

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
Affordable
floorstanding 5.1
speaker pack

POSITION:
Fyne Audio's
entry-level system

PEERS:
Q Acoustics 3050i;
Monitor Audio
Monitor

1. This system uses the F302 floorstander – a larger F303 features dual midbass drivers

Steve Withers finds a lot to like about some new kids on the loudspeaker block

Off to a Fyne start

Fyne Audio may not be a name with which you're immediately familiar, but this British startup boasts sonic pedigree. It's a new Glasgow-based loudspeaker manufacturer with the kind of expertise and background other fledgling companies can only dream of.

That's because the design and engineering staff previously worked at speaker brand Tannoy, bringing to the new venture decades of acoustic and technological know-how (it's safe to assume the company's boast of '200 years' experience is spread across multiple employees, rather than a single, very old audiophile...). And the accumulated experience of the core technical team gives Fyne Audio the confidence to believe it can achieve success in a marketplace where there's no shortage of competition.

Something for everyone

The company's lineup certainly suggests it means business. Since it launched in 2017 it has released three ranges (the entry-level F300, the mid-range F500, and the high-end F700 Series), plus its F3 Series of subwoofers and the ultra-high-end (and ultra-large) £18,000-per-pair F1-10 and £24,000-per-pair F1-12 (see p21) floorstanding speakers. It seems to have decided on a something-for-everyone approach.

The F300 Series is considerably more affordable than Fyne's premium towers and there's plenty to choose from here, with a brace of floorstanders in the form of the F303 (£600 per pair) and F302 (£400 per pair), joined by the F301 (£250 per pair) and F300 (£180 per pair) standmounts. There's also the F300C (£180 each), a dedicated centre speaker designed to tonally match the rest of the range.

Fyne also offers a 5.1-channel system which I'm reviewing here, and this comprises a pair of F302 floorstanders, two F301 standmounts, the F300C centre speaker and an F3-8 subwoofer, the most wallet-friendly bass maker (with a standalone price of £300) in its F3 Series. Not only does this particular combination create a solid multichannel platform, but the entire package sells for £1,000, making it a potential bargain if the speakers deliver on the company's promises.

The F300 Series represents the bottom rung on the Fyne Audio loudspeaker ladder, but benefits, we're told, from some of the same technical and acoustic processes as the rest of the company's lineup. To that end, the cabinets are rigidly constructed using MDF panels that are cross-braced internally. They also all have rear ports to augment the low-end, while the floorstanders use plinths (not photographed) to widen their footprint and provide greater stability, tightening the bass and improving stereo imaging.

Keeping it simple

While its higher-end designs feature point-source coaxial drivers, Fyne has taken a fairly traditional approach to the F300 Series' driver design, with a simple multi-fibre paper cone bass/midrange unit that uses a separate dust cap rather than a continuous profile cone. This is then

'The F300 Series auditioned here is considerably more affordable than Fyne Audio's premium towers'

enhanced with distinctive 'FyneFlute' technology, which essentially adds flutes – or grooves – in the driver's rubber surround. The aim here is to prevent colouration caused by sonic energy being reflected back down the cone. The centre speaker uses two midbass drivers (5in) while the other speakers feature a single 6in unit.

Fyne Audio's entry-level tweeter is also a combination of convention and innovation, with a Neodymium magnet system and a 1in polyester dome which hides from prying fingers behind a protective mesh cover. Built into this cover is a 'phase loss compensator', which Fyne Audio says delays the



output from specific areas of the dome, giving a smooth and extended response.

The speakers themselves boast an impressive set of claimed specifications. All are rated at 8 ohms, with sensitivities pegged at 90dB for the F302, 89dB for the F301, and 87dB for the F300C centre. That equates to them being extremely easy to drive, and the claimed frequency responses are also excellent given the price, with the F302 suggested to drop from 28kHz to 36Hz. The F301 standmount is quoted at 44Hz-28kHz and, as is normal for a centre speaker, the F300C has less low-end heft, being rated at 65Hz-28kHz.

While attention has been paid to the components in the F300 Series speakers, the designers of this budget bevy haven't forgotten about the outward appearance. At the risk of sounding superficial this remains an important aspect of a loudspeaker's design, because unless you're using them in a pitch-black room, they're going to be on display.

The F300 speakers are well-made for the money and genuinely attractive (if a little boxy), with a glossy black section wrapping around the tweeter and magnetic black fabric grilles to cover the bass/midrange drivers if you wish.

'Bass is clean, muscular and well defined, delivering deep impacts without obvious distortion'

Apart from the F300C, which only comes in black ash, there's a choice of walnut, black ash or light oak finishes – our F301 standmounts showcase the walnut option. Each speaker has a single pair of gold-plated terminals at the rear.

Fyne Audio's F3-8 subwoofer, as the name suggests, is based around a forward-facing 8in long-throw woofer, which is built into a downward ported cabinet. There's a claimed 425W of digital (DDX) amplification under the hood and a DSP engine enabling automatic dynamic range management and overload protection. There's also a Bass Boost function (selected via an on/off switch on the rear panel, below the normal/reverse phase switch) that gives a 3dB lift through the key 40Hz-70Hz frequencies, to rustle up a more impactful movie experience. The F3-8's cabinet has a black oak finish and sits on large rubber feet that provide support and isolation without damaging your floor.

I tested the Fyne Audio system in a standard 5.1 configuration, driven by an Arcam AVR850, with the F302 floorstanders either side of the screen and the F300C on a stand at the bottom centre. The F301s were positioned on stands either side of and just to the rear of the main listening position, while the F3-8 was at the front of the room away from any walls and corners. I used an Apple TV 4K and an Oppo UDP-203 disc spinner as sources.

The system needed some running in before any critical testing, but since this review coincided with the arrival of a new 4K projector, I was more than happy to sit through a bunch of movies.

Low-frequency fun

Loudspeakers usually have one element of their performance that makes the most immediate impression,



and with this 5.1 system it was the bass delivery. The F302 floorstanders can create a low-end presence at odds with their relatively small size. These aren't the biggest of speakers (they stand less than a metre high and are relatively narrow at 18cm) but they have plenty of tangible low-frequency extension. In addition, the F3-8 subwoofer seemed well integrated with the F302s, while also handling the heavy lifting and sounding bigger than its 8in driver specification would suggest.

It all adds up to a rich, weighty presentation, and this sense of subsonic presence was best demonstrated during the Saturn V launch in *First Man* (4K Blu-ray), where the system filled the room with massive amounts of low-frequency energy. I could almost feel the enormous rocket 'slipping the surly bonds of Earth' on its historic journey to the Moon. The bass was clean, muscular and well defined, delivering deep impact without obvious distortion and with plenty of headroom.

However it wasn't just a case of trouser-wetting low-end, there was also a pleasing subtlety to the bass. This was particularly evident in the sci-fi TV series *The Expanse* (Amazon Prime), which has a fantastic 5.1 soundmix. The sound designers deliberately use low frequencies during spacesuit sequences to create the sense of sound when in a vacuum, and the Fyne system conveyed this with a delightful precision.

For a sense of what the system could do as a whole, it was back to *First Man* and the X-15 test flight that opens the movie. This scene throws you straight into the cockpit with Neil Armstrong (Ryan Gosling), using a mix that's an absolute riot of multichannel surround sound.

The Fyne system handled it with real skill, maintaining a lovely tonal balance between all the speakers and combining them with well integrated bass. There are noises coming from every direction as the rocket plane is battered by turbulence before the sudden silence of space. The peace is then shattered as Armstrong literally bounces off the atmosphere, before having to fight to land what at this point is a glider with tiny wings. Through this F300 system, I felt I could hear every rivet and buckling piece of metal.

I then moved on to something slightly less intense, popping in the Ultra HD Blu-ray of *The House with a Clock in its Walls*. It's a more lighthearted movie but still has a dynamic mix with plentiful surround action, especially the constant ticking of clocks emanating from fore and aft. The F300C proved excellent at delivering dialogue in a clear and focused manner, and blended well with the floorstanders to create a pleasing front soundstage.

'Is there anybody in there?'

Fyne Audio has designed the F300 range to be versatile, hoping to deliver a sound that's good with both movies and music. This was ably demonstrated when I started watching *David Gilmour Live in Pompeii* (Blu-ray). The system, led by the floorstanders, revealed an excellent musicality combined with an openness that perfectly suited the concert's arena setting. Since the speakers are so easy to drive, they delivered each instrument with precision and clarity and little strain. Meanwhile, the centre speaker ensured Gilmour's vocals cut through the mix. If I had one complaint, it would be that these speakers are slightly too laid back, especially during Gilmour's majestic solo on *Comfortably Numb*.

SPECIFICATIONS

F302
DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 1in tweeter; 1 x 6in midbass driver **ENCLOSURE:** Rear-ported
FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED): 36Hz-28kHz **SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 90dB
POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED): 30W-120W **DIMENSIONS:** 190(w) x 932(h) x 271(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 13.3kg

F300C
DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 1in tweeter; 2 x 5in midbass drivers **ENCLOSURE:** Rear-ported
FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED): 65Hz-28kHz **SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 87dB
POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED): 25W-120W **DIMENSIONS:** 400(w) x 156(h) x 211(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 5.5kg

F301
DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 1in tweeter; 1 x 6in midbass driver **ENCLOSURE:** Rear-ported
FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED): 44Hz-28kHz **SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 89dB
POWER HANDLING: 25W-100W **DIMENSIONS:** 190(w) x 300(h) x 271(d)mm
WEIGHT: 5.3kg

F3-8 (subwoofer)
DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 8in woofer **ENCLOSURE:** Front-firing, downward-ported **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** Down to 35Hz **ONBOARD POWER (CLAIMED):** 425W (peak) DDX amplifier **REMOTE CONTROL:** No **DIMENSIONS:** 390(h) x 280(w) x 398(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 13kg **FEATURES:** Stereo phono line input; mono phono LFE input; normal-reverse phase switch; level control; bass boost feature (+3dB at 40Hz-70Hz); automatic standby; 12V trigger

PARTNER WITH



FIRST MAN: Damien Chazelle's prestige NASA drama has serious AV chops, combining a sensational Dolby Atmos soundtrack (on both its Blu-ray and 4K incarnations) with visuals culled from 16mm, 35mm and IMAX photography.

Finally I decided to change tack and spun Paul Verhoeven's satirical sci-fi masterpiece *Starship Troopers* (Ultra HD BD), which gave the system a chance to show all of its strengths. Basil Poledouris' militaristic score was given a driving urgency, dialogue always remained intelligible, and the set-piece combat sequences had a visceral impact. The system rendered the mix with plenty of fine detail, and had sufficient headroom to handle the explosions. Best of all, the tweeters had enough presence to ensure the high-frequency screeching of the bugs sounded suitably unnerving.

Fyne Audio is coming to town

For this affordable array, Fyne Audio's designers have sensibly concentrated on delivering speakers that keep things simple but do it very well. The result is a home cinema package that looks good and sounds better, handling both movies and music with skill and doing so at a price that is sure to please. The rest of the speaker market had better watch out, because in Fyne Audio they have some serious competition ■

HCC VERDICT



Fyne Audio F300 Series 5.1
 → £1,000 → www.fyneaudio.com

WE SAY: These easy-to-drive entry-level speakers will delight your ears – without busting your wallet – with their impressive balance across the frequency band.

2. A protective mesh shields tweeters, and magnetic fabric grilles cover the midbass drivers

3. The speakers are also available in walnut (pictured) and light oak