

Review of TAD CE1TX by
W. Jennings, 08/2023, on:



Editor's Choice 2023

TAD CE1TX Loudspeakers

Reference quality resolution, timbre, clarity, detail, and the most accurate imaging we've ever heard from a stand-mounted loudspeaker. The TAD CE1TX are very special loudspeakers.



Listening to the TAD CE1TX Loudspeakers at the recent T.H.E. Show in Costa Mesa was both exhilarating and depressing; the sound quality in the rather noisy confines of a trade show was one of the best demonstrations I had experienced in many years.

Why depressing?

Having just upgraded my digital front-end including a new dCS DAC and headphone amplifier, there was no chance that acquiring a pair was a possibility in the near future.

When TAD offered to send me the show pair to review, it felt like the winning Powerball ticket had fallen into my lap.

Technical Audio Device Laboratories (TAD) has been in existence since the 1970s and this high-end offshoot of Pioneer has developed a global reputation for audio engineering excellence; the products were originally designed for studio applications but once audiophiles were afforded the opportunity to experience them in home settings — the chase was certainly on.

Some have made the comparison that TAD's current lineup represents Acura in the Honda hierarchy, but that is not a very accurate representation of the differences. Current TAD models are more akin to Honda's F1 race car compared to the Honda Civic if we are being truthful when comparing Pioneer and TAD.

There is also a rather substantial difference when it comes to pricing; TAD's products are featured in some of the top recording and editing studios in the world and command anywhere from \$30,000 USD or more.

The first three decades saw the manufacturer focus on the pro audio category and while the occasional pair would end up in a mastering engineer's home system, there was never really a consumer version of their products.



TAD R1 Reference Loudspeakers

All of that began to change in 2007 with the TAD R1 Reference Loudspeakers; at nearly \$165,000 if we account for inflation over the last 16 years, the Reference One loudspeakers were beyond the financial means of most audiophiles with the exception of those putting together systems in the six figure range.

Having been fortunate enough to hear them with comparable electronics, the TAD R1 are still one of the best loudspeakers that I have ever listened to. The 2023 lineup includes the Reference One (\$86,000 USD) and the less expensive Evolution series with models starting at \$15,000 USD for the Micro Evolution One and the Compact Evolution One which retail for \$32,500 USD; that price does not include the mandatory stands which are an additional \$2,500 USD.



TAD-CE1TX

Technology

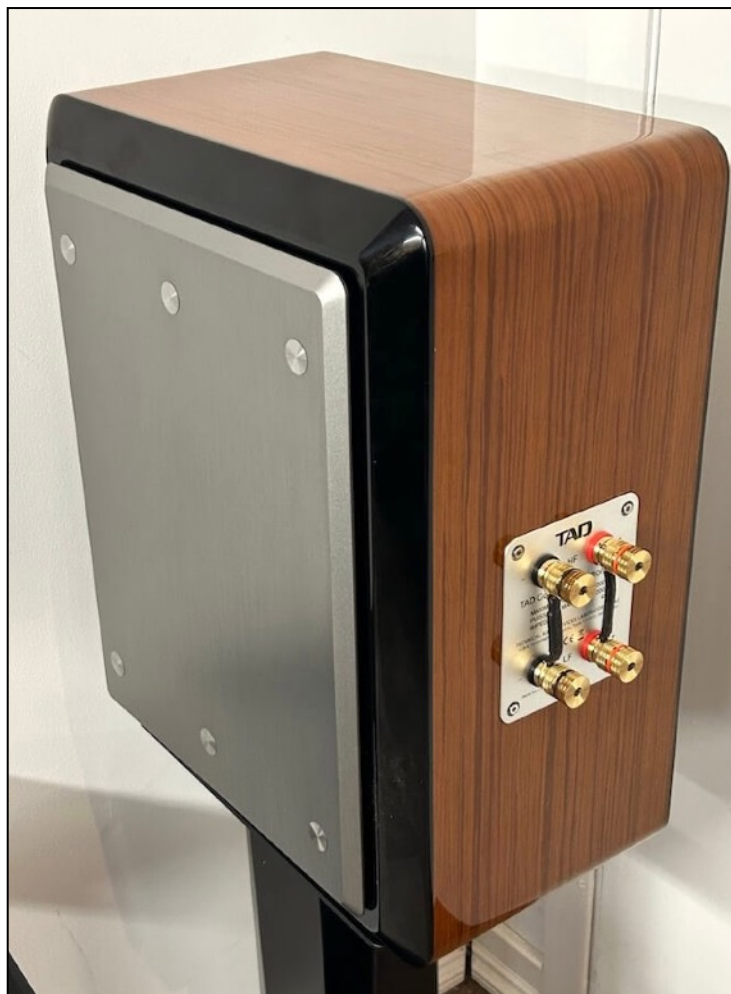
The Compact Evolution One (CE1TX) are marketed as a “bookshelf” speaker, but a quick look at the dimensions and physical weight of each loudspeaker puts an end to that concept rather quickly.

The aforementioned \$2,500 pedestal stands are optional but feel rather mandatory if you wish to maximize the performance of these loudspeakers; each loudspeaker is 20”H x 12”W x 18”D and 64 lbs apiece.

Each stand weighs almost the same as the loudspeaker they are supporting and these proved to be a two-person effort when it comes to placement and adjustments.

Not only are the TAD CE1TX larger and heavier than almost everything in the category but rather distinct looking; the front, top, and rear surfaces of the cabinet are finished with real hardwood with a piano black surround. The gloss finish appears to be wet and one can look almost endlessly into the wood.

TAD and Sonus faber seem to be on the same wavelength in that regard.



The side panels feature large brushed aluminum plates that act as part of the ADS (Aero Dynamic Slot) porting system. This slot system allows for better bass depth that is usually found in ported designs without the loss of clarity, or the distortion that can be prevalent.

One of the accompanying photos was taken at an angle so that you can see daylight through the gap between the plate and body of the speaker (the vent).

At first glance, one might assume that the CE1TX was a simple 2-way design because of its appearance and two sets of binding posts marked 'HF' and "LF' on the rear panel.

The binding posts match the quality of the rest of the speaker with an aluminum back plate and gold plated posts with black and red rings for easy indexing. The nuts glide effortlessly when unscrewed and the posts offer both banana clip as well as bare wire or spade connectors.

By default, the two sets of posts come bridged and removal requires that the bridges be bent slightly as the spade connectors on either end are narrow enough that they will not clear the threaded portion of the posts.



Coherent Source Transducers?

The top driver is where things become very interesting; TAD's Coherent Source Transducer (CST) is a coaxial driver with a 1-3/8" Beryllium-dome tweeter surrounded by a 5.5" magnesium cone midrange.

The woofer below the CST is marginally over 7 inches in diameter and uses TAD's proprietary multi-layered Aramid composite diaphragm for increased stiffness without increased moving mass. This combined with the ADS allows the woofer to reach down to almost 34Hz.

All of the drivers are manufactured internally in Japan and the tweeter uses a proprietary vapor-deposition process that TAD claims creates a finer grain structure when compared to typical stamped Beryllium domes.

Because of the cost of this deposition process, the midrange is magnesium coated to help keep costs down while the reference series CST unit uses a Beryllium midrange as well. TAD rates the tweeter to 100kHz at the top end.



TAD-CE1TX Woofer

Needless to say, loudspeakers with a quoted frequency response of 34Hz – 100kHz are not very common and when one takes into consideration that TAD considers these to be “bookshelf” loudspeakers — the 34Hz specification in the bass range seems somewhat impossible.

What these speakers were able to reproduce in that range within the confines of my listening space proved to be somewhat remarkable, but we’re getting ahead of ourselves at this point.

The woofer is crossed over at 250Hz while the midrange/tweeter hand off is set at 1.8kHz. The nominal impedance is 4 ohms with a sensitivity of 85dB (2.83v, 1m); TAD recommends between 50 to 100 watts and a maximum of 200 watts for the CE1TX.

Sound

After my experience with TAD at T.H.E. Show, I realized that to get a proper perspective on these loudspeakers it was almost essential to use as many power amplifiers as I could along with my new dCS DAC and Bryston pre-amplifier.

My Mark Levinson ML 23.5 Power Amplifier can output over 400 watts (4 ohms) and while the initial results were promising, there were some misgivings about the power output and overall synergy.

With the ML 23.5 looking somewhat annoyed in the corner, I inserted the Van Alstine Vision Set 120 that is a class A design and capable of delivering 80 watts per channel.

For the duration of the two weeks that I had with the TAD CE1TX, there was a constant rotation of amplifiers including a modified Dynaco Model 70 MKII (35 watts/channel) and a Bryston 9B SST Power Amplifier (200 watts/channel).



Listening to Mussorgsky/Ravel's Pictures At An Exhibition (CSO/Reiner) answered two very important questions about the CE1TX and its capabilities. The bass response is reference quality and there is no question that it extends to the 30Hz region and with a degree of clarity and overall neutrality that was rather exhilarating to experience at home.

Bass notes were taut and impactful giving music a very solid foundation; there was a complete absence of bloat or smearing even when percussion was extremely robust.

The way that the CE1TX handled extremely complex music and dynamic shifts felt almost effortless and whilst I have listened to other loudspeakers that didn't unravel with similar tracks, this loudspeaker just accomplishes the basic fundamentals with a greater sense of ease.

When I switched over to Vintage Trouble's "Blues Hand Me Downs," the Japanese loudspeaker demonstrated that it can reproduce bass notes with both finesse and brutal clinical accuracy; there was no compression even at the highest volume levels.

Are the CE1TX completely neutral sounding across the board?

There is some noticeable warmth in the mid-bass but that might have been the only area where the loudspeaker deviated from its otherwise textbook neutrality.

Midrange tonality and presence is reference quality and there are few dynamic loudspeakers that I have experienced that offer this balance of timbre, weight, detail, and clarity.

Male vocals were reproduced with proper weight and timbre and never became lost in any mix or were overshadowed by the instrumentation. Strings are reproduced with excellent tonal accuracy, presence, and just enough detail to sound real on higher quality recordings.

If you enjoy listening to classical or jazz piano recordings, the TAD comes as close as I have heard to a "live" piano in my listening room as any other loudspeaker over the past 20 years — it's almost remarkable how accurately it reproduces the timbre, scale, and presence of it.

Regardless of genre, the midrange resolution, detail, and clarity is above and beyond anything I have been fortunate to hear from this type of loudspeaker; and that includes some larger panel loudspeakers as well.

Female vocals also cut through the instrumentation with ease and they are never pushed forward of the mix; the stereo separation is superb listening to duets or choral music and there is something special going on with harmonies that had me sitting up in my listening chair.



What really separates the TAD CE1TX from the competition in that regard is the accurate reproduction of space between musicians and vocalists in both studio and live recordings.

The treble performance delivered both excellent snap and realism with percussion; there was an abundance of air and detail that extended well beyond my hearing range and it never came across as strident or too aggressive.

Ian Anderson's flute had just enough energy listening to Jethro Tull to sound real in my listening space and the CE1TX did not gloss over any imperfections in the recordings. Hardness in any recording gets revealed and it can be unpleasant through a pair of loudspeakers that are this revealing.

When Anderson backed off with his playing, the flute became more ethereal sounding in its reproduction and the notes floated in-between the loudspeakers before slowly vanishing.

Imaging and Soundstage

I loathe to use hyperbole, but the imaging and soundstage reproduced by the CE1TX was nothing short of groundbreaking for this type of loudspeaker; musicians and vocalists were reproduced with a holographic realism that very few loudspeakers can create.

Being able to accurately track musicians and vocalists on stage and experience the flow of music from one side of the stage to the other was invigorating because everything felt so real.

When the recording emphasized the specific positioning of a microphone above or in front of a specific vocalist or group of musicians, the CE1TX made that the focus and without losing the purity of the overall recording.



The linearity and coherency of the midrange and treble were also above and beyond superior to other loudspeakers that I have heard over the years. Listening to music off-axis was a genuine treat because it provided a performance that was nearly as accurate as the sweet spot of my listening chair. Moving as much as four feet to either side of my listening position had no impact and I was forced to walk around the room to find areas where the sound lost its coherency or rock solid imaging.

Audiophiles lucky enough to purchase the TAD CE1TX should invite family and friends to listen because the performance quality is not reserved for a solitary listener.

Conclusion

Because I was limited to only two weeks with the TAD CE1TX, I made a point of looking through my record collection for recordings that were originally mastered in studios using TAD's professional monitors. I spent some time doing research and selected recordings from Prince, Jimmy Page, Natalie Cole, Fleetwood Mac, and The Eagles which were mastered at the Record Plant and Larrabee Studios.

Sure enough, the CE1TX revealed details in each recording that other loudspeakers and headphones have failed to reproduce and it only reinforced my belief that these stand-mounted loudspeakers might be one of the most accurate sounding loudspeakers available.

Being able to reproduce music at this level comes with a rather significant asking price and that clearly puts them out of reach for most people.

Before packing these reference quality loudspeakers back up and shipping them out to another reviewer across the country, I joked with TAD's local representation that if nobody answers the door — I may have disappeared with these incredible pieces of audio engineering and industrial art to a place where nobody will ever find me. Grateful to have had the opportunity to experience them.