

An energetic contender

CHRIS KELLY GETS TO GRIPS WITH THE FLAGSHIP RANGE FROM ACOUSTIC ENERGY, IN THE FORM OF THE £2400-A-PAIR AE509 FLOORSTANDING SPEAKERS. HIS VERDICT? THIS REALLY IS A 'MUST LISTEN' DESIGN

Regular readers of HIFICRITIC may recall that some months ago I reviewed the Acoustic Energy AE320 floor standing loudspeaker, and that it was awarded a well-deserved Best Buy classification by our editor. I enjoyed my time with AE320s so when the opportunity to hear the brand's flagship range, in the shape of the floor-standing AE509, I was not backward in coming forward. Without rehashing what I wrote previously, I shall just remind you that this British company has been producing loudspeakers since 1987 and enjoys a strong reputation with audiophiles around the world for producing affordable but exceptionally musical loudspeakers.

The 509s that arrived here were finished in a very high quality gloss white, which looked very attractive, at least to these eyes. Each loudspeaker weighs 22kg, which makes them very manageable for one person to unpack, assemble and lift into place. The elegant 18mm MDF 'Resonance Suppression Composite' cabinet measures 1000x185x270 (mm, HWD) excluding the spiked feet. These are attached to the sole plate via two aluminium bars of unequal length, using the supplied Allen key. Once set in the preferred position, the 509s seem pleasingly solid and very stable. The front boasts a pair 125 mm carbon-fibre main drivers and between them is a centrally sited 25mm dome tweeter, also crafted from carbon fibre. Each driver is attached to the cabinet with four black screws, set at the 2, 4, 8 and 10 o'clock positions. A black grille is supplied and attaches via hidden magnets. I played them with and without the grilles on but as I preferred the look of them without that is how most of the review was done.

The rear panel offers a pair of good quality three-way binding posts towards the the bottom, with an aluminium plate bearing the serial number, the model name and the legend "Made in PRC". Internally, the cabinet is extensively braced and dampened, and rapping it with a knuckle creates no superfluous acoustic response. There is a bass port located on the rear of the cabinet.

The crossover is a two-way affair. In the company's own words "The crossovers use high voltage polypropylene film wound capacitors and air core inductors at critical locations for optimum dispersion through a smaller acoustic source size within the crossover region."

Driver materials seem to go in and out of fashion and carbon fibre has appeared in various main

driver designs over the years. In the manufacturer's own words again: "The 125mm mid/bass driver includes a new oversized 35mm voice coils for low thermal compression and very high motor force factor, to provide a highly dynamic yet controlled bass response. The woofer has an optimised motor and suspension system for maximum linearity and lowest distortion ensuring mid-range definition, whilst the lightweight nature of the carbon fibre cone material increases transient speed and clarity."

The use of carbon fibre in tweeters is much less common, and once again, rather than paraphrase, let me quote what Acoustic Energy has to say on the matter: 'Our 500 Series tweeter features a brand new 25mm carbon fibre dome. Carbon fibre is much lighter and better damped than other typical hard dome materials and provides a lightning fast, natural sound which will surprise the listener with its neutrality.'

The new cast aluminium WDT waveguide on the high frequency driver is positioned close to the mid/bass driver for optimum dispersion and is extremely stiff to reduce vibration being passed to the tweeter, ensuring sweet, clear and natural highs.' The claimed frequency response for the AE509s is a wide 32Hz to 28kHz. The impedance is quoted at 6ohms, with sensitivity of 89dB. I decided to use the 4ohm tap on my PrimaLuna EVO400 integrated valve amplifier and deployed TelluriumQ UltraBlackII cable to make the connection. I had the cabinets with a slight toe-in towards the listening position, with the corner nearest to the rear wall at 60cm distance on both sides.

The rest of the review system consisted on my own modified Linn Sondek LP12, with a Dynavector XX2 cartridge fitted to the Ittok arm, with my GoldNote PH10 and PSU phono

