

Tannoy Kingdom Royal

PAUL MESSENGER TACKLES TANNOY'S ENORMOUS KINGDOM ROYAL, AND DISCOVERS THAT IT'S ACTUALLY A SURPRISINGLY POLITE IF VERY LARGE PUSSY CAT

HIFICRITIC
AUDIO EXCELLENCE



The *Kingdom Royal*, especially in our *Carbon Black* finish version, sits right at the top of Tannoy's home-oriented loudspeaker collection, though in fact I'm reminded of a studio monitor called a *215 DMT* that I persuaded the company to let me review way back in 1994. The two models are actually different in a great many ways (including, not least, a huge price discrepancy), but both do feature a reflex-loaded 15-inch (380mm) paper cone bass driver. While such a bass system is arguably inferior to a full range horn, it might well be the next best thing.

As far as I can tell, Tannoy's *Kingdom Royal Carbon Black* costs a very hefty £51,999 per pair. (A caveat is included because it's supposed to carry a price premium over the standard version, which no longer seems to be the case.) (It's also supposed to have silver- rather than gold-finished trim, but again this didn't seem to be the case, though that's arguably more debatable.) The supplied links for connecting together the bi-wire terminals only have 4mm plugs on both ends, which is the same as all my various speaker cables. Such a situation is certainly entirely useable, by inserting one end of the link through the hole in the terminal shaft, but in fact I elected to use my spade-equipped Vertex AQ links instead.

The *KRCB* might be an expensive prospect, costing more than twice the B&W *800 D3s* that represent one of my references, but in both size and weight its pricetag seems justified. Given the quite enormous bulk, I was quite glad to find that the floorstanding enclosure came equipped with castors, and I made no attempt to modify these floor-coupling arrangements. Indeed, the Townshend decoupling platforms that I usually use with the B&Ws were merely parked on end against the wall for the duration of the time spent with these very large Tannoys.

Quite frankly these *KRCBs* are a bit too big even for my good size listening room, as the front not only accommodates two very wide drive units, but leaves plenty of space around them too. A brochure photograph shows them sitting either side of a magnificently large carved fireplace in what looks like a stately home, which somehow seems rather more appropriate (though the speakers in the picture do look a bit too close to the wall).

Unlike that horizontal three-way *215 DMT* stand-mount, the *KRCB* is a four-way floorstander, combining a port-loaded 380mm (15in) bass unit mounted below a sealed-box-loaded 300mm (12in) dual-concentric driver. A Tannoy SuperTweeter is sited on the very top, and is intentionally set a couple of inches behind the front panel. Both the large drivers use paper cones, but whereas the lower (380mm) bass-only driver has a conventional half-roll rubber surround, the upper (300mm dual concentric) large drive unit has a corrugated doped fabric surround, for better resonant mode termination.

Some adjustment of the relative tweeter outputs are available *via* two five-position 'screw-in' dongles that are accessed on the front panel. These provide a total spread of $\pm 3\text{dB}$ in 1.5dB steps, and may be applied to the horn-loaded 75mm (3in) metal dome (concentric) unit from 700Hz-17kHz, and to the 17kHz and above 'supertweeter' range. Although both were left at '0dB' through nearly all the reviewing process, brief tests did indicate some benefit in being able to reduce the normal treble range by a little when playing the speakers at a relatively high level (*ie* loudly).

Measurements

I wasn't able to measure the impedance of these speakers on this occasion, but the manufacturer responded to our request for an impedance trace. Centred on a port tuning frequency of around 16Hz, this showed a low Q, which should ensure some independence from the amplifier type. It's a 4ohm load at most low frequencies below 150Hz, but stays above 6ohms above 300Hz, peaking up at 28ohms by 1.6kHz. A true 8ohm load would assist matching.

Sensitivity is a generous 97-98dB here, a figure that correlates well with the installed driver complement. Interestingly, the in-room response tends to contradict my expectations for those large drive units and the very high sensitivity by delivering an unusually smooth and well ordered response trace, albeit one that falls steadily with rising frequency. In fact it drops about 5dB from 20Hz to 5kHz, then a further 7dB from 5 to 20kHz because of narrowing horn directivity with frequency, though I can't say the latter was particularly audible in practice.

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The overall smoothness of the acoustic output was not only visible on the measured in-room far-field trace, it was also subjectively very noticeable. While the high frequency roll-off might not have been all that obvious, the low frequency behaviour is particularly impressive, not only for demonstrating that the large port-loaded 15-inch bass driver has been kept in check, but also due to this speaker system's ability to minimise the usual bass response irregularities (*aka* 'woodles') from the standing waves related to the room proportions. These routinely result in a measured maximum peak-to-trough dimension of some 15dB, while the largest variation found with these big Tannoy speakers is only 10dB and most of the other 'woodles' are rather smaller than that.

Sound Quality

The sound quality did indeed go some way towards justifying this speaker's rather hefty price, while the high sensitivity will undoubtedly make it a very compatible partner for low powered valve amps, such as the single-ended *PX4*-based Howes monoblocks that I sometimes use. (That said, I used the Naim *NAP500 DR* power amplifier throughout the brief time the Tannoy *KRCBs* were here.)

Such factors aside, the *KRCB* delivers an exceptional standard of sound quality, combining a beautifully extended frequency response with an impressively large dynamic range. Add in a tonal balance that's very smooth, even and well balanced, especially regarding the avoidance of bass excess, and the net result is a totally impressive loudspeaker.

As I wound up the volume, so the upper midband began to sound a bit aggressive, but this was easily dealt by adjusting the feed to the dual-concentric unit's tweeter. This is a simple enough exercise, accomplished by changing the positions of the 5-way 'screw in' dongles that are very visible on the front panel. So if you like to play your music very loudly, simply leave the appropriate dongle at the lower setting.

I suspect the very high sensitivity is a good reason to give the Tannoy *KRCB* due consideration, especially for those with very large listening rooms or a predilection for low power valve amplifiers. However, I've often suspected that a substantial sensitivity figure has advantages over and beyond a simple advantage in decibels. Although very difficult to prove, comparison with the fine B&W *800 D3* tends to confirm that the big Tannoys do indeed deliver extra detail, especially in terms of instrumental textures, and more natural dynamic contrasts...



Conclusions

A number of US speakers cost as much as (or even more than) these big Tannoys, but the latter are nevertheless possibly the most costly speakers to come from a UK brand (give or take B&W's original *Nautilus*). Whether any loudspeakers can really justify a pricetag of £52,000/pair must be debatable, but the *KRCBs* can make good sense, especially if the right circumstances are met.

One essential ingredient is a large room, in order to accommodate its considerable bulk and make best use of its magnificent bass, while the exceptionally high sensitivity will also make a suitable partner for low power (*eg* valve) amplification if desired. But high sensitivity is also worth having for its own sake, and when set alongside the smooth and very well balanced sound with exceptional dynamic range, the results are perhaps surprising in view of the somewhat oldfashioned technology involved, but clearly merit *HIFICRITIC* Audio Excellence status.

Manufacturer's Specification

Size (HxWxD)	1275x585x600mm
Volume	160litres
Type	4-way: reflex 380mm bass; 2-way closed box 300mm Dual Concentric, 25mm SuperTweeter
Weight	120kg (265lbs)
Rec Amp Power	20 – 600W/ch RMS
Max SPL	126dB at 1 metre for 1200W peak
THD	Less than 1% at 300W (50Hz to 20kHz)
Sensitivity	96dB for 2.83 volt at 1 metre
Impedance	8ohms
Crossover Points	120Hz; 700Hz; 17kHz
Dispersion	90 degrees conical
Frequency Response	24Hz - 61kHz (-6dB)
Cabinet Construction	Birch ply & HD fibreboard Heavy bracing
Price (per pair)	£52,000