and soothing the soul. Some may say the experience is akin to having an artist appear in your listening room, painting the air with brush strokes of sound. Others might describe it as a seat at a live event or recording session. To my ears, the experience is a complex mixture of the two, where source material dances on an invisible canvas with dimensionality and precision that sounds impossibly real. When you hear it, there's no denying it's spectacular.

How did the Tritons fair? Let's find out...



Image: Pink Floyd/Capitol Records

Norah Jones' debut album *Come Away With Me* (CD) will forever be one of my favorite demo discs. It's packed with detail and subtleties just begging to be revealed, and carries a rounded warmth and texture that gives the album real-world character. The Tritons handled Jones' dusky voice and clear breath to levels of mastery, revealing the most minute of details. The title track *Come Away With Me* showed off the speaker's neutrality and airy presence as the opening moments scratched with brush sounds floating high and wide and shimmered with guitar notes slightly tainted by in-studio imperfections. Jones' voice on this particular track has a softness that was revealed to wonderful levels. Imaging and breadth of sound stage were excellent. *Turn Me On* fed the speakers with slightly more pronounced bass material (albeit not aggressive) which demonstrated the Tritons' ability to handle a detailed

low-end. Tonal balance was on full display during this track, with no one area of the frequency spectrum given more attention than another. Jones' voice was once again perfectly captured with all of its gritty detail, whispers, and subtle lip-smacks. This was a tough disc to keep out of the player while the Tritons were in town.

Moving on, I wanted to give the Tritons a solid injection of alternative electronica. Perhaps this move is a bit unconventional from a review standpoint, but I've found the clean and repeated pulses of sound presented by techno inspired tunes to be an excellent evaluator of imaging and precision. Typically I reach for Orbital, but for this review I decided to shift gears and pull a more modern title: LCD Soundsystem's *US V Them* (CD). I kicked it off with *Sound of Silver* to explore the Tritons' deep bass-ability and they didn't disappoint, delivering tight and controlled bass with excellent pop and seemingly endless extension. The low-end held to extreme levels of composure as more complex bass rhythms were introduced. Imaging was simply off the charts as various percussion sounds and beeps-and-bops danced effortlessly across a broad range of space. The high-end of the song's frequency spectrum was certainly challenging and the Tritons handled it with a noticeably tight snap that lacked harshness or bite. Another notable track was *Someone Great*, which laid a bedding of smooth-rolling electronica before introducing a mesmerizing whirring sound that danced excitedly across the air. Imaging on this track was razor sharp and the soundstage appeared to blow through the front of the listening room with a compliment of considerable height.

If you read the beginning of this review, then you'll know that my last GoldenEar – Pink Floyd run-in left my ears buzzing with delight. How could I not position Pink Floyd near the top of my demo list? The only question: which material to reach for? First came *Roger Waters The Wall* (Blu-ray, PCM 2.0), which was a phenomenal listen from start to finish. One particular track (*Mother*) showed-off the speakers' ability to deliver tonal balance and restraint. The Tritons bled into the air with a Hammond organ that warbled with a controlled smoothness as Waters' acoustic guitar shimmered with stringy detail. Bass within the song had control across the track, filling the room with warmth. *The Dark Side of the Moon* (SACD), however, was the true showstopper. Leading off with *Speak to Me*, the Tritons delivered deep pulsating bass that pounded with confidence and depth as the song's samples and racket unfolded; imaging was to perfection and the sound stage stretched well beyond the boundaries of the speakers. The song's chaotic climax never fell to harshness, displaying pinpoint clarity as *Breathe* took over and delivered a punch that reached forward with wispy sonic swirls. Every ounce of Waters' voice was perfectly soft. These traits were on display for the entirety of the disc, which was played multiple times. The band's well-known hit *Money* was, by far, my favorite track, with stunning tonality, controlled bass, and an impressive width of sound.

For a final demo act, I reached for Sony Classic's *Great Performances 1903-1998* (CD). *Chopin Mazurka in C Minor* is a piano solo that let the Triton's midrange ability take flight. It was a white-glove treatment, as the notes rang to perfection and the recording's soft echoes seemed to float effortlessly. Gershwin's *Promenade* projected a sound stage that hovered well above the speakers and held court with multiple layers of depth. The Tritons treated the song's delicate nature with distinction; upper frequencies were razor sharp without any signs of harshness.

Tonal neutrality proved to be the Triton Two+ Tower's calling card, with balance on full display from the lower end to the upper reaches of audible frequencies. I was particularly pleased with the dynamic sharpness of high frequencies. They were sharp but never harsh or distorted, and portrayed a smoothness that allowed fine high-end details within songs to sound completely natural. Mid-range reproduction was also spot-on. The Tritons never changed the character of a song's intended sound. In many cases, the speakers simply appeared to step aside to let the source material shine.

I was particularly interested in the speaker's bass-ability and the depth quality of its self-powered sub drivers. Extension, tightness, and control were all present on levels that made it hard to believe the Tritons were the only low-end source in the room. I never heard hints of bloated or loose sound, and the speakers mid-bass slam factor was superb. GoldenEar's spec page says that extension should have hit down to 16 Hz, however my in-room measurements show a roll-off beginning around 25 Hz. While there appears to be a small discrepancy, I never felt the speakers were lacking or struggling to dig deep.

Conclusions

The Triton Two+ Tower is a world-class speaker that performs well beyond its price point, delivering GoldenEar's sound to perfection. Consider, for a moment, that its retail price lands a pair in your home for a tad under \$3500 (\$1749 each, MSRP). That's quite a small price to pay for high-end design and devilishly killer performance. It's a total category buster, possessing the ability to deliver in ways that direct price-point competitors have a hard time touching.

When you hear the Triton Two+, it's easy to assume that uber-expensive equipment is required to fuel the show. This is primarily driven by the fact that the speaker sounds amazingly rich and dynamic. If anything, my demo experience has proven the exact opposite to be true. While not cheap, my reference rig consists of widely available equipment totaling \$3500 in cost. I believe this is exactly the type of gear (plus or minus a few hundred dollars) that potential Triton buyers will likely have on hand. Huddle together and cheer, folks, because the Triton Two+ can thrive and deliver with quality gear that's within the realm of financial reason.

Having the Triton Two+ Towers in my dedicated room was a total joy ride. The itch that GoldenEar gave me at CEDIA has been thoroughly scratched by the speaker's buttery smooth bass drivers, controlled and neutral midrange, and elegantly detailed high frequency capability. Truth be told, the Triton Two+ Towers are a sonic force that your ears deserve to hear. They easily receive my strong stamp of approval – highly recommended.