

hi-fi+

Fyne Audio F704

by Alan Sircom



Perhaps the most bewildering thing about Fyne Audio is the sheer profusion of products that spring from the Scottish company. If there's a company that defines the notion of having a work ethic, it's Fyne Audio; ten different series of loudspeakers totalling 45 separate products. The F700 is the largest of its conventional dual-concentric ranges and the F704 is the largest model in that group of two stand-mounts and three floorstanders.

And what a hulking great beastie the F704 is too. Not only is it a mash-up (in all the right ways) of technologies used in the company's distinctly high-end F1 series, but also sporting its own 300mm 'IsoFlare' point source driver and a matching multi-fibre 300mm bass driver, it is capable of some serious in-head redecoration.

Not just brute force

It's also tempting to paint this as simply a brute because with that much driver surface area on display in a cabinet that stands nearly 135cm tall and weighs in at an impressive 67.7kg, the temptation to go a bit shouty is irresistible. But under the surface there is also a loudspeaker of some serious grace and subtlety.

It's also hard to avoid the back story of this Scottish phoenix brand, but Fyne hasn't fallen into the trap of becoming 'Coatbridge 2.0' and simply rehashing what went before. And while the lower-slung minds of our industry did just see Fyne Audio as 'Rebel' Tannoy after the Music Tribe takeover of the 96 year old brand, most quickly realised that wasn't the case at all. Instead, Fyne Audio has become what

Tannoy should have been, had the company not simply rested on its laurels. It takes some of the basic concepts of what made the older brand so popular and re-imagine them in light of 21st Century materials science and engineering tolerances.

Of course, when you go from a company mass producing most of its models down to a price to a smaller, precision engineering brand building most of its models by hand in Scotland, the products can get a little 'spendy'. But it remains money well spent, and this F704 big behemoth takes on some impressively-priced challengers.

Let's not dance around this; when it comes to the F704, it's meme time: "I'm in awe at the size of this lad. Absolute unit". Weighing in at just under 68kg per loudspeaker (that's almost 150lb or roughly half a professional tighthead rugby prop) and standing almost 134cm tall, the F704 sits somewhere between 'conventional domestic loudspeaker' and 'audiophile statement piece'. And yet, while nothing hides its physical presence, this isn't too imposing in room, thanks in part to a curved cabinet and the floating stand system.



Of course, that all ends with the front baffle, because the F704 has two 300mm drive units per speaker staring back at the listener. The uppermost of these two drivers is Fyne Audio's distinctive IsoFlare driver, with a 300mm midrange-woofer made of a multi-fibre paper cone and a 75mm titanium-dome compression tweeter that uses a ferrite magnet and sits in the acoustic centre of the mid-woofer. This tweeter sits toward the rear of the mid-woofer's motor housing, unlike most point-source drivers but in a manner like a bespoke version of a 'well-known coaxial driver' design. Personally, I'm more in the Dr Mills of Fyne Audio 'taking something good and making it better' camp here, but 'the apple doesn't fall far from the tree' (in the less cynical reading) works too.

Both 300mm drive units are designed in house and feature ridged 'FyneFlute' surrounds, which Fyne Audio suggests lowers coloration. The two-and-a-half way loudspeaker uses a twin-cavity tuned cabinet and the company's clever BassTrax low-frequency diffuser integrated into the down-firing port. Fyne Audio worked out one of the problems with all down-firing ports with a very simple solution; the port response will change if it fires into thick carpet, a wooden floor, or even a tiled or marbled floor. To eliminate this inconsistency, the F704 has a twin-level plinth with an flared horn shape. The down-firing port hits the same lower plinth regardless of home decor or surface. It's also a predictable size and shape. As I said, simple, yet clever in the 'bloody obvious, really' school.

Two speakers in one

Listening to the F704s is an interesting experience, but because of your reaction to the loudspeakers. Anyone who has been staff to a domestic cat will understand the in-head F704 dichotomy; periodically, cats have a case of the 'zoomies' where they suddenly bolt around the house at random until they abruptly stop, make this strange look as if to say "what am I doing, I'm a cat. I'm supposed to be cool and aloof." Listening to the F704 allows the listener to have a case of the musical zoomies. One minute

you are listening to a nice aria or some elegant Mozart, only to discover that was 20 minutes ago and you've been wiggling out to Infected Mushroom and The Prodigy at 'stupid' o'clock on the volume dial with a idiotic grin on your face. That's the joy of the Fyne Audio F704; you can be as effete and as polite as you want, but whenever you need to unleash your inner nut-case, it's there for you too.

It's rare for a party speaker to have audiophile credentials. It's rare for an audiophile starlet to have a secret penchant for Death Metal. The F704 is that rare loudspeaker with feet in both camps. The combination of high efficiency, an untroubled impedance plot, an ability to cope with some hefty current swings and a maximum SPL that wouldn't look out of place in a small PA is normally the stuff of uncouth and shouty speakers, but the F704 is full of couth, too.

The difficulty in describing the F704 is not overstating this 'never boring' sound making it read like the loudspeaker is a bit of a thug. It's really not; sure it's a muscular and forward sound, but within that there's deep refinement. I did a lot of listening through Tidal, playing Scarlatti's Keyboard Sonata in F Minor [Fasil Say, Warner] and the piano was projected vividly into the room, but always with the refinement required of baroque keyboard work, and in this case excellent solidity and air around the instrument.

Similarly, when moving over to 'Sophisticated Lady' from This One's For Blanton [Duke Ellington, Ray Brown, APO/Pablo] the F704 had a great sense of dimensionality and instrument solidity. Much of that dimensionality was forward of the loudspeakers and the directness of the sound was ever-present (but never overstated). The stereo staging was wide, the detail pin-sharp precise and the instruments were rooted in place, making a fine presentation overall.

However, even here (a beautiful recording, but one that begins with a slow bass line) the F704 couldn't help but bring out the exuberance and excitement in the recording. The great thing about the F704 is they will bring out the best in any recording, and if that recording is good it will sound glorious. However, that can be a double-edged sword; playing something like 'I See A Darkness' from the album of the same name Bonny 'Prince' Billy [Drag City], you don't want upbeat and glorious. Fortunately, the dynamic shading of the F704 means you are left as you should be after listening to this track; feeling hollowed out.

I'm acutely aware of not making the F704 sound like a one-trick pony; it's a detailed and dynamic performer, capable of playing all sorts of music with the sort of filigree inner detail and much of the microdynamic shading audio enthusiasts crave. But there's that inner drive and energy too, and it's always there, begging to be unlocked with plenty of deep, rich bass on tap.





Not an Absolute Unit?

Earlier, I described the F704 as an 'absolute unit', but that isn't strictly true. Sure, it's a big and heavy loudspeaker (especially for one made in the UK), but there's no flab or excess weight to the sound. Bass is clean, deep and forceful, with a good lick of speed to it. It even passes the Trentemøller test, with fast, deep synth bass notes not choking up the down-firing port; a sure sign of some really intelligent loudspeaker design.

Practically everyone who has written about Fyne Audio's products has used this wordplay, but the F704 is a 'fine' loudspeaker. It's the antithesis of 'boring but worthy' loudspeakers yet can be extremely civilised and refined. Music is an upfront, vibrant and visceral experience when played through the Fyne Audio F704, and there's nothing wrong with that at all. Sometimes we want a loudspeaker that hums along in the background, then we need a loudspeaker than can enthrall and entertain, and sometimes we just need to party hard. The F704 is all those things!

Technical specifications

- Type 2 ½ way, downwards firing port, with BassTrax Tractrix diffuser, twin cavity loading system
- Drive unit complement 1 × 300mm IsoFlare point source driver, multi-fibre bass / midrange cone, FyneFlute surround with 75mm titanium dome compression tweeter, ferrite magnet system. 1 × 300mm bass driver with multi-fibre cone, FyneFlute surround.
- Frequency response (-6dB typical in room) 24Hz–26kHz
- Sensitivity (2.83 Volt @ 1m) 96dB
- Nominal Impedance 8Ω
- Continuous power handling 150W rms
- Peak power handling 600W
- Finish Piano Gloss Walnut, Black or White
- Dimensions (H×W×D) 133.9 × 54 × 56.1cm
- Weight 67.7kg each speaker