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TANNOY'S AUTOGRAPH MINI

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Small wonders

What's this? A genuine Tannoy dual concentric speaker costing just over a grand and standing inches over a foot tall? Yep, you heard it right. Ken Kessler falls in love with a mini marvel

BELOW: Dual Concentric driver measures just 4in across



DETAILS

-  **Tannoy Autograph Mini**
-  **£1250 (a pair)**
-  **www.tannoy.com**
-  **01236 420199**
-  **Looks, size and fast yet weighty sound**
-  **Needs careful partnering**

There it was, all creamy-coloured grille and 1950s-look woodwork. It was photographed against a white background, another model in the Tannoy Prestige series of classic coaxial speakers. Then I clicked opened the second image. Only this time, it was sitting on a table. What the f-?!? It couldn't be much more than a foot high! Why would Tannoy produce a scale model of the 1954 Guy R. Fountain Autograph? I mean, I'd seen cute, miniature point-of-sale material before, including a Quad ESL the size of a paperback novel, and a Magnepan panel not much bigger than an LP sleeve. But those companies didn't send out press releases.

EXQUISITE REPLICA

Nuh-uh: this was a real loudspeaker. A genuine Tannoy Dual Concentric driver, in a pointed-back cabinet... but with dimensions of only 13 7/8in tall and a footprint of 8 1/4in wide by 5 1/2in deep – not much larger than an LS3/5A. There were few precedents I could think of other than the 1990s Minox reissues of classic Leica and Contax cameras – 1/3rd scale reductions that actually worked with Minox's 'spy' camera film. They, too, were gorgeous and covetable. But the Tannoy Autograph Mini isn't just for collectors with a penchant for miniaturisation. No, the Autograph Mini is a real-world speaker that just happens to look like it was stolen from a Lilliputian listening room.



LEFT: Cabinet is hand finished in birch ply and sports gold-plated, multi-way binding posts to the rear; Van den Hul silver cable is used inside

Tannoy describes the Autograph Mini as 'a hugely scaled-down but authentic version of a loudspeaker that was famous throughout the audio world 50 years ago. Reduced to a fraction of the size

'You can rock your tush off with this speaker without having to feed it £5k-plus worth of power'

of the immense and revered original Tannoy Autograph, this exquisite replica is the ultimate modern retro audio product'. I second that. Even if you don't need a pair, you'll want these. They'll tug at your heartstrings, like a cute little kitten. And that lust will affect a few gazillion audiophiles in Japan. With their limited room size, the world's leading Tannoy wannabees, from Kagoshima to Sapporo, must be staining their futons.

It's as if CNC and MDF never sullied the art of speaker cabinet making. The cabinet build and finish ooze the sort of craftsmanship that marked vintage Tannoys. Even at £1250 or so per pair the woodwork seems too expensive for the price tag. And inside is no crappy \$2-per-unit driver but a genuine, bona fide Dual Concentric driver.

Because Tannoy never stopped making Dual Concentrics, and because so much has happened in terms of materials, the quality of sources and amplification, listening habits and other determinants since the days of Mr Fountain, the new 4in unit is not a pint-sized surrogate

of a Red or a Gold. It doesn't have Alnico magnets or cones made from recycled Penguin paperbacks. We're beyond mere nostalgia, and recent Tannoy Dual Concentrics have been marvellous (oh, to have the

space for the Churchills!) But, for the record, yes, this is the smallest Dual Concentric ever manufactured.

Size is the only difference, for Tannoy wouldn't compromise on anything else. It's built upon a heavy cast alloy frame, containing a 'multi-fibre paper pulp' cone to cover midrange and bass. Tannoy regards the material as 'traditional but high tech' and able to ensure 'subtlety with stunning detail and expansive imaging'. It's not kidding: the most immediate impression you'll get of the Mini, especially if you go into the room blindfolded, is that of a huge speaker, for both scale and bass delivery. The new Tannoy is 'mini' in name and dimensions only.

FAST & CRISP

What differentiates it most from Dual Concentrics of yore is the titanium domed high-frequency compression horn driver, a development of Tannoy's work with super-tweeters. In fact, Tannoy's Tim Lount told me that I would find the company's add-on super-tweeter superfluous, and he was 100% correct: if anything, the Autograph Mini has

an abundance of treble energy. It is breathtakingly fast and crisp, with the sort of attack that will have you pulling out Alvin Lee LPs to test their speed with his guitar licks. And what it does for trumpet ... wow!

As with all Dual Concentrics, the tweeter is positioned on precisely the same axis as the bass section. It's fitted with a neodymium magnet system, also unavailable to GRF way back when, and is said to deliver a smooth response up to an 'incredible' 54kHz. Suffice it to say, the Mini never sounds dull. 99.99% high purity Van den Hul silver cable is used to wire the tweeter to the system's 'minimalist' crossover network, which features low-loss inductors and specially-damped audio-grade capacitors. At the back are solid, gilded, multi-way binding posts.

High-density birch ply of 10mm and 13mm thicknesses with hardwood veneers and solid hardwood mouldings make up the aforementioned, hand-finished enclosure, and the Mini conveys an aura of fine furniture. This is not a speaker you'd want to hide. However, Tannoy is mooted a version of the Mini in contemporary trappings for the sort of cold, heartless, 

REVIEW SYSTEM

Sources: Musical Fidelity kW25, Marantz CD12/DA12 CD players, SME 20/12 turntable, 312S arm, Transfiguration Orpheus cartridge
Amplifiers: Audio Research PH5 phono pre-amp, Musical Fidelity Nu-Vista pre-amp, McIntosh MC275 and Quad 909 power amps
Speakers: Rogers LS3/5A speakers, PMC DB1+ speakers
Cables: Yter, Acrolink and Kimber interconnects, Atlas speaker cables

WE LISTENED TO

Claudio Abbado/London Symphony Orchestra Mendelssohn Overturen (Deutsche Grammophon 423 104-20) CD

Keb' Mo': Peace ... Back By Popular Demand (Okeh EK92687) CD

Mr. Big: Lean Into It (Atlantic 7567-82209-2) CD

Taj Mahal: Recycling The Blues & Other Related Stuff (Pure Pleasure PPA31605) LP audoph



BELOW: Bass is extended in the Mini by use of rear port; while this means speaker cannot be used in close proximity to walls, a supplied plug allows you to tune out any bass 'sag'



DATA FILE

SPECIFICATIONS

Recommended power	20-100W
Power rating	50W RMS; 200W peak
Maximum SPL	105dB at 1 metre for 50W RMS
	111dB at 1 metre for 200W peak
Total harmonic distortion	Less than 2% at 50W RMS
	(100Hz to 20kHz)
Sensitivity (2.83V @ 1m)	88dB
Nominal impedance	8 ohm
Minimum impedance	5.5 ohm
frequency response	68Hz- 54kHz (-6dB)
Crossover point	2.3kHz
Crossover type	2nd -order compensated low-pass, 1st order compensated high pass
Dual Concentric Driver	LF 100mm (4in) mixed fibre pulp cone
	HF 19mm (3/4in) titanium dome with neodymium magnet system
Enclosure Type	ported
Cabinet dimensions	210 x 345 x 130mm (whd)
Cabinet volume	3.5L (0.124 cu.ft)
Weight	4.0kg (8.8lb)

HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

Matching issues aside, I adore this speaker. How much? I'm going to use them as my reference in the £1000-plus sector, a no-brainer for people who want LS3/5As but need loudness, too. But that's irrelevant: you, like I, might want a pair just because they look so damned wonderful.

glass'n'chrome 'lofts' beloved of those who only read fashion mags and still listen to Sade.

Those who go retro will be torn between playing the speaker without the grille – to see that nifty driver and the design fillips recalling the original's baffle – or to leave the grille in place, which tames the treble by a tiny amount.

What the Autograph Mini cannot do is be positioned in a corner like its bigger granddaddy. That's because the size and shape demanded a rear port, so the Mini ought to be sited away from walls, either on stands or shelves. I used the

24in-tall IF stands, optimised for LS3/5As, and the top plate's size was ideal.

WEIGHT AND EXTENSION

Then again, why stuff it in a corner when it has adequate bass? OK, so a switch to a true full-range design like the MartinLogan Vantage reveals the Mini's limitations, but trust me: at no point will you mistake this for anything smaller than a sealed two-way with an 8in driver. It has almost enough weight and extension to convey the mass of 'The Hebrides,' and certainly enough to deal with the flowing funk of Keb' Mo's 'People



ABOVE: Tannoy Westminster and Mini Autograph to show scale

Got To Be Free'. The Mini can fill the space in front of you, in three dimensions, with palpable mass. Kodo drums and house might upset it a bit, but there's a plug for the rear port if you need to tune out any 'sag'. Allow a half-metre from the walls, and use a bit of toe-in, and everything will snap into focus, without disturbing the bass balance.

All of this is down to the Dual Concentric driver: the dispersion is such that these drivers always convey a huge space, and there seems to be plenty of travel in the woofer element. Add to it reasonable impedance, medium sensitivity and decent power handling, and you'll find that even medium-power amps like the Quad 909 and McIntosh MC275 amps will drive it to levels that border on the absurd in a 12 x 18ft room. Yes, dear, you can rock your tush off with these speakers, and do so without having to feed it the sort of power that costs £5k-plus.


Then there's the retrieval of detail. At times, the Autograph Mini is so revealing that you'd swear you were listening to a pure studio monitor. Its fast, extended treble is the least

ALSO CONSIDER

Stirling LS3/5A (circa £1000): Latest incarnation of a true great
PMC DB1+ (£625): An astounding mini, and a bargain
Second-hand Tannoy corner horns: If space isn't an issue

forgiving I've heard this side of a Wilson WATT. In fact, it was so transparent and open that it made the Tannoy something of a devil to match. This speaker is fussy not about wire, nor even amps, but about sources. It did not get on with the Musical Fidelity kW25, sounding edgy and aggressive, but it loved the Marantz CD12/DA12. With analogue sources, there was a clear preference for the Transfiguration Orpheus over the Decca Gold and Blue Angel.

REALLY SING

Once you nail it – and this means that retailers are going to have to be careful about demonstrations (software and hardware) – the Tannoys can really sing. They brought out all the rich texture of Keb' Mo's voice, the sweetness of Kyu Sakamoto with his classic 'Sukiyaki', and, best of all, were utterly convincing with the acoustic guitar in Mr Big's 'To Be With You': in the room, twanging with all of the energy a guitar can muster, following the dynamic swings effortlessly, even at serious playback levels. It's here's that you don't mind the surfeit of detail. A guitarist would probably even be able to tell you the make of strings. 

THE INSIDE TRACK...

Tim and I discussed using the Autograph Minis with a subwoofer and he concurred that they love it. 'The amount of information from the Autographs combined with exceptionally controlled and tuneful bass truly made the ultimate sub-sat system!' he enthused. He set the crossover point

'pretty low, at around 65-70Hz,' but found that, 'maybe in purist terms there was a bit of a hole between 70-85Hz.'

Allowing for the accuracy of the settings on subs, it's best to experiment; I gave 'em a twirl with the MartinLogan Descent, crossing over slightly higher, and it was magical. The added weight

seemed to compensate for the slightly prominent top end.

The only reason I mention this is because I can see people buying six of these little speakers for a home cinema system, turning one on its side for the centre-channel and using the sixth for the rear in a 6.1 set-up.

ON ADDING A SUBWOOFER