

REVIEW

HI-FI WORLD

Musical Energy

Jon Myles is beguiled by Acoustic Energy's AE109 budget floorstanders.



Floorstanding loudspeakers around the £500 mark with a good sound are relatively rare. The reason is simple – large cabinets cost more so there is less money to spend on the drive units. And then you have the problem of controlling resonances in a bigger enclosure.

None of this is simple. Give a designer an unlimited budget and free rein to do what they like may well come up with something special but us – the buyers – will have to stump up thousands of pounds for it.

If your budget doesn't stretch that far – where do you look? Acoustic Energy may just have the answer in their new AE109 floorstanders.

It's the flagship model in the revamped AE100 range that also includes the AE100 standmount model, a centre channel 'speaker and an active subwoofer.

I was impressed with the AE100s when I reviewed them last year (see Hi-Fi World November 2017). This is a small loudspeaker which produces a big, controlled sound with an even tonal balance. No surprise, then, that I was eager to see how their bigger brothers fared,

The AE109s are a two-and-a-half way design using a pair of 4-inch (100mm) mid/bass paper cone units similar to that used in the AE100 with the lower one augmenting lower bass response before rolling off. These are allied to a 1-inch (25mm) soft dome tweeter mounted in what Acoustic Energy calls a Wide Dispersion Technology waveguide to project sound further into the room.

These drivers are housed in a relatively slim mass-loaded MDF cabinet measuring

800mm x 160mm x 240mm (HxVxD) with cone shaped spikes at the base.

A pair of full-length magnetically-attached grilles are also supplied (although, as ever, I kept these off for reviewing) while finishes are Satin Black or Walnut vinyl veneer.

At the back is a single pair of 'speaker cable binding posts as well as a slot-shaped reflex port to reinforce the bass.

While not overly-flashy the AE109s are certainly well put-together, weighing in at 17.5kg each and feeling solid and sturdy. A solid rap with the knuckles on the side of the cabinet produced no unwanted resonances.

Acoustic Energy claim a frequency range of 40Hz to 35kHz (see Measured Performance for full details) with an 89dB sensitivity – meaning they should be able to go loud with moderately-powered transistor amplifiers or even valves.

SOUND QUALITY

A room-filling sound is a prerequisite for any decent floorstander – and the '109s have it in spades. Hooked up to a 40 Watts per channel Naim Uniti Atom via QED's excellent budget XT25 'speaker cables and playing The Clash's 'The Card Cheat' (24/96) with its Phil Spector-like production, the 'speakers set up an enveloping wall of sound.

The first notes from the piano were strikingly resonant with both accurate pitch and depth. When Topper Headon's drums came in they also sounded firm and weighty, propelling the track along with verve.

Switching to 'Fairytale Of New York' by The Pogues I was struck by the detail and delicacy these 'speakers can unearth. Spider Stacy's tin-whistle was never buried in the mix while the banjo, accordion and even the harp were reproduced with clarity. Kirsty MacColl's vocals also came through with exceptional sweetness and a light touch.

The 'speakers knitted all this together into a thoroughly engaging, toe-tapping sound that had energy, verve and bounce to it. The trio of drivers are well integrated with no obvious dip at the crossover frequencies so they work seamlessly together.

Of course, there are limitations. Playing my go-to test track of James Blake's 'Limit To Your Love' the AE109s could not reproduce the sub-sonic bass effects which will shake a

room through larger loudspeakers. Nor do they have quite the air and space in the treble that a ribbon tweeter brings.

But that is being especially picky. At their price of £500 these loudspeakers are not just good – they are exceptionally good. So much so that I even spent some time with them connected to our reference McIntosh MC152 power amplifier – which at £6000 would seem something of a mismatch.

But the Acoustic Energy's weren't overly fazed, sounding big and spacious on the San Francisco Symphony's DSD recording of Mahler's 'Symphony No 2'. The sound of the orchestra was thrown wide left and right and well into the room to convey the scale of the piece. They even managed to handle the apocalyptic crescendo in the third movement without sounding strained or congested.

CONCLUSION

These AE109s floorstanders are exactly what good budget hi-fi should be. Exciting with rock and pop, authoritative with classical and sparkling with everything in-between. You can pay a good deal more and get a great deal less for your money.



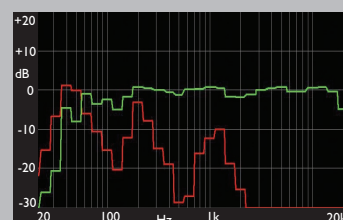
At the rear the Acoustic Energy's have a slot shaped reflex port to enhance the base response.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

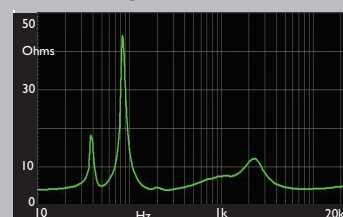
The AE109s had some treble lift (+2dB) when measured on-axis, but at approximately 20degrees off-axis, frequency response was relatively flat, making the 'speaker tonally accurate in effect when pointed straight down a room and not at listeners. This is now common in loudspeakers and it makes for a fairly obvious high-treble. A dip in

FREQUENCY RESPONSE

Green - driver output
Red - port output



IMPEDANCE



output at the 2kHz crossover region between bass/midrange and treble units will however soften the delivery overall.

Below 200Hz output gently decreases toward low frequencies, compensating for the presence of a rear wall. The slot port at rear is tuned to 45Hz and will provide low bass of a fairly bouncy nature as it is narrow-tuned. In all then the AE109 is a relatively accurate loudspeaker, a tad softer in the upper midband than some but still with plentiful high treble. Bass extends down to 40Hz, if not into subsonic regions, and with support from a rear wall will be in good balance, without boom.

A low measured impedance of 5 Ohms means the 'speaker draws current, but it also results in very high voltage sensitivity of 89.4dB, so at any particular volume control setting the AE109 will sound appreciably louder than most rivals.

The AE109 has been designed to work close to a rear wall, pointing straight down a room. It has an accurate balance, although high treble will still be obvious. Being unusually sensitive, it will play very loud from any amplifier. **NK**

ACOUSTIC ENERGY AE109 £500



OUTSTANDING - amongst the best

VALUE - keenly priced

VERDICT

An affordable floorstander with a refinement that belies its price. Goes loud with ease but remains poised and enjoyable at all times.

FOR

- good bass
- refined treble
- toe-tapping sound
- easy to drive

AGAINST

- nothing to speak of

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