

GoldenEar Technology Triton Reference Loudspeaker Reviewed

By: [Dennis Burger](#), January 5, 2017

"Yes, it does deliver the sort of performance previously delivered only by cost-no-object speakers."

Where do you go after you've created one of the most critically acclaimed speakers of the past decade, if not longer? I'm referring, in case it needs spelling out, to GoldenEar Technology's Triton One, a speaker that garnered the sort of ink in the year of its release that's normally reserved for new surround sound formats or video standards in the AV press. And deservedly so. It positively redefined the level of performance achievable from a \$2,500 speaker.

But back to my original question: where do you go from there? For GoldenEar, the answer to that question, for the past few years at least, has involved filling out and revamping the rest of its lineup, with highly lauded new passive speakers, a new XXL center speaker to keep up with the sound and fury of the Triton One, an entirely new subwoofer line, and some substantial tweaking to the second- and third-largest speakers in the Triton tower lineup to bring them more in line with the performance of the Triton One.

So, what's next for the company? Somewhat surprisingly, a bigger, better, badder flagship speaker that ups the ante on size, design, and performance. With no integers lower than One to rely on, GoldenEar has dubbed it the Triton Reference (\$4,250 each). Although it seems at first blush to be a Triton One on steroids, this new beast is pretty much an entirely new creation from bottom to top.

Starting at the bottom, each Triton Reference tower features a quartet of 10.5- x 9.5-inch side-mounted infrasonic radiators, similar to the ones found at the top and bottom of the company's SuperSub X subwoofer, but tweaked for even higher excursion. Next up, a trio of newly designed 6- x 10-inch active bass drivers, with 40 percent more surface area than the active bass drivers found in the Triton One and a newly designed "Focused Field" magnet structure that also drives its pair of 6-inch Multi-Vaned Phase Plug cast-basket mid/bass drivers.

Last but certainly not least, the Triton Reference features an entirely new version of the driver that could be considered GoldenEar's secret sauce. Its Reference HVFR (high-velocity folded ribbon) tweeter incorporates 50 percent more neodymium as the company's other offerings, and it promises both improved transient response and higher efficiency.

The drivers alone tell only part of the story, though. Venture inside the speaker, and you'll find new wiring, a reprogrammed 56-bit DSP control unit, a further tweaked crossover network, a proprietary blend of long fiber lamb's wool and poly-fiber for internal damping, and a 2.4mm-thick steel plate built into the base for increased rigidity.

Perhaps most noteworthy, at least from a visual standpoint, is the speaker's new one-piece monocoque cabinet with a hand-rubbed piano gloss-black lacquer finish. The speaker still strikes a pose that is decidedly GoldenEar, but the

HTR Product Rating

Performance ★★★★★
Value ★★★★★
Overall ★★★★★

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sleek glossy finish gives the speaker an air of aesthetic luxury that its forebears have never quite been able to claim. My wife (long a fan of the GoldenEar sound but never smitten with their looks) exclaimed upon seeing prototype renderings of the Triton Reference: "Wait! Is that the same company that normally makes the big black socks?"

Indeed it is. The new look makes sense for the Triton Reference for a number of reasons. Firstly, the one-piece black fabric wrap for which GoldenEar is known just barely worked for the massive Triton One. Add four inches in height and roughly an inch in depth, not to mention the extra weight added by a step up from 1,600 to 1,800 watts of amplifier power, and the Triton Reference would be nearly impossible to move without a good solid surface to hold onto. There's also the issue of price to consider. Value has always been a significant portion of GoldenEar's appeal, and adding several hundred bucks to the cost of a \$4,250 speaker isn't quite as impactful as would be the same cost added to a \$2,500 or \$1,250 one.



Whatever the reasoning and justification for the new design, it's hard to deny its appeal. For the first time, in my opinion, GoldenEar Technology has unveiled a speaker whose looks are an undeniable match for its performance. And given its performance, that's saying a lot.

As is usually the case, I stopped by GoldenEar's suite the day before CES to say hello and see what was on slate for this year's show. Unlike previous years, though, I had the opportunity to sit and spend an entire afternoon with the new speakers, listening to a few discs' worth of my own favorite tunes, alone and without interruption.

Before we dig into any specific impressions, let's go ahead and get this out of the way from the giddyup: yes, the GoldenEar Triton Reference's bass is undeniably stellar. Perhaps even more stellar than I was expecting. It stands to reason from reading the specs alone that bass would be improved over the already staggering Triton One. This is, after all, a speaker that's larger than my 22-year-old daughter by any metric you choose to measure it. What I wasn't expecting, though, was bass performance that's so completely and utterly controlled, nimble, and even delicate at times.

One particular example is with Jean Victor Arthur Guillou's arrangement of Pictures at an Exhibition: I. Gnomus, an organ-heavy piece with notes so deep as to be felt more than heard. It's a piece I've heard a number of times through a number of speakers, and I've always found the bass either underwhelming or overwhelming--either nearly

non-existent or domineering. Through the Triton Reference speakers, though, it hit that perfect Goldilocks zone: weight, authoritative, but not at all out of proportion with the rest of the mix.

I don't want to dwell on the bass too much, because there really isn't much more one could say other than that. It's practically flawless. But I also popped in Beastie Boys' "Hey Ladies" and cranked it to the high heavens just for fun, almost in an attempt to push the passive radiators to the burping point. It was a futile attempt. The track thumped and thumped hard, but try as I might, I couldn't stress the speakers to anything approaching a breaking point.

What impressed me more than that, though, was how the speakers handled one of my favorite Björk tracks, one I rarely listen to over loudspeakers for obvious reasons. "Headphones" is a song that was made for its namesake, especially in the way it plays around with the in- and out-of-head experience. What shocked me most was just how ... intimate the song sounded through the Triton Reference speakers. They were set up a good 10 feet away from me, and as far apart, closer to the boundary walls that I would have set them in my own home. And yet the listening effect was, with this song, akin to a pair of really amazing nearfield monitors. My listening notes are full of words like "holographic," "spooky," and "frighteningly tangible."

Joss Stone's "The Chokin' Kind" gave me a similar sensation. Not the spookiness, mind you, nor the holographic nature--because the song isn't mixed that way. But again, words like "intimate" pepper my notes. The speakers capture the breathy detail (and even the mouth noises) of the mix perfectly, seemingly teleporting past the air rather than passing through it, while also delivering the sort of silky smooth, sultry bass that goes straight to your naughty bits.

Another track that blew me away was "Question" by The Moody Blues. The dynamic punch at the beginning of the track and near the end was pure GoldenEar, simply cranked to eleven. But even more impressive to my ears is the way the speakers handled the song's varying width: the way it shifts back and forth between wall-to-wall width and a narrow, more personal, focused sound during the middle bits. I'm trying hard to think of another speaker I've heard capture that element of this song nearly so well. I'm failing. Hard.

Another noteworthy track was "Why We Build the Wall" from Anaïs Mitchell's folk opera *Hadestown*. What sets this song apart is that Greg Brown's vocals (in the role of Hades) are so deep and rich as to demand pretty much equal effort from bass and midrange drivers and tweeter alike. As such, I've found that, with larger speakers and especially in systems with subwoofers, his voice can sound a little disconnected from itself. It tends toward being a bit of a triangle--weighty and wide at the bottom and rising to a point in the middle. That's not the case with the Triton Reference. His voice is a thick, rich, solid rock right in the center of the soundstage, booming out from a definite point in space.

High Points

- GoldenEar's Triton Reference speakers builds upon the foundation of the company's previous powered towers, delivering all of the rich and powerful bass, smooth and natural midrange, and penetrating, deliciously detailed high frequencies of previous efforts, with the obvious added benefits of more power, more dynamics, deeper bass, and superior imaging.
- Surprisingly for such a massive speaker, it's also GoldenEar's most cohesive effort yet. The line between bass, mids, and treble is imperceptible. Try as I might, I could never get the slightest sense of where the powered bass drivers left off and the passive midrange drivers picked up. Ditto for the transition between the mids and the HVFR tweeters. The disparate drivers work in concert to create the sort of unified listening experience you would expect from massive (like, truly massive) planar magnetic panels.
- Owing to its powered bass section, new crossover design, and exceptional efficiency (93.25 dB, anechoic), the Triton Reference speaker can be driven by pretty much any good amplifier. So, if you're in to low-powered Class A amps, you're good to go. If gigantic Class D mono blocks are more your speed, you're covered there, too. Within reasonable bounds (nothing below, say, 20 watts per channel on the low end and not much more than 750 watts per channel at the extreme), you'd have a hard time finding an amp that doesn't work with these big, beautiful beasts.

Low Points

- At 58 inches tall and weighing in at 110 pounds apiece, the Triton Reference is a daunting speaker in many respects. It certainly isn't a loudspeaker that you'll be unpacking and positioning by yourself. Or, heaven forbid, if it is, then may I never cross you in a dark alley.
- As gorgeous as the new cabinet is (and it's truly gorgeous in a way that pictures don't do justice), it's a shame that piano black is the only finish option. While I understand that GoldenEar's primary mission is to deliver unparalleled performance at unheard-of price points (mission accomplished there, for sure) and while I also get that adding custom finishes (or even offering multiple finishes) would have jacked up the MSRP substantially, I think it would be worth the extra expense. The thought of seeing these beauties in Shark Gray Metallic or Laguna Blue Tintcoat makes my heart go pitter-patter. But for now, such finish options are only the dream of yours truly.

Comparison and Competition

GoldenEar has entered into new and less populated territory with its Triton Reference tower. As such, finding speakers with which to compare it isn't easy (nor, in my opinion, incredibly informative). There are a few in this price range that deserve mentioning, though, if budget is your primary concern.

Paradigm's new Persona 3F (the smallest in its flagship line, measuring just over 44 inches tall) sells for \$5,000 each, making it a bit more expensive than the Reference but certainly worth auditioning if you're shopping for offerings in this ballpark.

MartinLogan's Impression ESL 11A, at \$9,995 per pair, is also in roughly the same price territory (give or take 1,500 bucks), and its massive electrostatic panel should appeal to those who love the clarity and transparency of GoldenEar's high-velocity folded ribbon tweeter.

The Triton Reference also snuggles quite nicely between the B&W 804 D3 and 805 D3 in price, the former coming in at \$9,000 per pair and the latter selling for \$6,000.

Perhaps a more apt comparison could be made to speakers a bit off the beaten path, like the active version of ADAM Audio's Classic Column MK3, which sells for \$10,000 per pair. Like the GoldenEars, the active Classic Column MK3 relies on a folded ribbon tweeter, but it also features a larger folded ribbon midrange driver. Its powered version also provides amplification (of the Class AB variety) to all its drivers, not just the bass section. Low-frequency extension is rated at 30 Hz, though, as compared with the Triton Reference's gut-wrenching 12 Hz.

In terms of the total package--the impact and authority of its bass, combined with the depth of its soundstage and remarkable detail--I've never heard a speaker that truly bests the Triton Reference at anything approaching its price.

Conclusion

The phrase "statement piece" is used and misused quite frequently in our industry, often to mean an unrealistic, cost-no-object proof of concept that may or may not make it to market, and is usually only attainable by the one percent if it does. In every meaningful respect, the GoldenEar Triton Reference speaker is a statement piece, but not in that way. Yes, it does deliver the sort of performance previously delivered only by cost-no-object speakers. And yes, if you have room for these speakers in your living room, you're certainly making a statement.

But as hard as it is for me to describe a \$4,250 speaker as an exceptional value and expect to be taken seriously--after all, I know that's far outside the budget range of many of our readers--when you get down to brass tacks, this truly is, above all else, an incredibly high-value speaker that simply doesn't sound like price was considered at all in its design process. If anything, I think it's underpriced.