

Acoustic Energy AE1 Active | Active stereo speakers | £1000

"You owe it to yourself to track down a pair"

FOR Clear, balanced, detailed; rhythmic skill; dynamic subtlety

AGAINST Nothing of note



We like tradition. It's what puts sprouts on our plate every Christmas. Year after year we shuffle them toward the edge of the plate attempting to locate the mouth of some gluttonous house pet. Then at some point they become the highlight of the day.

It's the rule that our parents must make atrocious jokes that end up included in our repertoire much earlier than they should. Tradition also states that every four years there must be some blind hope, faint as it may be, in order for us to revel in the misery of exiting the World Cup with a whimper.

In hi-fi, tradition can mean a lot of boxes and a lot of clutter; but it can also mean finely tuned system-matching and broadened horizons for upgrading. It means versatility, often a better overall performance and, frankly, it keeps people like us in a job.

Active speakers are hardly a gargantuan step from tradition, but it's rare to find a pair at this price that leave us struggling to come up with separates that would match their talents.

Nice and easy

Acoustic Energy's AE1 Actives are relatively basic in terms of their set-up and function. Connect them to your source via either their RCA or balanced XLR inputs and you're ready to go. There's no Bluetooth built-in, but attaching a separate module would be far more cost effective than for AE to have integrated the technology itself, and decent pre-amps and streamers with wireless capability are far from hard to find.

While intuitive, the AE1s' method is scarcely rewriting the rulebook, either. Each drive unit is driven by a dedicated 50W class A/B power amplifier module, while dials at the back of the cabinets allow for treble adjustment and bass cut up or down by 2dB.

The drivers themselves are likely to be familiar to anyone already acquainted with Acoustic Energy speakers. The mid/bass drivers are products of the company's pure piston ceramic aluminium cone technology, the use of metal for its rigidity targeting a

more consistent output, while the aluminium dome tweeters benefit from AE's Wide Dispersion Technology waveguide for enhanced room integration.

And it's all wrapped up in a charmingly unassuming box. Available in Piano Black, Piano White or Piano Cherry real wood veneer finishes, the AE1s' faces are bare but for the drivers footed by the brand name – and at only 30cm tall won't be dominating the landscape of your living room. The sonic landscape, however, is a different matter.

We test the AE1s primarily using the balanced XLR connection to our reference Gamut pre-amp and Naim NDS/555PS streamer, but the consistency of their character irrespective of source (as long as it's good) is worth celebrating from the off.

We end up with the speakers slightly toed in, around a 1.5m from each wall, but

those bass and treble controls mean you're free to tweak their response in synergy with their placement if space is at a premium.

The AE1s deserve decent, hefty speaker stands. Their presentation is forward, but that's not to say they lack subtlety or dimension, just that they're endearingly excitable. They never cross a line even with our lighter speaker stands, but the sturdier the better, and they're consummately worthy of more than an MDF bookshelf.

Variety with quality

Testament to their talent is the range of music we end up playing while testing, and the time we spend listening, unable to tear ourselves away. We get through a hefty chunk of our library over a couple of days, and with each album the AE1s' response is an absolute delight.

USE IT WITH



Arcam rPlay £400

A fine music streamer that has a volume control. Will make a great partner for the AEs

IN DETAIL...

1

The two input options are balanced XLR (recommended by Acoustic Energy) and RCA – just plug in to your source and you're all set to start listening.

2

Although the AE1s are not too fussy about positioning, the postbox-style bass reflex port will highlight bass response if the cabinets are close to a wall.

3

Unusually, the AE1 Actives are fitted with separate bass and treble controls on the rear panel. Each one allows for a 2dB adjustment either way.

