

# GoldenEar Technology Aon 3 loudspeaker

By Chris Martens

**T**here's an unwritten truth in audio circles: never try to import a standmount loudspeaker into Britain. OK, so this truth is subject to some serious conditions (it doesn't apply to the high-end, for example), but generally, when it comes to reasonably price standmount loudspeakers, there are so many famous British names (albeit, sometimes in name only) brands, trying to break the home crowd advantage is almost impossible. But, if any imported loudspeaker can achieve success in such a contended market, it's the GoldenEar Technology Aon 3.

This comes down to the guiding force behind the brand. Sandy Gross was co-founder of Polk Audio and founder of both Definitive Technology and now GoldenEar Technology, and is a man driven by a desire to make fine loudspeakers available at a relatively modest price.

The Aon 3 has a specification that belies that modest price tag. It sports a Heil Air Motion Transformer-type Golden Ear HVFR (high velocity folded ribbon) tweeter. This is a thin, light, and responsive pleated diaphragm made of 'a high-temperature film', coupled to high-powered Neodymium magnets. Unlike conventional dome tweeters, the alternate pleats of the diaphragm push and/or pull together in unison, effectively squeezing the air between the pleats outward or drawing the air inward. This is partnered with a 177mm mid-bass driver with MVPP (multi-varied phase plug) design sitting in a rigid free-flow cast-basket chassis, with a 25mm Kapton voice former and a high-gauss magnet.

That alone would place it among the best of breed for the money, but the Aon 3 also features a pair of side-firing 200mm passive radiators, which are claimed to act more in the manner of a tuned transmission line. Finally, the speaker cabinet itself is a truncated pyramid shape, which reduces the size of the front baffle around

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- ▶ the tweeter, affords the speaker a degree of natural time alignment and reduces internal standing waves thanks to those non parallel sides. Gold binding posts and a keyhole slot for wall hanging (should you so wish) seal the deal.

One of the strongest design elements in the Aon 3 is GoldenEar’s superb HVFR tweeter. It offers excellent high frequency extension, superb detailing and transient speed, and is blessedly free from apparent edginess or problems with overshoot and ringing. It sets a very, very high performance bar that the rest of the speaker in turn attempts to match. The fact is the tweeter is so agile and finely focused that it becomes a real challenge to build a midrange driver that can keep pace. That this is not simply a tweeter with a loudspeaker in tow shows the depth of thought that went into this design.

The secret to the midrange unit is that it is in fact closer to a full-range driver. The result is a remarkably versatile mid-bass driver, one that seems to possess the speed, detail, and extension of a small driver, while also providing the kind of bass output normally associated with a much larger one. As result the Aon 3 offers a wonderfully seamless blend between its mid-bass driver and tweeter, but also offers something more: namely, unexpectedly deep bass from what is, after all, a very compact two-way bookshelf monitor.

In practice, this means you get a speaker that offers many of the virtues you would expect to find in much higher priced monitors: good midrange-to-treble balance, terrific openness and transparency, and plenty of subtlety and detail. But you also enjoy bass solidity and depth that are rare in small bookshelf monitors of any price. The Aon 3 offers enough bass that its low-end performance should satisfy most listeners, on most types of music, most of the time. What is even more impressive than the quantity and depth of the Aon 3’s bass is the quality, starting from the lower midrange and ranging right on down the lowest frequencies the speaker can reproduce. What is more, the low end (and lower midrange) of the Aon 3 is every bit as agile, detailed, and nuanced as the speaker’s midrange and top-end.

The Aon 3 deliberately limits low-end response to a respectable (and indeed, impressive) 38Hz, so you get less low-end punch and clout than you would from a full-size floorstander, but you also get a pure, unadulterated, high-resolution sound across that frequency range. That said, there are a few caveats and set-up tips to help readers determine whether the Aon 3 might be right for them.

First, the Aon 3 has a somewhat narrow dynamic envelope; while the bookshelf monitor works well in small and mid-size rooms, it may or may not offer enough dynamic oomph to fill larger spaces. Given this is an American loudspeaker, and ‘larger spaces’ in that context means ‘half the size of Switzerland’, this speaker practically comes with dual nationality and is perfect for our more cosy UK and EU rooms. Better yet, the Aon 3 for the most part sounds dynamically expressive, provided you don’t press it beyond its limits. Just use a judicious hand on your amp’s volume control and things should be fine.

The Aon 3 requires careful placement in order to deliver optimal bass. In my room the Aon 3s performed best when positioned within about 60cm from my listening room’s rear wall. When I pulled the speakers further out into the room, the bass lost weight and punch and became too lean sounding. Don’t settle for ‘good enough’ bass; keep experimenting with placement until the Aon 3s serve up a balanced combination of bass depth, weight, and clarity. Also, to unlock the Aon 3’s full imaging and soundstaging capabilities, plan on spending some time carefully adjusting toe-in angles and the distance between the speakers until you find a desirable sweet spot where images seem suddenly to snap into focus and soundstages take on desirable depth and breadth. More so than many small bookshelf monitors, the Aon 3s may require and will richly reward a little extra time and care during the initial set-up process.

One final performance note: For best results, you’ll want to hear the Aon 3s on good stands that position the speakers’ tweeters at ear level for seated listeners. When placed up at ear level, the GoldenEars produce images that are quite realistic in height and scale, with desirable qualities of spaciousness and three-dimensionality. In other words, while there is a keyhole for wall-hanging, please, please don’t use it.

To get a handle on the Aon 3, I turned to Ti-Ti Chickapea’s *Change of Worlds* [Orchard Park]—a lovely old chestnut of an album. The sound of the trio embraces elements of traditional folk music, next-generation bluegrass, and jazz. As I listened to the Aon 3s on this album, I was struck by their speed, purity, and sheer realism in reproducing intricate and finely woven guitar lines, and by the way each plucked note seemed almost perfect in attack, sustain, and decay—so that each ▶

► note seemed to lead an independent life of its own. I was also floored by the way the Aon 3 demonstrated real weight and warmth on the lower registers of the cello, while revealing its underlying richness and woodiness, which remained fully intact even in the instrument's upper registers. This sort of top-to-bottom focus and consistency, spanning the range from upper bass on through to upper midrange, is one of the Aon 3's great strengths. I was also wowed by the accuracy and realism of the Aon 3s as they rendered the voice of the electric violin—an instrument that sounds pure, clear and at times quite incisive yet is never overly 'steely' or brittle-sounding (my wife owns and plays one of Aceto's electric violins, so it's a sound I know well). Finally, I was impressed with the way the Aon 3 found the understated but heartfelt emotion and subtlety in seemingly simple vocals. Best of all, each ensemble member is heard playing or singing from a precise location in a highly believable 3D soundstage that floats well free from the speaker enclosures.

If you look back at the comments I've just made, you'll see that they represent a blend of thoughts on technical performance (involving accuracy, tonal purity, and realism), but also on the speaker's ability to expose the emotional content embodied in the music. This ability to deliver both a strong technical performance and one that lets the music live and breathe is what makes the Aon 3 very special—and quite exceptional for its price.

The GoldenEar Aon 3 is a brilliant standmount that could easily pass for a far more costly speaker than it actually is. Several things make the Aon 3 lovable:

its transparency and detail, the seamlessness of the integration between its tweeter and mid-bass driver, and its very impressive bass output (for such a compact speaker). Watch out Brit-boxes, this Yankee speaker comes very highly recommended. +

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## TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

**Type:** 2-way, dual-driver bookshelf monitor with dual passive radiators

**Driver complement:** one HVFR (high velocity folded ribbon) tweeter, one 177mm cast-basket mid-bass driver, and two 200mm side-mounted passive radiators.

**Impedance:** 8 Ohms

**Sensitivity:** 90 dB

**Dimensions (H x W x D):** 35.6 x 23 x 28cm

**Weight:** 10.4kg

**Price:** £1,000/pair

**Manufactured by:** GoldenEar Technology

**URL:** [www.goldenear.com](http://www.goldenear.com)

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