

One Singular Sensation

By Darryl Wilkinson

GoldenEar Technology Triton One Speaker

PRICE \$5,000/pair

IT'S NOT AN OVERSTATEMENT TO say that Sandy Gross is a legend—a double legend, as a matter of fact, since he's in two entirely different industries' Halls of Fame. In high school, Gross was an award-winning racecar designer. With his best friend, Howie Ursaner, the Gold Dust Twins (as they were called) were a professional racing team that competed around the country. (At one point, Ursaner won a Corvette. Unfortunately, he wasn't able to legally drive it—because he was only 14 years old.) That was during

the late 1960s and early '70s, a time generally considered to be the Golden Age of Racing—slot car racing, that is.

If you know much about Sandy Gross' career after racing, you'll understand why, in addition to being in the Slot Car Hall of Fame, he's in the Audio Hall of Fame. If you're unfamiliar with his second life designing loudspeakers, here's a quick rundown: In 1972, Gross helped start Polk Audio, and in 1990, he co-founded Definitive Technology. After he retired from Def Tech, he

wasn't willing to simply sit on his legacy and admire his growing collection of fine art. It was then that Gross convinced his Def Tech co-founder, Don Givogue (Canadian, engineer *par excellence*, and international man of mystery, eh?), to start yet another speaker company—GoldenEar Technology—in 2010. (At this rate, we can expect to see Gross' next speaker company sometime around 2030.)

The Man with the GoldenEar

It's interesting to me that a former Gold Dust Twin who competed during the Golden Age of

AT A GLANCE

+ Plus

- Three forward-firing active woofers with four side-firing passive radiators and a 1,600-watt amp
- Remarkably open, balanced sound quality
- Extremely dynamic

- Minus

- They're really, really heavy

Slot Car Racing is now the driving force behind GoldenEar Technology, a speaker company that's just beginning to hit the straightaway during the Golden Age of the Loudspeaker. What? The Golden Age of the Loudspeaker? Yep, and this is why I believe it to be so. First of all, as with slot car racing, speakers are no longer a hot hobby. Nor is the traditional five-channel dedicated speaker setup the must-have (even for non-hobbyists) that it used to be, now that it has been usurped by the simpler, all-in-one soundbar. Furthermore, the speaker industry as a whole has reached an impressive level of maturity in design and manufacturing, which means there are a lot of excellent, affordable models on the market. Not surprisingly, Polk Audio and Definitive Technology (both during and after Gross' tenures there) deserve significant credit for innovations and advancements in the art and science of loudspeaker design that have brought us to this point.

Four years ago (after he got a T-shirt that said, "I spent 38 years

RATING

GoldenEar Technology Triton One Speaker

Performance ★★★★★
Build Quality ★★★★★
Value ★★★★★

designing affordable, great-sounding loudspeakers, and all I got were two awesome speaker companies"), Gross decided he wanted to take everything he'd learned about speaker design and go after a particular type that has remained stubbornly—some would say obscenely—expensive: the true high-end, audiophile loudspeaker. The goal, as Gross told me, was "to create a speaker that genuinely could be compared with the very expensive super speakers." Coming from almost anyone else, that statement would've sounded like either over-exuberant marketing hype or highly refined, weapons-grade bullshit. But you really had to take Gross seriously, because he had the experience, the resources, and the gumption to pull it off.

So far, the GoldenEar team has indeed pulled it off, releasing the Triton Two (\$1,500/each), the Triton Three (\$1,000/each), and then the Triton Seven (\$700/each) towers—along with several monitor speakers and a trio of subwoofers—with each successive model getting rave reviews for providing sonic performance well beyond what you'd rightfully expect from the sticker price. Now GoldenEar has a new tower, the Triton One (\$2,500/each), with a model number indicative of its top-of-the-line status. But is it *the One*—the achievement that Gross had in mind when GoldenEar Technology didn't even have a name yet?

All the Little Details...

Talking about the Triton One, Gross told me, "I think part of the magic is that we approach it in the same way as the designers of those very expensive products and really focus on all the little details, as though our speaker were going to sell for \$50,000 or whatever. A lot of these details don't cost more money to get it right; you just have to have the expertise, take the time and care."

Sure enough, in spite of its high-end aspirations, the Triton One doesn't include any super-exotic materials to *ooh* and *ahhh* over. That's OK because ultimately it doesn't matter if a loudspeaker isn't much



● Thanks to its slender profile, the 54-inch-tall Triton One won't visually dominate your room.

THE VERDICT

GoldenEar Technology's Triton One is Sandy Gross' magnum opus and provides an astounding performance-versus-price ratio.

more than matchsticks held together with rubber cement, or if it uses different sizes of Trojan "intimate massagers" as transducers, as long as you feel like the heavens have opened up every time you listen to it. (As far as I know, no matchsticks, rubber cement, or massagers are used in the Triton One. As to whether or not any of those items were used during the design process, I'd rather not speculate.)

The Triton One is a 54-inch-tall monolith, yet it's not as domineering in the room as you'd think. That's because the tower's ninja-black rounded front grille and the cabinet's stealthily sloping left and right sides give the illusion that the speaker is narrower than it really is. The slenderizing

design is common throughout the Triton lineup, as is the use of GoldenEar's excellent High Velocity Folded Ribbon (HVFR) tweeter. Two 5.25-inch midrange drivers straddle the tweeter (one above and one below), and the enclosure for the mid drivers is "designed to, in effect, be part of the crossover and provides an overdamped rolloff, resulting in better transient response."

So far, so good. But the part I can't quite get my head around with the Triton One is how in the hell GoldenEar managed to fit three active, forward-firing, 5 x 9-inch woofers and four 7 x 10-inch passive radiators into what is essentially the bottom two-thirds of the cabinet and not have the speaker wobble itself to pieces after the first drumbeat. I know it can't be true, but there almost seems to be more woofer surface area on the Triton One than there is cabinet surface. I'm suspicious that the passive planar radiators are so passive that they're really just painted on, but Gross assured me that they're real. He also said that the placement of the passive radiators—two on each side, with one above the other—takes advantage of floor coupling. Having this staggered arrangement helps to minimize the effects of the typical "floor bounce" response dip.

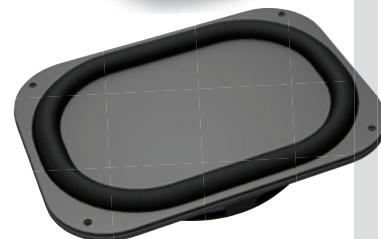
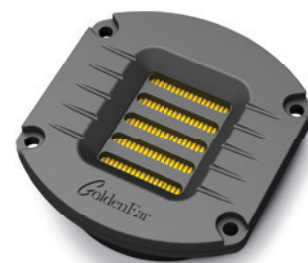
All elements of the electronic circuit topology—from the speaker inputs on the back of the cabinet through the high-resolution DSP and electronic crossovers to the 1,600-watt subwoofer amplifier—are balanced in order to reduce as much induced noise as possible. Rather than a single, large power supply, the Triton One's sub amp "utilizes many small, separate power supplies for each circuit section to provide isolation, so there is little opportunity for coupling through the power supplies."

LOUDSPEAKERS

GOLDENEAR TECHNOLOGY TRITON ONE SPEAKER

PRICE: \$5,000 pr (Triton One, \$2,500 ea)

GoldenEar Technology • (410) 998-9134 • goldenear.com



● GoldenEar's HVFR tweeter (top) and 7 x 10-inch passive radiator (bottom).

A Living, Breathing Speaker

After "forcing" myself to listen to a pair of the Triton Ones, I began jotting notes, such as: *revelatory, ultra-dynamic, seamlessly seamless, addictively addictive, cosmically orgasmic, removes wrinkles, rejuvenates bald spots, better than Viagra, who farted?* (oops, that was me), *holy crap!* (that was about the speakers), *I am not worthy*, and *Is that pair 5,000 U.S. dollars or 5,000 Euros?* Needless to say, I quickly ran out of appropriate approbations and lavish laudations and had to resort to hijacking adjectives from foreign languages—to the point where I eventually ended up consulting my tattered Egyptian Hieroglyphics-to-English scrolls. ("These speakers absolutely embalm the competition!") My point is that GoldenEar's Triton One speakers are members of that rarest of rare breeds for which words can do little justice. You simply have to listen to them—no, *experience* them—firsthand. While adjectives may not suffice, I can give you these words of advice: Make sure you have some spare underwear with you the first time you listen to the Triton Ones. One way or another, these speakers are going to *move* you.



● Each Triton One houses a combination of 10 active and passive drivers.

TEST REPORT

- An inside view of the Triton One.



See soundandvisionmag.com for full lab results and technical definitions



which piece of music to discuss first. No single track stands out because they all stand out. For example, in “*Una furtiva lagrima*” from Donizetti’s *L’Elisir d’Amore*, as heard on Joshua Bell’s *Voice of the Violin*, the tension in the strings and the fragility of the wood in the body of the violin are visceral. Even with your eyes open, it’s practically impossible to make yourself realize you’re not listening to living, breathing human beings playing actual instruments in front of you. Likewise,

pick any track from Peter Gregson’s *Terminal* (originally commissioned by Bowers & Wilkins, by the way), such as “Spin” or “Cello Counterpoint,” and Gregson’s cellos sound magical and alive thanks to the fact that the drivers in each Triton One are so beautifully matched. It’s as if that splendid HVFR tweeter, the pair of 5.25-inch mid drivers, and all that woofer surface area were being moved simultaneously—not by the power of watts, but by the power of distilled emotion. Peppino D’Agostino’s acoustic guitar in “Desert Flower” is equally as vivid, and you can hear and feel a lush texture within the low sounds of the strings and drums.

GoldenEar’s HVFR tweeter sounds just as spectacular in the Triton One as it does in the other Triton towers. But as much as I love this tweeter, it’s almost a minor character in the performance here. What makes the Triton One so special and oh-so-worthy of over-the-top plaudits is how dramatically dynamic and unbelievably seamless the entire speaker is—and there’s not one single magic ingredient or special tweak to point to that makes this so. Sometimes people will compare one speaker to another by noting that the better speaker sounds like a veil has been lifted away from it. Because the Triton One is so open, so full of energy, and so low in obvious distortion, it doesn’t sound like a veil—or even a blanket—has been lifted. It sounds like a flippin’ doublewide set of Venetian doors has been thrown open.

The speakers are so well balanced sonically that it’s difficult to decide

When it comes to bass response, I’m not sure there are many pieces of music that would come close to taxing the powerful woofer assembly in the Triton One. Mickey Hart’s *Global Drum Project* certainly didn’t, despite the recording’s blend of acoustic and electronic percussion. “Funky Zena” was an especially interesting track to audition because of the continuous low bass tone that lasts throughout the song. In addition to being an important unifying aspect of the music, that tone began to come

alive via the pair of Triton Ones—almost as if it were a sentient presence in the room. The bass on that and so many other songs, such as Steely Dan’s “Cousin Dupree,” was so smooth throughout the room that each drumbeat almost made a transition from music to a living breath.

Conclusion

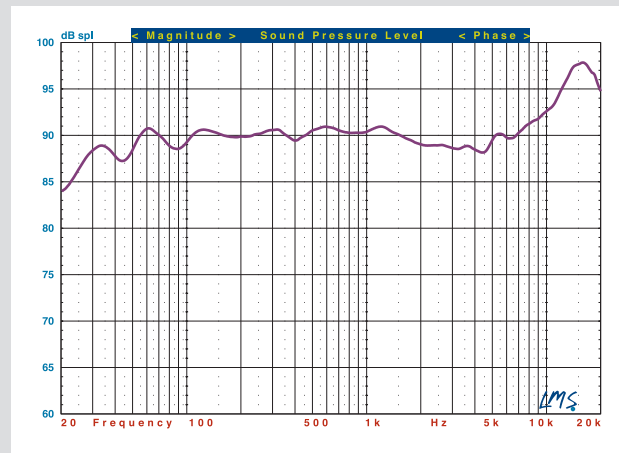
In the beginning of this review, I made a poor attempt at summing up Sandy Gross’ 42-year career in the speaker industry. I shouldn’t have tried. There’s no way to do it justice in print. I’d have done better by simply telling you to go out and listen to a pair of the Triton Ones. They are the perfect summation of a legendary career—a magnificent magnum opus—and no one can say that better than the speakers

themselves. With the Triton Ones, GoldenEar Technology has fully ushered in the Golden Age of the Loudspeaker. I have no idea where Sandy Gross goes from here, whether he collects more art or finds some other way to astound the audio world. (After all, 2030 is still a ways off.) In the meantime, I know where I’m going. I’m heading back to my theater room to take another listen to the Triton Ones. ♦



Test Bench

GoldenEar Technology Triton One Speaker



Triton One (purple) +2.05/–2.35 dB, 200 Hz to 10 kHz; –3 dB @ 27 Hz, –6 dB @ 21 Hz; impedance minimum 3.99 ohms @ 4.1 kHz, phase angle –38.58° @ 3.3 kHz; sensitivity 90.5 dB, 500 Hz to 2 kHz.—MJP

SPECS 5 x 9 in cone woofer (3), 7 x 10 in passive radiator (4), 5.25 in cone midrange (2), 1 in planar magnetic tweeter; 5.75 x 54 x 16.5 in (WxHxD); 80 lb

One way or another, these speakers are going to move you.

- Two midrange drivers (shown here) straddle the Triton One’s HVFR tweeter.