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AUDITION



**GRYPHON
PENDRAGON**
LOUDSPEAKER
SYSTEM

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“ *The soundstage is immense in all directions... it's a generous open window to the music!* ”



Start with big, black, breathtaking industrial design. Then add in awe-some sound and being darn hot and heavy! That's the parlance when talking Gryphon amplifiers. And some years back, it was these beasts—mirroring the imagined graceful power of a mythical creature said to be part eagle, part lion—which catapulted the-then budding Danish company to the world stage in a storm of acclaim.

Later, Gryphon expanded its portfolio to include digital products—standalone reference level CD players and DACs—cables and even audio rack systems all on par with the excellence of their amplification brethren. So, having enjoyed extraordinary international success with the Gryphon line

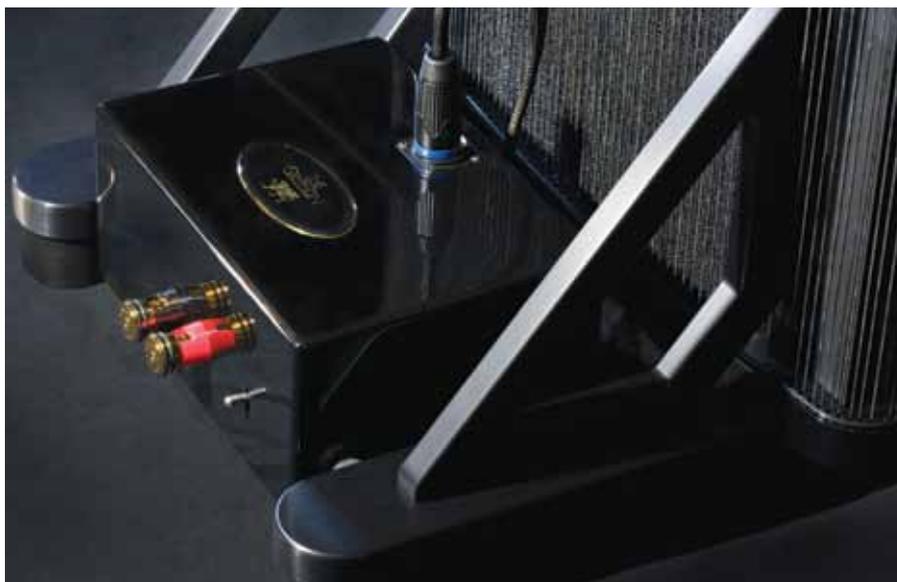
of electronics and accessories, what next for a growing business rich in engineering talent and with a charismatic owner with a keen sense of design aesthetics in Flemming E. Rasmussen at the helm? Well, in order to complete the chain and offer the full stable of gear required to run a high-end system, Gryphon embarked on an ambitious program that would, over a relatively short period of just a few years, see a developing line of outstanding speaker designs, introduced by the over-performing and somewhat underrated Cantata standmount. Since that formidable beginning Gryphon has followed with a number of designs at several price points and featuring varied driver, crossover and enclosure technolo-

gies. This steady progression informed the Pendragon, an imposing four-tower design that is as ambitious as it is technically impressive and now the company's flagship loudspeaker model.

The Pendragon features two towers per side in a three-way configuration. Each high/mid tower houses four Air Motion Transformer 'super-tweeters' and a two-metre tall dipolar planar magnetic thin-film ribbon transducer handling the mid-range. The second tower is home to eight custom-designed 203mm woofers driven by bespoke Gryphon Class-A/B amplifiers rated at 1,000-watts continuous and said to be capable of 4,000-watts on peaks. And just as an aside, the in-built amplifiers are no garden-variety plate amps, they're Gryphon designed marvels with a capacitor bank totalling over 200,000 micro-farads, 18 high-current bipolar output transistors, zero global negative feedback and a massive Holmgren magnetically shielded transformer.

SCALES OF POWER

The imposing stature and construction of the Pendragon does nothing but inspire confidence. And further reinforcement of the design talent is provided by some clever electronics that allow the large design—with its potential room-related issues—to better fit into a variety of acoustic environments. The system features a remote control (a nice solid aluminium piece) that allows a number of adjustments, namely the setting of the bass system's Q, the low-cut point, system mute and, very usefully, overall bass level trimming which can all be performed on the fly.



Settings are displayed on a small vacuum fluorescent screen panel with clear and large characters so, when placed ideally at the foot of one of the towers, it can easily be seen.

The drivers are a *tour-de-force* of transducer design and have been specifically chosen to deliver high output and low distortion. Starting up top, frequency-wise, we have four Air Motion Transformer tweeters. This is a superb high frequency driver that has been around for decades (invented by Dr Oskar Heil) but its contemporary incarnation has been refined via benefits brought about by modern materials and magnet technologies. The foil is suspended between

powerful magnets and acts much as a ribbon tweeter does except for featuring a folded—or pleated—diaphragm rather than a ribbon's flat membrane. This arrangement allows increased air movement for less foil excursion—it contracts and expands accordion-like, moving far more air than a standard flat foil ribbon. The AMT array can be level-adjusted via a +1dB level control.

The midrange is catered for via a two-metre-tall wide-band, dipolar line source ribbon driver fixed to a massively-stiff self-reinforced three-layer steel enclosure. The large surface area of the ribbon is conducive to efficient thermal dissipation for high power handling and low distortion.

The second tower features an array of eight active high output 203mm bass drivers with massive triple magnet systems. Superb control, depth and power are promised via the aforementioned built-in amplification. The foot of the bass tower—which is stabilised by steel outriggers—serves as the location for the external crossover which is housed in a gloss black enclosure and features Gryphon custom binding posts. On the rear panel you'll find controls which replicate the remote's own. Further, there are connections for XLR/RCA inputs and outputs (switchable), a pro-style multi-pin remote display connector, a 12V remote socket, D-Sub data connector, IEC socket and an on/off switch.



Specifications are as impressive as you'd expect at this level. Frequency response is a very wide 16Hz to 32kHz within a ± 3 dB envelope depending on Q setting. The Duelund topology crossover hands the bass drivers over to the mid ribbon at 250Hz which in turn hands over to the AMT array at 18kHz—yes, nigh on super-tweeter territory. Having such a wide bandwidth for the midrange promises continuity in tonal balance and reduced crossover artefacts.

The Pendragon is unashamedly a luxury item. Construction, fit-and-finish, application of technologies; everything about it—and I mean *everything*—is just pure excellence in manufacturing and industrial design. The Pendragon is attractive (in that black Gothic Gryphon style), even if it's imposing, but a modicum of marital harmony is granted by the 'virtually unlimited' number of finish options offered for the bass enclosures' side panels.



Listening becomes an experience and analytics are set aside as the speaker seduces and astonishes

SHOWROOM SESSIONS

With remote in hand and a whole stack of familiar music tracks on silver disc, I was given free reign for an extended music session in Gryphon distributor Kedcorp's large auditioning room. As a speaker system of this calibre demands, the ancillary equipment for the audition was of the highest order. Sources were the Metronome T5 Signature and C8 CD player/DAC, briefly a CEC USB DAC, the Gryphon Mirage preamplifier, Gryphon Mephisto amplifier (for the mid/highs towers) and all-Gryphon guideline and PSC reference cables. The listening environment was a large open carpeted area with a somewhat low ceiling. This last element is not so crucial given the line source nature of the design. Of more importance is the speaker-to-wall positioning given the dipole configuration of the midrange ribbon. Here, there was a good clearance of around two metres.

Let's start with the first things that will hit you (almost quite literally) once you start listening—scale and dynamic impact. The Pendragon speakers are among the most dynamic I've heard and join a select few designs I would call the best available. Some large designs have a very powerful and dynamic bass but the mids and highs may seem tame, or of lesser visceral power, in comparison. Others are the converse. The Pendragon is consistently devastating across the board from its 16Hz depths to its soaring upper limits at 32kHz. And if you dial the bass just right to suit your room (easily done via the bass settings) the sound remains formidably coherent and tonally consistent throughout the spectrum. It's an effortless dynamic envelope that would seemingly extend to the listener's cognitive limits. Very telling at the audition was the fact that given the large space in which I was listening—far larger than any likely private room—the bass was fully adjustable to my particular taste (which leans towards the moderate) so dialling the low-end down a tad made it just right for me. For bass heads, the platter is overabundant should you wish to indulge.

Also abounding is the sense of scale; play an orchestral piece and psychoacous-

tics fool you into just about *believing* you're in the concert hall. This is no mean feat and only a handful of designs, in my experience, are able to convey that level of majesty and, consequently, drama.

Of course, given the largess of the presentation, the soundstage is immense in all directions—width, depth and height. And the musical layers are peeled, nuances are expressed fluently—it's a generous open window to music. The Pendragon handles demanding transients in its stride while being true in tone, exact with detail and honest to recording and ancillaries. Listening becomes an experience and analytics are set aside as the speaker seduces and astonishes. Pendragon *communicates* the music.

AUDITIONING SCARS

Throughout my career as a professional reviewer I have had the privilege of hearing some remarkable audio systems at shows, at distributors' and retailers' auditioning rooms, at fellow audiophiles' homes and, of course, in my own listening environment.

There has been a plethora of sonic experiences accumulated over the years but the Pendragon system has irrefutably ploughed an indelibly scarring impression. It joins a very select group and makes an extraordinarily profound mark on a landscape sparsely populated by the very best available today as current loudspeaker technology stands. And that is a precious and rare experience indeed...  Edgar Kramer

GRYPHON PENDRAGON LOUDSPEAKER SYSTEM

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