

WHAT HI★FI?

TEMPTATIONS

EXPENSIVE, YES. BUT YOU KNOW YOU WANT THEM

Fyne Audio Vintage Five

- Standmount speakers
- ★★★★★

WHAT HI★FI?
★★★★★



“The Fynes’ ability to float a broad soundstage and fill it with precisely located instruments is excellent”

We have something of a soft spot for Fyne Audio’s Vintage speaker range. It mixes old-world aesthetics with thoroughly modern engineering in a way that we find hugely appealing. The four-strong series starts with the diminutive Five we have on test here and ends at the wardrobe-sized Vintage Fifteen that packs a whopping 38cm mid/bass driver and costs around ten times as much.

While the three bigger models, all floorstanders, can fill some pretty large rooms with sound, the Fyne Vintage Five standmount speakers are more suited to cosier spaces. That’s easy to understand given that they stand just 35cm tall and sport a relatively small 12.5cm mid/bass driver. This being a Fyne product, it is no surprise that a tweeter sits at the centre of the mid/bass unit in an arrangement the company calls Isoflare. The idea is that the acoustic centres of each driver (the place where it appears to generate sound) are on the same axis and better time-aligned. The benefits over conventional separate driver placements range from more even dispersion characteristics to better integration between the two units.

WHAT HI-FI?

SOUND



BUILD



COMPATIBILITY



FOR

- Clarity and dynamic presentation
- Impressive resolution
- Precise stereo imaging
- Lovely build and finish

AGAINST

- Work best in smaller spaces
- Need to be partnered with care

VERDICT

Fyne’s Vintage Five are charming and capable performers that excel in smaller rooms

LUXURIOUS, TACTILE EXPERIENCE

That tweeter is a 19mm magnesium-dome compression unit driven by a vented neodymium motor system; it is linked to the multi-fibre paper mid/bass unit through a high-quality second-order crossover. This filter network is cryogenically treated to relieve internal stresses in the components and crosses over at 1.9kHz. The internal wiring is Van Den Hul silver-plated copper.

The mid/bass unit’s indented rubber surround is shaped to improve its ability to damp cone-resonances, for a cleaner, less distorted sound. The bass is tuned by a downward-facing reflex port that fires onto a cone-shaped diffuser. Fyne Audio calls this arrangement Basstrax and it is designed to disperse low-frequency sounds more uniformly. This approach makes the speakers less fussy about their position relative to walls.

Above this is the ‘Presence’ dial. This tone control only affects the 2.5-5.0kHz region and is relatively subtle, with a maximum adjustment of plus or minus 3dB. That frequency band affects how we perceive vocal clarity and stereo image depth. In our reference set-up, we favour leaving the Presence control in its central position, where the speaker sounds most balanced to us.

There is no denying these speakers feel like pieces of expensive furniture rather than hi-fi components. The speaker’s enclosure is made of high-density birch ply and internally damped by a combination of bonded acoustic fibre and polyether foam. Its walnut veneer is hand finished and those lovely dark inlays on the front baffle are burr walnut. It all adds up to an impressively luxurious tactile experience.

At the back of the cabinet are a single pair of WBT Nextgen binding posts and a terminal for grounding. It is well worth connecting this grounding terminal to your amp: it results in a small but definite improvement in clarity and refinement.

These speakers have a claimed sensitivity of 87dB/W/m and a nominal impedance of 8 ohms, so they shouldn’t be too demanding to drive when used in smaller rooms. Relatively low-powered valve amplifiers with outputs ranging from 20 watts per channel upwards are likely to get decent volume levels. We have no issue with loudness when using transistor-based integrated designs such as Arcam’s A5 (50 watts per channel), Naim’s Nait XS3 (70 watts per channel) or PMC’s Cor (95 watts per channel) in our large 3 x 7 x 5m (hwd) test room. Our reference Burmester 088/911 MkIII reference amplifier (180 watts per channel) predictably drives the Vintage Five without issue, though these speakers can’t make the most of such an amplifier’s muscularity. Their strengths lie elsewhere.

These are small speakers, so it is no surprise that they work best in small to medium-sized rooms. We have heard them sound remarkably capable in larger spaces, but the inevitable limitations in terms of low-frequency reach and authority are obvious. While they will tolerate being put right up against a wall, we find that their bass turns a little lumpy, and stereo image depth flattens when used this way. It is much better to give them a little space to breathe.

The Fyne Vintage Five turn in a charming performance. They are never going to deliver seismic bass or be able to play at very high volume levels without sounding strained. This applies to a lesser or greater extent to every small speaker, though, and it is a fair to say that this little gem does better in these areas than we expected.

As we listen to Rag ‘n’ Bone Man’s *Human*, it is genuinely impressive just how much low-end heft the Five delivers for something so small. The lows are surprisingly taut and tuneful which speaks highly of the mid/bass unit and the effectiveness of that sophisticated Basstrax arrangement. These speakers sound cohesive and musical. The song’s simple but persistent rhythm comes through with momentum and there is plenty of attack when required. Detail levels are high and these boxes have no trouble organising all that information into something that holds our attention over longer listening sessions.

As we switch from Górecki’s *Symphony No.3* to Nina Simone’s *Feeling Good* it becomes clear that these are impressively transparent speakers. The differences between the various productions and recording technologies become obvious very quickly. It comes down to excellent resolution, low distortion and the ability to cope with both micro and macro dynamics convincingly. The Górecki piece shows off the Fyne’s terrific stereo imaging; their ability to float a broad soundstage and fill it with precisely located instruments is excellent. Tonally, these are reasonably balanced, but the higher frequencies could be a little sweeter and more refined. Partner with well-behaved electronics, though, and the bite and clarity of the top-end overshadow any lack of sophistication here.

The Nina Simone track bursts with energy and Simone comes through with unrestrained passion and drive. Some rivals may be more refined than these Fynes, but few deliver sound with such verve and articulation.

The Vintage Five’s retro appearance suggests that they are for those who yearn for the past, and their dinky size makes them harder to take seriously, especially at what looks to be a high price. But consider the exceptional build, quality of engineering and, when used in an appropriate system, terrific sound, and it is hard not to be won over. We certainly are.