Fyne Audio F700 Standmount Speakers Reviewed

Fine audio review samples are like gold dust. Products of the company formed by disgruntled ex-Tannoy staff following the acquisition of Tannoy by Uli Behringer's Music Group and the closure of its Coatbridge factory are selling faster than they can be produced. Demand for Fyne's distinctive loudspeakers shows no signs of slowing. I finally got my hands on the Fyne F700, the mid-sized standmount in the 700 series.

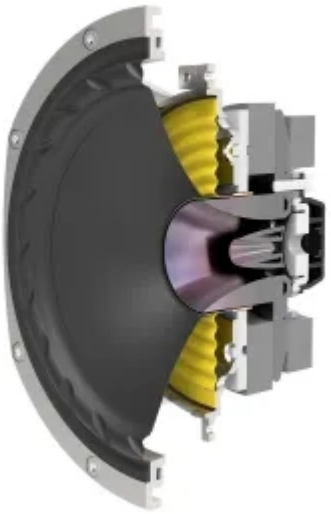
The F700s are produced in Fyne Audio's Scottish factory and are point-source loudspeakers in the truest sense of the term. A significant proportion of Fyne's products are manufactured in the UK, including the F500SP special editions and the entirety of the F700 and flagship F1 range. The F3, F300 and F500 ranges are produced in the Far East, though as one would expect quality control does not suffer in the slightest.

The team behind Fyne Audio have decades of combined experience and it shows in every aspect of their product, from technical design to manufacturing, and from packaging to efficient distribution. Starting from a blank sheet gave them the freedom to take established concepts and improve on them in every area, rather than being encumbered by last-generation components and materials already held in stock.

The F700 is a true point-source loudspeaker. Its single 6.5-inch 'IsoFlare' driver places a 25 mm (1-inch) magnesium dome tweeter concentrically at the heart of a 150 mm (6-inch) mid/bass multi-fibre coated paper cone with Fyne Audio's 'FyneFlute' rubber surround. Energy is radiated isotropically following the flare of the driver cone, effectively horn-loading the tweeter, which is set back within the driver with an independent waveguide. This arrangement provides excellent imaging even off-axis, dramatically improves time alignment (the time taken for the sound from each driver to reach the listener) and enables a smoother transition through the crossover point.

One of the last products that Dr Paul Mills, Fyne Audio's technical director developed during his time with Tannoy was the XT series. These used a radically different dual-concentric driver design, described in great detail in our review of the XT8F. I wondered, then, why Fyne reverted to a more traditional design. The reason is two-fold; a deeper cone and waveguide gives more airspace, and the larger driver design allows for a larger, stronger dual-magnet and thus a more efficient driver. The XT driver design was initially developed for in-ceiling speakers and thus was designed to be as shallow as possible with wide dispersion. Neither of these aspects are acoustically ideal in a traditional speaker, hence the

careful cabinet designs that were a major contributor to the XT's sonic prowess. On the surface Fyne's dual-concentric drivers are an evolution of a concept that has existed for over 70 years but in reality are anything but traditional in design.



Fyneflute is a trademarked technology intended to overcome the adverse limitations of standard rubber-roll surrounds. At specific frequencies (usually around 700 to 1.8kHz) energy can be reflected back into the cone, causing undesirable resonances and thus audible colouration. This is especially true where the cone is required to reproduce the full range of frequencies below the crossover point, and thus the surround must allow higher excursion than a dedicated midrange driver. Fyne's surrounds incorporate computer-designed fluting, seen as small angular ridges formed in the surface of the surround. The result of this non-homogeneous interface effectively terminates cone energy, eliminating miss-termination thus reducing colouration. FyneFlute solves one of the major issues encountered with concentric drivers and allows a true point-source design with a single driver to be realised without sonic compromise.

The cabinet is a curvaceous beauty (words I never thought I'd use to describe a loudspeaker), with each panel curved and impeccably finished in high-gloss lacquer with solid black, white or walnut veneer finish options. The curves are not just beautiful but help to control standing waves within the cabinet. As such the F700s sound less 'boxy' than a typical loudspeaker. Magnetic front grills hide the drivers behind an acoustically transparent grill cloth, with subtle front branding completing the look.

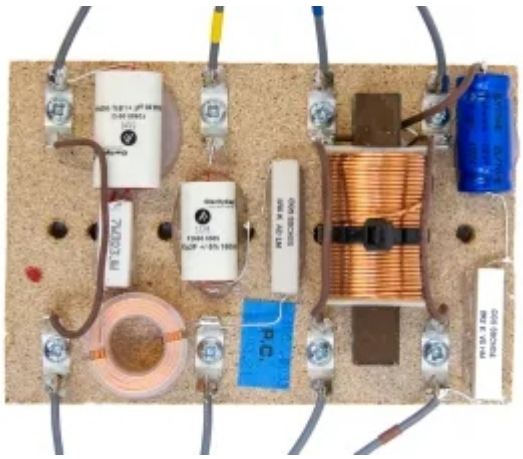
The cabinets sit on a base of machined aluminium separated by beautifully turned aluminium spacers. The purpose of this base and the standoffs is to provide a vent for the Basstrax down-firing diffusion system.

Designed to eliminate the deficiencies of a traditional reflex port, Basstrax disperses the energy leaving the cabinet into a 360-degree wavefront, distributing that energy uniformly into the room. It does this by firing a downward-firing reflex port into a metal cone, the point of which is well inside the mouth of the port. Air exiting the port is guided through 360 degrees as it disperses around the conical shape.

As a result Fyne Audio speakers are unusually tolerant of positioning, at least in terms of room reflection, as adverse reflections are largely avoided. This clever design is seen in much of Fyne's range from the F500 series and up, with important material and design advances in higher-end models.

The F500 standmount loudspeakers hide the gap required for the Basstrax between a vented grill incorporated into their design. Here the vent is completely open and the bottom section of the defuser cone just visible in the gap, so nothing stands in the way of the expelled air.

The rear terminal tray incorporates 4 terminals for those who insist on the pointless exercise of bi-wiring, or who more sensibly run a bi-amplified system. Cross-link jumpers are provided in the package for a single-wire installation. Bi-wiring splits the high and low-frequency crossover to allow two sets of loudspeaker cables to carry each signal. What most don't realise, however, is that the bi-wiring connections in their amplifier are usually nothing more than a parallel pair of speaker terminals and that there is no real advantage to a bi-wired configuration in terms of combatting crossover losses.



At best you'll see slightly less voltage drop (which you'd never notice), and at worst you'll waste potentially a great deal of money on extra cables. This is especially true if your auditory senses can defy science and you insist you can hear the differences that extravagant audiophile cabling are said to bring.

A bi-amplified configuration however is a system whereby independent amplifiers, either a pair of stereo amplifiers or four monaural amplifiers are used to independently power the high and low-frequency channels of the loudspeaker.

This configuration has the advantage that power delivery can be optimised. However, the amplifiers must be well-matched as marginal differences in their performance can carry a significant sonic impact and may be objectively worse than a quality stereo amplifier. sensitive speakers like the F700 don't need a lot of power. They are rated at 75W continuous, with recommended amplifier power between 30-150W and a peak power handling of 300W. Any competently designed integrated amplifier or stereo power amplifier should provide enough power to drive the F700s to high levels with headroom available for dynamic peaks.

The fifth rear terminal directly grounds the driver chassis. This is best connected to the ground of your amplifier, through either the earthing point intended for a turntable or through a case screw. Grounding the driver chassis in this way can help to reduce radio-frequency interference and lower the system's noise floor. I tested this in my system by connecting the ground to different components and to a

dedicate grounding point on my power distributor. The latter was my preferred solution, but in all cases grounding the driver chassis did noticeably reduce the background hiss by a small amount.

The speakers come wrapped in cloth bags and are provided with minimal documentation, some adhesive rubber feet and the aforementioned jumper cables. I was pleased to see a plastic foam used in place of polystyrene; it is a much higher quality packaging material that offers a greater degree of protection and doesn't leave statically-charged flakes on every possible surface.

The F700s are deceptively heavy but are beautifully made. The cabinets are seamless and the finish is flawless. The driver is surrounded by a metal trim and even the Fyne badges are machined in aluminium. The cabinets are internally braced.

The baseplate is a solid slab of 8 mm aluminium with bolt holes to fix the speaker to one of Fyne's matching stands; either the £999 FS-8 or £499 FS-6. DIY-minded buyers with existing stands can obtain the required bolts and drill the necessary holes to use this secure method of mounting.

The F700s are relatively easy to position. THey're not especially fussy about placement, and they work well near adjacent walls. Giving any loudspeaker space to breathe is always preferable, but the F700s are more flexible than many. They'll work well in small to mid-size rooms. If you have a larger listening room or an open-plan living space, you might consider the F701s. Their larger 8-inch driver will offer a bit of extra 'oomf' in the low-end to fill a larger space.

I positioned the speakers with a small toe-in toward the listening position, either side of the rack at least 1.5 metres apart. They would benefit from a larger spread, but that is impractical in my room and performance didn't seem to suffer. My stands put the tweeter just below ear height; not ideal, but close enough to be acceptable especially as I have a terrible habit of slouching, which I can't shake despite the promise of back problems in my later years.

Sonically The F700s demonstrate the same forward presentation that makes Fyne speakers so enjoyable to listen to. The first thing I noticed was the quality of the bass which has a significantly greater impact than I'm used to from a standmount loudspeaker. On a good pair of stands with a gutsy amp, the F700s can produce a quantity of bass to rival a mid-sized floorstander but with the lightness usually attributed to a smaller standmount design. I noticed high levels of detail in bass frequencies too, with synths and strings clearly distinguished, notes in the bottom octaves easily discerned. Many speakers blur their low-end due to resonances within the cabinet, resonances and chuffing in the port or breakup in the driver.

Through the mids, the F7700s are somewhat in your face, though not in a negative way. They are terrific fun at high volume but shine with a vocal or an acoustic track. Their directionality and the indeterminable transition through the crossover makes some vocals haunting, and stringed instruments such as a violin rendered tangible and lifelike as if reaching out and touching the instrument were possible. These exquisite details continue through the highs too. Percussion rattles, shimmers and

tings across an expansive and unfaltering stereo image. I wouldn't consider the F700s to be an entirely neutral loudspeaker. They err on the side of entertainment and musical satisfaction rather than outright accuracy, but are no worse off for that. After all, these are domestic hi-fi loudspeakers and are not intended to be used in a critical monitoring application. I recently reviewed the Kali Audio IN-8 active studio monitors which also use concentric or 'coincident' drivers, though augmented with a dedicated bass driver to allow for an optimised cone profile and surround for midrange duties. The IN-8s use a sophisticated DSP to further optimise their drivers, tuning their sound to the environment and doubtless removing some of the sonic deficiencies due to resonances in the cabinet that would be more obvious if they were a passive design.

I used those speakers to mix a few tracks and feel they do offer neutrality as the mixes translated well on other equipment, including traditional hi-fi loudspeakers. I don't know if it is wholly realistic to expect absolute neutrality from a single dual-concentric loudspeaker. Cone excursion must be minimised so as not to adversely affect the tweeter's high-frequency output, but must also move enough to reproduce the lowest frequencies in the music. It's a difficult balancing act and one that I think Fyne Audio have perfected. The results of the design of their drivers and their implementation might not be neutral, but they're nowhere near as coloured as other loudspeaker designs which can sound boxy, shrill, or any combination of the above.

One memory springs to mind of a demonstration I once endured in a dealership one autumnal Friday afternoon. A Rega Elicit-R was driving a pair of B&W PM-1 speakers, playing Queen's 'Another One Bites The Dust' from the live release record in Montreal. I distinctly remember retracted, muffled highs yet with a shrill extremity, and a midband that gave the impression of listening to music through headphones placed over the hood of a thick winter coat. It was the bass however that stood out. It pounded and thumped along with absolutely no sense of rhythm, and made what is usually an upbeat track delivered with the exuberance of a band on top form to a loping, galumphing mess. It was one of the worst things I have ever heard.

The reason I tell this story is to demonstrate what I mean by colouring in an extreme case. I have never heard colouring that came anywhere close from Fyne Audio, nor Tannoy. To me, the dual-concentric loudspeaker has always sounded 'right'. I can forgive its lack of outright neutrality for its entertainment and musicality, and the enjoyment it offers. After all, a hi-fi is just a means to an end, that being the enjoyment in the consumption of music. In my system, I strive to achieve neutrality in the electronics and tune the system to my taste by selecting a loudspeaker that offers the sonic signature I look for. That sonic signature is one that closely follows the neutrality line, but adds a dose of 'get up n' go' to proceedings. That's what I get from a pair of Fyne Audio loudspeakers, and to me, the F700s are sonically 'just right'. Not for the first time in the presence of a Fyne review sample, I dropped the needle on yet another record, lean back in my chair and reach for the volume. As the gentle crackles of the lead-in groove signify imminent music, I know I am in for a wild ride; and I can't wait.

Highly recommended.