



Acoustic Energy AE500 £1,050

There's no denying the provenance of this British company when it comes to small speakers

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Acoustic Energy
AE500

ORIGIN
UK/China

TYPE
2-way bass reflex
standmount

WEIGHT
8kg each

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
185 x 310 x 260mm

FEATURES
• 25mm carbon
fibre tweeter
• 125mm carbon
fibre mid/bass
driver
• Quoted sensitivity:
87dB/1m/1W (6ohm)

DISTRIBUTOR
Acoustic Energy

Acoustic Energy's first ever product was the AE1. Back in 1987, this practically wrote the rule book for small, high-performing standmounts. It was so good that it made the whole genre fashionable, in a world previously dominated by large, tall standmounts. The AE500 shares no parts with this, but the design DNA is clear. The company's design engineers Mat Spandl and James Luce know how to engineer a small box for good sound.

When launched a few years back, this speaker introduced carbon fibre drivers to the brand. The material is well-suited to the application, being light and stiff. Although not new to the genre – Sony was using it in the Seventies. Not only does it have half the mass of AE's previous ceramic/aluminium cone, but it has superior self-damping. In the AE500, it appears in the 25mm tweeter dome, and the 125mm mid/bass cone; the drivers cross over at 2.8kHz, which is pretty standard for a two-way design like this.

Good drive units can't make up for a poor cabinet, so AE hasn't skimped here. It uses the company's Resonance

Suppression Composite material, a fancy name for constrained layer damping where there's a rubber-derived anti-vibration material sandwiched between layers of MDF. It comes in a choice of Piano Gloss White or Black and snazzy American Walnut Wood veneer. Overall build quality is excellent at the price, right down to the magnetic grille. Putting the bass reflex port at the back means a little more care needs to be taken when positioning; the AE500 can boom intrusively if pushed too close to the rear boundary wall. 30cm or more out into free space and slightly toed-in it works very well, though.

Sound quality

Although this speaker has been on sale for a few years, it still sounds special. Tonally warm and fulsome, it is nevertheless beguilingly musical. Often it's the forward speakers that sound the most fun, raising the roof with their grit and drive. Yet the AE500 pushes the music along at speed while being silky velvety smooth. It also images really well, each cabinet dissolving into the

soundstage as soon as it is fed with any real power.

Journey's Girl Can't Help It is a riot; its Eighties-tastic AOR vocals, chiming digital synths and cranked-up electric guitars come over with total commitment from this little loudspeaker. Despite its dark tonality, there's a lot of detail from bottom to top; you hear no screechiness on vocals and that big Eighties rock drum sound is unapologetically epic. Though the bass guitar isn't the tightest in the group, it is supple and tuneful. The hi-hat cymbals never grate, yet ring sonorously with surprising air and space.

The picture stays the same with the more dour, introspective UK indie guitar rock of *The House of Love*. *Shine On* is a blistering three minutes, but poorly recorded. This speaker minds not one jot; it cuts straight to

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the rhythmic chase, so to speak, and blasts this soaring song to the rafters. Despite the dirge-like recording, it pulls out lots of detail and pieces it all together in a deft way. All the components of the mix are expertly strung together to make this impassioned, driving guitar pop really hit home on an emotional level.

This small standmount is surprisingly agnostic about what music you play – it relishes everything from the punchy reggae of Black Uhuru's *Party Next Door* to the banging techno of Hyper Go Go's *Never Let Go*. In ultimate terms it's a tad compressed at high volumes, slightly tonally dull and a bit soft in the bass. Yet it's such a charming little speaker that many will forgive it – especially at the price ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY



LIKE: Classy, warm, musical sound

VALUE FOR MONEY



DISLIKE: Lacks a little bass grip

BUILD QUALITY



WESAY: A supreme value charmer

EASE OF DRIVE



OVERALL

