



Premier league

There's plenty to like about this lofty but elegant floorstander in Fyne Audio's Premium range, as **David Price** discovers

O It's hard to talk about Fyne Audio without mentioning Tannoy, simply because – like Cyrus Audio and Mission – the former could not have existed without the latter. In 2017, Tannoy operations director Gabriel O'Donohue, product development director Stuart Wilkinson and design and engineering director Dr. Paul Mills all left to form Fyne Audio, along with various others. Although not every hi-fi enthusiast pays close attention to corporate rearrangements, it's important to know this because the F702 shares some design DNA with earlier Tannoy designs – so fans of the brand sound should automatically sit up and pay attention. Indeed, the company's management team boasts collective audio industry experience of over 200 years – something that money can't buy, and practically every other hi-fi 'start up' cannot muster.

It handles recordings with an innate sense of balance with no artificial plateaus

The new F702 is the middle model in Fyne Audio's premium range, neatly sandwiched above the F700 compact standmount and below the huge F703 floorstander. It's still pretty big by British standards, and most people's listening rooms will look a lot smaller with a pair in place. Its profile reminds me of – yes, you've guessed it – a big Tannoy loudspeaker, but there are plenty of detail points that differ. Most striking to my eye is the quality of finish; the smoothness of the piano black gloss cabinet lacquer on the supplied review sample is quite simply staggering. Glass-clear, it is better than any finish I've ever seen on a car; as such, it's surely a declaration of intent to any doubters or naysayers.

There's a lot more to the F702 than just a fancy finish, though. The three drive units are key to its sound, not just in what they are but how they are arranged. The lion's share of the work is done by the 200mm IsoFlare point-source driver; this is a coaxial treble and mid/bass unit, and works with a 200mm multi-fibre bass driver. The 2.5-way system crosses over at 1.7kHz and 250Hz respectively, using a passive low loss crossover with second order low pass and first order high pass filtering; all components are cryogenically treated.

The closer you look at the drivers, the more interesting things get. The upper IsoFlare has at its heart a 25mm magnesium dome compression tweeter with neodymium magnet system and a multi-fibre mid/bass cone with a special FyneFlute surround. This is a specially designed roll surround, oriented to stop energy being reflected back down the cone and thus distorting the sound. The 'non-homogenous', variable-geometry cone interface is said to reduce coloration. Design supremo Dr. Paul Mills won't tell me what fibres are used in the cone, saying only that: "It's a Fynely guarded secret!" What he can disclose, however, is that the F702's large cabinet has two cavities inside to separate the main drive units; the bass unit uses the company's own BassTrax Tractrix diffuser with a downward-firing port.

The result is a large and heavy loudspeaker, albeit one that's exceptionally well built – even at its lofty price. Weighing 30.5kg, it isn't something you can whisk out of its packing box at will; you'll need to be careful and methodical about unpacking it. Then it's a case of getting the positioning just right; I find that it works surprisingly well when placed close to my boundary wall, but for best results it needs at least half a metre of breathing space. The speaker's metal plinth includes very high-quality

► DETAILS

PRODUCT
Fyne Audio F702

ORIGIN
UK

TYPE
2.5-way floorstanding loudspeaker

WEIGHT
30.5kg

DIMENSIONS (WxHxD)
384 x 1,111 x 440mm

FEATURES

- 1x 25mm IsoFlare magnesium dome tweeter
- 1x 200mm IsoFlare multi-fibre mid/bass driver
- 1x 200mm IsoFlare multi-fibre bass driver
- Quoted sensitivity: 92dB/1W/1m (8ohm)

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spikes; cups are also included for those who don't want to kill their carpets or polished wooden floors. The supplied grilles fit easily via magnetic mounting, but all listening is completed with them removed. The F702 sounds best in my room with a slight toe-in, but needs some run-in time. At first, it sounds quite shut in, but after an hour's listening things snap into focus to create an expansive image that's way outside of the cabinets.

Sound quality

The company quotes a power handling of 30 to 200W, and the speaker can stand 100W RMS of power continuously. Sensitivity is put at 92dB per watt, which is very good by class standards and means that many valve amplifier users will naturally be drawn to the F702. Nominal impedance is 8ohm, and Fyne Audio says that in a typical room, the frequency response is 30Hz to 34kHz (at -6dB). Being a human being, my ears prevent me from verifying the higher frequency claim, but the back of my chest confirms that the F702 goes down extremely low in my listening room, at least.

One of the joys of loudspeaker reviewing is the sheer diversity of sound you get to hear. Experience soon teaches you to expect a certain style of presentation from a particular type of speaker; for example, Quad electrostatics are way different to horn-loaded Klipschs. So with a large floorstander with a point-source treble/midrange driver and an

Substantial binding posts with bi-wiring capabilities



IN SIGHT



- 1 25mm IsoFlare dome tweeter
- 2 200mm IsoFlare mid/bass driver
- 3 Bi-wireable binding posts
- 4 200mm bass driver



equally sizeable bass unit, odds are that it's going to be expansive, widescreen fun – and so it proves.

Out of the box

Fyne Audio's distinctive IsoFlare coaxial driver isn't the only thing that makes it sound as it does, yet it certainly plays a big part. The most obvious and arguably impressive aspect of its sound is its excellent soundstaging, which takes the music right out of the box. Nick Drake's *Hazy Jane II* highlights this all too clearly; the album from which it is taken – *Bryter Later* – isn't the world's most audiophile recording and can be a little underwhelming due to its tonal dryness and opaque early seventies analogue recording quality. Yet as this speaker gets into its stride, you can hear it dissolve out of the cabinets like a fizzing Alka-Seltzer disappearing into its glass of water. The stereo soundstage grows in size, opening up to reveal what's actually quite a decent recording with plenty of things going on. All the strands of the mix such as guitars, bass and drums are very accurately located, but most impressive is the rendering of Drake's vocals, which hover

ethereally between the speakers and hang back a little, too. The effect is quite mesmeric, and for me the magic of a well-done point-source design.

The second most obvious facet of this big speaker is its tonal balance. This turns out to be very even and extended, with no obvious shouty bits that alter the sound of the source material. Take Duran Duran's *Lonely In Your Nightmare* for example; a heavily

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compressed early eighties pop record it's strong on the EQ. It can sound a little thin and tinselly on lesser loudspeakers but the F702 gives a resolutely even and balanced rendition, making it very clear that it's a wideband design. No excuses are needed for its deep, extended bass response; it goes down very low and yet isn't in the least bit lumpy. Instead it handles all recordings with an innate sense of balance, with no artificial plateaus here or there to give

The IsoFlare coaxial tweeter/midrange mates perfectly with the bass driver

things an extra fillip. This is a sign of a seriously designed big floorstander for me; all that extra cabinet volume should be there to make the bass deeper, not louder.

At the other end of the frequency range, the tweeter does a good – if not quite stellar – job. To my ears it isn't quite as delicate or insightful as some designs I have heard with ribbon treble units, but this type of drive unit brings its own problems – one of which can be dispersion issues, so it's swings and roundabouts. The fast hit ride cymbals on the Duran Duran track are great to hear; arriving right on time and sounding smoother and silkier than many metal dome tweeters I have heard. Some might actually want just a little more bite; for example, put on the nineties pop of Saint Etienne's *He's On The Phone* and it almost sounds too refined and balanced to indelibly stamp the music on you. This is very much a judgement call by Fyne Audio I suspect; those with the means and space to afford such a speaker probably won't be listening to retro electro dance every waking hour – and instead might seek program material that is more subtle, insightful and even handed to play.



FLARE FOR DESIGN

Designed and developed inhouse at the company's Glasgow R&D facility, the IsoFlare driver is Fyne Audio's ideal type of coaxial drive unit. Designer Dr. Paul Mills explains that it is a true point-source where the mid/bass driver shares a common centre with the high-frequency unit, noting: "The complete audio spectrum radiates isotropically from the driver, giving a spherical wavefront, and the phase response is more linear (constant group delay) than a discrete driver configuration. Also, it better preserves the harmonic structure of complex sounds." Having previously worked with countless drive units at Tannoy, he is highly experienced in optimising it. Fyne

Audio's IsoFlare uses a rigid cast aluminium chassis that's light so doesn't store energy. This marries to a bespoke multi-fibre cone with a FyneFlute surround, and the light and stiff magnesium dome. There's a vented rear chamber in the neodymium tweeter magnet, which is designed to place low-frequency resonance well below the crossover region. The unique geometry of the tweeter's waveguide is said to provide a flat frequency response while avoiding internal reflections. The end result is a drive unit that generates exceptional stereo imaging, with less dependency on room placement in order to give of its very best.

Sunset by Frederick Delius with Julian Lloyd Webber and Jiaxin Cheng on cello might be more representative of what many of this loudspeaker's natural customers use it for – and here the F702 positively blossoms. Alongside the aforementioned vast soundstaging and imaging precision, it is very gratifying to hear so much detail from the recording. This isn't an ultra-forensic speaker – some others dig deeper – but it's still highly informative about, for example, the textural quality of the cellos. Here one can get a good sense of them being real acoustic instruments, rather than digital facsimiles, and enjoy their natural timbre and resonance. The drive units are obviously of very high quality and mate up well to one another; at the same time, there's very little to be heard from the cabinet either.

There's no doubting the many qualities of this big loudspeaker; it is stellar in some respects and in others nothing less than excellent. Its handling of rhythms and dynamics is highly accomplished, albeit not quite up there with its imaging. The way the progressive rock of Steve Hackett's *Star Of Sirius* rolls along and how it tracks the subtle dynamic accenting of this great guitarist's playing, is very enjoyable. Yet this is not a loudspeaker that tries too hard to deliver sonic fireworks; it's less showy and more subtle than that. People wanting a 'character speaker'

that wows the listener within seconds of setting ears on it may find it a little too cultured. Personally, I find myself really warming to its presentation over time; the F702 has a knack of getting the basics very right indeed, and the result is always a most enjoyable listen.

Conclusion

With true high-end performance – especially in its imaging and soundstaging – the Fyne Audio F702 is an excellent large loudspeaker in its own right. It ticks a good deal of important boxes while having very few flaws and when you consider that in the great pantheon of high-end floorstanders it isn't actually particularly expensive at all, it begins to look an even more impressive proposition ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY
★★★★★
LIKE: Soundstaging; imaging; insight; balance; bass

VALUE FOR MONEY
★★★★★
DISLIKE: Even handedness won't please all

BUILD QUALITY
★★★★★
WE SAY: Hugely capable, excellent value floorstander

EASE OF DRIVE
★★★★★

OVERALL
★★★★★

Q&A

Dr. Paul Mills
Technical director, Fyne Audio



DP: How would you describe your acoustic design philosophy?

PM: Simply, it's about purity of design to deliver a truly engaging musical presentation. The IsoFlare driver is key to what we do, but the attention to detail crosses all aspects of the loudspeaker design process from the initial R&D to the final cosmetic finish. As a new company with decades of loudspeaker experience across the management team, we have had the luxury of developing everything from scratch and the expertise to really push the boundaries of acoustic design and engineering. It boils down to our combined passion for music and delivering the best possible sound in the home. Nothing in the Fyne Audio range gets signed off until the entire team agree that we have created a product that delivers class-leading musical performance at its price.

Why did you opt to use a magnesium tweeter dome?

It is lighter than more commonly used materials such as titanium and aluminium, and has a higher speed of sound propagation. It is also inherently well damped and has a better controlled resonance at break-up frequency. On the downside, it's a difficult material to work with and form, and considerably more expensive than the common options. As such, magnesium diaphragm HF units are the preserve of Fyne Audio's premium ranges.

Why use a 'multi-fibre' cone?

Controlling the rigidity and damping of a large surface area bass driver while keeping the mass as low as possible to improve the transient response is a balancing act. Materials like polypropylene are well damped and relatively low cost, but lack rigidity compared with a well designed fibrous pulp mix, so can sound a bit dead in the midrange. So on premium products like the F700 series, we have developed bespoke fibre mixes to create optimum cone mechanical performance for our IsoFlare drivers.



One of the closest rivals is the new £7,700 Spondor D9. A three-way, four-driver floorstander, this speaker sports a conventional box rather than a curved cabinet. In one way it has a similar smooth and civilised tonal balance, yet the Spondor can't match the Fyne Audio's superlative soundstaging and imaging. Conversely, the F702 isn't quite as snappy in the bass or as delicate in the treble. Both are great speakers, so try before you buy.