

ACOUSTIC ENERGY 3-SERIES 5.1 → Approx £2,000

Three really is the magic number

UK speaker brand Acoustic Energy is on a charm offensive with its newly-designed 3-Series.

Ed Selley sits back and prepares to be seduced

The 3-Series range also includes floorstanders for larger setups



AV INFO

PRODUCT:
Standmount 5.1 speaker array

POSITION:
The first of three new ranges – the 3-Series is the middle offering

PEERS:
KEF Q Series;
Monitor Audio Silver



ACOUSTIC ENERGY IS best known for helping start the high-end standmount market with the original AE1, but it's been an equally potent force in multichannel systems over the years as well. The Neo Compact package I reviewed last year was an inspired pairing of three pairs of the Compact bookshelf speaker and a Neo subwoofer. Certainly, it was a bit of a bargain.

What you see here is not an expedient collection of existing components but an all-new range of speakers. The 3-Series has been developed in-house and intends to combine the engineering virtues of the classic Acoustic Energy models with some 21st-

century wizardry and aesthetics. This system comprises two pairs of the £425-per-pair 301 standmount, the £350 307 centre speaker and the £800 308 subwoofer. A floorstander (the 305) retails for £1,000 per pair.

The 301 is a two-way standmount cabinet with a 4.5in spun, hard-anodised aluminium cone and a 1in soft dome tweeter. The mid/bass driver could really only be Acoustic Energy thanks to the pointed dust cap and substantial surround. The tweeter is a bit more of a departure, though, as Acoustic Energy has usually preferred metal up until this point.

The cabinet is front-ported via a slot, which should allow the 301 to be placed relatively

close to a rear wall if you need to. Around the back, a single pair of sturdy terminals is fitted. This should support bare wire, plugs or spades without a problem. There's no option for bi-amping, though.

The 307 centre makes use of two of the aluminium drivers and a single tweeter in an elongated cabinet. One thing to note is that the cabinet for the 307 is as deep (slightly deeper in fact) as the 301. This is logical in an acoustic sense – with the same drivers in place, there's no reason why it should be anything else – but if your centre shares space on an AV rack with your screen you might want to take this into account. >



REVIEWS



The 308 subwoofer is by far the burliest member of the set. This is a downward-firing design with a 12in pulp driver powered by a 500W internal amplifier. The control panel is reasonably extensive and includes separate LFE and low-level inputs as well as looped outputs. There is no EQ or notch filter option, but given that most AVRs will handle this, that shouldn't be too much of a problem.

Overall, the package is one of the best pieces of industrial design that Acoustic Energy has come up with in yonks. The cabinets are well proportioned and finished in high gloss, with a matt black frontpanel which

'The Acoustic Energy array easily captures all the nuances of *Super 8's* rich Blu-ray soundtrack'

can be covered by a magnetically-affixed grill. The effect of 'too much black' is neatly avoided by the use of a chrome surround for each driver; it effectively lifts the design very nicely. A white finish is also available.

Ready, set, go!

There is no dedicated stand for the 301 but sat on a pair of Soundstyle Z2's they delivered good results, and the large subwoofer seemed perfectly happy in my 'normal' position, inboard from the front left and right speakers.

With the cheery violence of *Dredd 3D* on Blu-ray, the Acoustic Energy array reproduces the onscreen brutality with a deftness and assurance that is deeply impressive and extremely entertaining. Combining different driver materials in the same speaker can sometimes result in a little tonal imbalance, but the 300s are seamless from top to bottom, handing over from speaker to speaker beautifully. The performance across the front trio, in particular, is a single superbly convincing soundstage.

Chrome trim to the driver surrounds gives the 3-Series cabinets a touch of class

Detail retrieval is also extremely good. With the rich soundtrack of *Super 8*, the Acoustic Energy package captures the nuances of the increasingly abnormal experience of the town of Lillian. The spread of sound from each speaker is a neat balance between being too broad and diffuse and equally not beaming a narrow signal at a single sweet spot. In a normal UK lounge, the results are likely to be entirely convincing.

The hi-fi heritage of Acoustic Energy is apparent when it comes to music and stereo, too. The 301 is a bit of a star in two-channel terms, and if you are looking for a speaker to handle an equal balance of tunes and movies this is a strong contender. It's rated frequency response, down to 48Hz, is sufficient for listening without the woofer if you fancy.

This isn't a slur on the 308 subwoofer, of course. Throughout my time with it, the sub didn't really put a foot wrong and managed to keep up with its agile passive brethren. It's a civilised and refined piece of equipment, sharing some of the traits of the other speakers, in that low-level detail is generally convincing and there is no shortage of low-end shove. Its control is impressive but on serious bass occasions – trains crashing, aliens wreaking havoc and other day-to-day stuff – the 308 can occasionally be a little polite.

This minor limitation of the subwoofer is shared by the rest of speakers as well; how serious an issue it is will depend on your listening preferences. The tightness and smoothness is extremely impressive, but every now and then I found myself wanting a little more of the sheer vitality that other Acoustic Energy speakers have demonstrated.

Yet this last point shouldn't detract much from what is a seriously impressive offering. Acoustic Energy has often produced designs that perform well at real-world prices and made very attractive speakers. In the 3-Series it's done it again. Fantastic looks, well bolted together and enjoyable to listen to ■

SPECIFICATIONS

301 STANDMOUNT

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 1in soft dome tweeter; 1 x 4.5in hard anodised aluminium cone

ENCLOSURE: Front slot-ported

FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 48Hz-32kHz (+/- 3dB)

SENSITIVITY: 87dB

POWER HANDLING: 150W

DIMENSIONS: 185(w) x 300(h) x 250(d)mm

WEIGHT: 5.5kg

307 CENTRE

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 1in soft dome tweeter; 2 x 4.5in hard anodised aluminium cones

ENCLOSURE: Front slot-ported

FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 45Hz-32kHz (+/- 3dB)

SENSITIVITY: 88dB

POWER HANDLING: 175W

DIMENSIONS: 450(w) x 185(h) x 260(d)mm

WEIGHT: 9kg

308 SUBWOOFER

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 12in pulp cone

ENCLOSURE: Sealed

FREQUENCY RESPONSE: Down to 28Hz (-6dB)

ON BOARD POWER: 500W

REMOTE CONTROL: No

DIMENSIONS: 360(w) x 360(h) x 360(d)mm

WEIGHT: 20kg

CONNECTIONS: 1 x phono LFE input; 2 x phono line-level inputs; 2 x phono line-level outputs (loopthrough)

HCC VERDICT



Acoustic Energy 3-Series 5.1

→ £2,000 Approx → www.acoustic-energy.co.uk

→ Tel: 01285 654432

HIGHS: Excellent sound with movies and music; superb aesthetics; very impressive build

LOWS: Can lack the last degree of excitement; doesn't support bi-wiring/bi-amping; subwoofer is quite bulky

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★