

Fyne Audio F703

SCOTTISH COMPANY FYNE AUDIO HAS WASTED NO TIME IN BUILDING BOTH AN ENVIABLE REPUTATION AND AN EXTENSIVE – AND WIDELY ACCLAIMED – RANGE OF SPEAKERS. KEVIN FISKE GETS TO GRIPS WITH ITS SUBSTANTIAL F703 FLOORSTANDING DESIGN

Just four years since it made its market début, Lanarkshire-based Fyne Audio has already developed and launched an astonishing array of 23 hi-fi speakers, plus five combined 'bare' driver/crossover combinations for the home installation market. All are designed by Dr Paul Mills, who – with some of his fellow Fyne Audio founders – was formerly with Tannoy for many years.

Lower-priced Fyne Audio speakers such as the F303s (reviewed in HIFICRITIC Volume 13 No. 2), are manufactured entirely in China, while the more costly 700 Series and F1 Series – the latter of which tops out at £28,000 with the company's flagship F1-12 – are manufactured in the northern hemisphere; the cabinets in Europe and the drivers in Fyne Audio's Glasgow factory, where final assembly and testing also takes place.

In December 2019 I had a five-day encounter with a well run-in pair of the £6,750 F702s, which left me somewhat underwhelmed. While they sounded engaging at the lower end of the audio band, elsewhere they failed to deliver the competitive level of transparency and dynamics I'd expected, and I also felt the rather coarse tweeter had too much to say for itself. I mentioned these impressions to Fyne Audio at 2020's Bristol Sound & Vision Show, and to the





company's credit, the reaction was not defensive – as might be expected – but a nod, followed by the offer of some larger F703s which, it was suggested, might be 'more to my liking.'

Flares and Flutes

The £8,750/pr F703 is a two-and-a-half-way floorstander 118cm tall, 43.8cm wide and 46.4cm, deep, the speakers weighing 48.3kg apiece. It features an IsoFlare concentric coaxial tweeter/midrange driver, augmented with a dedicated woofer mounted just below it on the baffle, and the combined rear output vents through a port on the underside of the cabinet. A two-tier podium with a 35mm gap between the two flat plates locates a diffuser beneath the port to encourage the bass frequencies to disperse over a largely unimpeded 360 degrees into the room, this podium extending beyond the base of the cabinet at the corners to incorporate mounts for the supplied spikes.

The 75mm titanium dome compression tweeter operates to 850Hz, which is unusually low, has a metal mesh cover/diffuser and sits at the back of a spun aluminium flared-horn waveguide. A first order crossover integrates the tweeter with the concentric 25cm multifibre paper cone bass/mid-range driver, while the 25cm lower bass driver, also a multifibre paper cone, joins in below 200Hz via a second order network. The suspensions of the two driver cones are embossed with radial flutes – or FyneFlutes – that Fyne Audio claims achieves better termination of incident travelling energy.

All three motor systems use ferrite magnets, and the claimed frequency range of the F703 is 26Hz (-6dB) to 26kHz, and sensitivity a seriously high 94dB.

The cabinet of the F703, with an internal volume of 100 litres, is fabricated of press-formed 20mm Baltic birch ply, with a 40mm baffle of the same material. The sides curve from the front to the

much narrower back, and the top is also curved gently downwards from front to back, with the aim of minimising standing waves. There's internal horizontal bracing at three points, with ports machined into the braces to create four interlinked and tuned compartments, and four gold-plated binding posts are located near the base of each speaker allowing for biwiring or biampification.

The piano black lacquer of the review samples accentuated the curved sides and top, creating an impression of elegance and quality enhanced further by two thin concentric chrome rings around the perimeter of each driver. However, the black finish is merciless in revealing what's underneath, including parts of the seam, faintly seen in some light, where the top of the cabinet is inlet into the sides, back and front. The 702s that I borrowed earlier, also piano black, had a similarly partly visible seam, but it may be that the alternative piano gloss white or walnut finishes don't telegraph the offending line to the same extent, if at all.

If Fyne Audio's European cabinet-maker doesn't quite get top marks, the design of F703's feet and spikes most certainly does. The speakers come with a custom Allen screwdriver that, rather than requiring the buyer to kneel or lay on the floor and still do the job largely by feel, allows the spikes to be adjusted from above. Never have I achieved four-square coupling to the floor so quickly. It was literally the work of a minute per speaker.

The F703 review samples were well-run in. I connected them to a Bryston 4B Cubed power amplifier via Quiescent Peak speaker cables. Sources were an Audio Note CDT Five red-book transport and 4.1 Balanced DAC, and an Audio Note TT Three/III and Arm Three hung with an IO II moving coil cartridge into an Audio Note M6 RIAA. For a preamplifier I used a Bryston BP-17 Cubed.

Sound Quality

Fyne Audio makes much marketing capital out of the downward-firing bass port of the F703 and its 'tractrix' constant expansion profile diffuser, but such ports are prior art, not a notable new development. In general they can excite low frequency room modes less than other port arrangements and the Fyne Audio speakers proved the rule rather than the exception: they were very easy to set up for even, clean and powerful bass.

What the F703 is *really* about is its concentric driver, and, in particular – given Fyne Audio's choice of crossover points – the horn-loaded dome: the company's pricing puts this speaker head-to-head with a number of sonically worthy alternatives and the concentric mid/tweeter arrangement is highly differentiating in a segment otherwise populated by speakers using a direct radiator. Fyne Audio



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wouldn't be the first to claim 'horn-loaded drivers' superior dynamic immediacy over that achieved by regular direct radiator drivers, and – aided by a subjectively slightly forward mid-range, particularly in the region occupied by human voices – the F703 doesn't disappoint.

Fyne Audio's tweeter offers not just wider-than-conventional bandwidth but also a generally price-competitive degree of refinement. Quality recordings result in a soundstage that is totally stable, with voices and instruments rendered with class-leading spatial resolution and 3D-ness. The F703 compression driver is a *markedly* better tweeter than that used in the F702s. In my room, with my electronics, it was dynamically on its toes, tonally more informative and pleasingly refined, comparatively lacking in a hard edge or grain.

A little forwardness

I suspected that Fyne Audio's confidence in the driver led to the entirely rational decision when voicing the F703s to allow it a little forwardness in order to let it strut its stuff, and my suspicion was confirmed when I contrasted them with my studio monitor reference speakers. I imply no criticism by that observation – as Nelson Pass has astutely observed about the audio sector, "This is the entertainment industry, after all."

As heard in my listening room, the F703s therefore might not be scrupulously accurate, but their tweeter combines with the surrounding concentric midrange driver to produce a vivid performance that is attention-grabbing and entertaining, and which for the most part won household approval.

As might be expected given two 10in drivers working in tandem up to 200Hz and a cabinet volume of 100 litres, the bottom end of the F703s was found to be powerful, with a nicely judged low-frequency bounce enhancing a strong overall sense of rhythmic drive and engagement. The F702s had similar, but more modest qualities low down, but I found that in my setting they gave away tonal density and dynamic agility through the upper bass into the midrange. Not so the F703s: in this and every other part of the audio band they proved much more competent and satisfying, and able to trigger excitement and enjoyment in listeners.

Taken to the limit

Fyne Audio recommends that the F703s are used with amplifiers from 20 to 250 Watts. Driving the review pair with the 400-plus watts (into eight Ohms) of the Bryston 4B Cubed I was able to find the point at which, with the 4B Cubed nowhere near clipping, they started to compress and become shouty. It was noted, though, that this point of

incipient distress was comfortably beyond the level required to generate realistic concert-hall SPLs or satisfying rock volumes in my circa six by four metre listening room.

After I submitted a draft of this article to Martin Colloms, he sent me a link (hificritic.com/blog/the-tannoy-700-dual-concentric) to a review he wrote in 1993 of Tannoy's Definition 700 speakers. The transducers MC describes, and of which he generally approved, have a marked resemblance to Fyne Audio's F703s, even though there are some key differences including cabinet volume.

If the F703s are indeed a refinement of the Definition 700s, then Dr Mills has clearly advanced the thinking behind them in some key areas. The F703s might not go quite as loud as the studio-derived Definition 700s, but in my view they offer competitive and balanced levels of dynamic agility, dynamic power, tonal density and timing for the domestic setting.

With that one caveat about physical finish noted, they otherwise thoroughly look the part too. They will undoubtedly win a large number of showroom shoot-outs because of their striking and somewhat imposing visual appearance, and in particular that confidently-voiced concentric driver and its arresting sound-staging abilities.

If I had up to £9k to spend on a pair of speakers the Fyne F703s would be on my short-list. They're serious contenders at their price-point.

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RECOMMENDED

Specification

Fyne Audio F703

Price	£8750/pr
Drivers	250mm bass, 250 mm bass-mid with 25mm concentric horn loaded tweeter
Sensitivity	94dB/W/m
Nominal impedance	8ohm
Suggested amplifier power	20-250W
Sensitivity	94dB/W/m
Frequency response	26Hz-26kHz
Finishes	Piano Gloss – black, white or walnut
Dimensions (HxWxD)	117.6 x 43 x 46.5cm

fyneaudio.com

