

Avalon Saga

IT'S NOT EVERY DAY ONE CAN SPEND TIME LISTENING TO A PAIR OF AVALON'S SAGA LOUDSPEAKERS – AND NOT JUST BECAUSE THEY ARE EXPENSIVE (€170,000) AND TOO BIG FOR THE AVERAGE EUROPEAN LIVING ROOM AT 1.78 M TALL. THE SPEAKERS, HANDBUILT BY THE COMPANY IN THE SHADE OF THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS IN COLORADO, ARE ALSO VERY RARE AND SELDOM DEMONSTRATED. JOSÉ VICTOR HENRIQUES DESCRIBES HIS RECENT BRIEF ENCOUNTER

Only two pairs of Avalon's Saga speakers have so far made it to Europe: it takes almost six months from order to delivery, which is indicative of how much Avalon owner and designer Neil Patel cares for his products, and the laborious handcrafting that goes into them. One of the two pairs is in Italy, and the other has only recently arrived in Portugal – which is where I got to listen to them.

The Avalon Saga is, by any standards, an extraordinary speaker, and not just in terms of price, size and weight – even though 118kg apiece, while substantial, sets no new records for flagship speakers. Indeed, a Focal Grande Utopia EM Evo would not just tower over the Saga, at a bit over 2m tall, but weighs just on two and a half times as much, while a Wilson Audio WAMM Master Chronosonic is even taller, and a back-breaking 408kg.

So, while (relatively) tall and (fairly) massive, these speakers are neither imposing nor menacing in their design, and in fact could almost be said to look somewhat delicate. Like all of Avalon's top-end models they boast somewhat exotic, sculptural lines, with their multifaceted, polyhedral shapes having a distinct air of ancient Egyptian architecture about them. However, they're less extreme than the flagship Tesseract, named after the mythical four-dimensional hypercube, and the culmination of Patel's quest to control diffraction.

The Saga uses some of the technology developed for the Tesseract in a cabinet more alike the former Osiris and Isis models – see what I mean about the Egyptian influences? – with the complex multi-baffle geometry and alignment working as a concave lens, designed to place the acoustic centre slightly above the ear-line of a seated listener despite the height of the speakers.

It also draws on the low noise technology developed for the Tesseract project, while evolving on the pin-point focus accuracy of the Isis, now with the implementation of a full-range driver array comprising a 7in radial-magnet ceramic midrange, two 13in Nomex/Kevlar composite bass units and a new 1in carbon/glass concave tweeter. All the drivers use 'proprietary magnetics technology', based around Neodymium, to 'increase energy transfer and reduce noise floor,' and claim purely pistonic behaviour, with 'no diaphragm break-up modes within 70dB of signal.'

The crossovers, meanwhile, are entirely hard-wired, with no PCBs, and use 'proprietary all-phase crossover topologies' as well as delivering 'control of all magnetic field interaction.'

The aim of the Saga, Patel says, is 'a large dynamic system that behaves like a small monitor, revealing the most subtle details of space... within an envelope of explosive sound pressure contrasts.' To that end, he explains, the speaker uses 'constrained-mode damping to absorb cabinet

