



Acoustic Energy AE320

SENSIBLY-PRICED, BEAUTIFULLY FINISHED AND SLENDER ENOUGH TO FIT INTO MANY A ROOM, THESE BRITISH-MADE FLOORSTANDERS SOUND FINE, TOO

It's hard to believe that it was way back in 1987 that a new British loudspeaker company called Acoustic Energy burst on to the scene with the compact AE1 loudspeaker, which garnered much praise and sold like the proverbial hot cakes. In 1994 the company accepted a partnership with an overseas investor and like many other British brands moved some manufacturing to the Far East, at the same time expanding its sales and marketing activities around the world.

Today, the company is once again fully British-owned, and headquartered in the Cotswold town of Tetbury. Manufacturing is still carried out in China, under close quality control by the UK directors, but they're working on plans to return manufacturing to Europe. Acoustic Energy has never lost its commitment to the design and manufacture of loudspeakers and has avoided the temptation to branch out into electronics or other distractions.

Thus it was that in early December one of the aforementioned directors loaded a pair of the company's £1600 AE320 slim floorstanding loudspeakers into his car and delivered them to Kelly Towers. The car in question was a three-door Mini, so that was impressive: as a fellow Mini owner, it's good to know that our choice of vehicle is not as impractical as it might appear!

Unboxed and spiked, the speakers were carefully positioned in what I have determined is the sweet spot for loudspeaker placement in our 14'x12' lounge: toed in towards my listening chair, the inside rear corners are 58cm from the rear wall. From the listening position, and with the black grilles attached

the AE320s don't visually overpower the senses: at a metre tall, 17.5cm wide and 32cm deep, these are substantial enclosures but drew no word of complaint from Mrs Kelly, which is always good news!

The review pair were finished in a very good-looking walnut veneer over 18mm MDF panels, the cabinet using proprietary bracing technology trickled down from the company's Reference Series, while its base is pre-loaded with what's described as "an inert mass material". This adds damping to reduce cabinet colourations, and also make the AE320 very stable, meaning it doesn't need a plinth, aiding the impression of slimness.

The speaker certainly feels very 'planted' on its spikes on a carpeted hard floor: we have neither small children or dogs, but my sense was that the AE320s would be a safe choice where the listening space is sometimes shared with smaller creatures.

There are four drive units arranged vertically: three 13cm midrange and bass drivers, custom-made for Acoustic Energy, and above those a 28mm aluminium tweeter. The main drivers are made of a ceramic/aluminium sandwich material, with an ultra-