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WHAT HI★FI?

STUNNING SYSTEMS



**TURNTABLES
STREAMERS
CD PLAYERS
AMPLIFIERS
SPEAKERS**

AWARD WINNING STEREO SET-UPS



Four superb two-channel systems based around our 2020 champion products



REVIEWED

Apple HomePod Mini



Grado GT220 in-ear headphones



Fyne Audio F501SP loudspeakers



PS5 vs XBOX SERIES X
The next-gen consoles head to head: which one should you buy?

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FUTURE

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p24



Putting all our systems in place

It's easy, after the frenzy that is our Awards judging process, to get carried away with the idea that that means it's job done. After all, an Award-winning product is the best of the best; it stands to reason, surely, that putting a system together with a number of these top pieces of kit will create an award-winning set-up.

But not so fast... If there's one thing that we at *What Hi-Fi?* have been saying over the years, it's that you have to be careful with system matching - especially if you want to create a set-up with almost magical synergy in its sound.

The four **stereo systems (p30)** we have come up with here, though, do a remarkable job of pulling off that trick. Not every product in every system is an Award winner - but every system is simply superb at playing music in a way that will bring you delight and pleasure for years to come.

Also in this issue, to bring us bang up to date, we compare **next-gen consoles (p43)** with Sony's PS5 taking on Xbox Series X - and there's an impressive line up of **First Tests (p6)**, too.

Jonathan Evans, editor

MY PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

Fyne Audio F501SP, p16

A special take on Award-winning speakers, these bring stunning excitement and energy to music



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HOW WE TEST



EXPERIENCE. HERITAGE.

We've been helping the world discover the best in hi-fi and home entertainment for more than 40 years, and have more than 100 years of reviewing experience under our collective belts - so you can count on our expert opinion.



DEDICATED TEST FACILITIES

We test every product against its peers in our brand-new, bespoke reviewing facilities in London and Bath. We conduct all our tests as a team - our opinions and conclusions are always the result of collaboration.

HOW WE SCORE

All review verdicts are agreed upon by the team as a whole - not an individual reviewer. Each product will be listened to and/or viewed by several members of the test team, who will then discuss the final verdict before it appears in the magazine or on the website. This avoids any individual bias creeping in.

OUR SCORES EXPLAINED

One of the best ★★★★★

A serious contender ★★★★☆

Worth a look ★★★☆☆

Disappointing ★★☆☆☆

Awful ★☆☆☆☆

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Look out for this badge to find the best price

COVER PHOTOGRAPHY: Phil Barker

View offers

Stereo speakers | £2799 | whf.cm/F501SP

Fyne Audio F501SP

The turbo-charged F501s are one of the most entertaining pairs of speakers we've heard

We're big fans of Fyne Audio's F501 floorstanders - these former Award-winners remain terrific performers for their price (£1299). Despite appearances, the Special Production version we have on test here is a rather different and far more ambitious proposition.

The Special Production idea is to take an existing product and hot-rod it by implementing as much of Fyne Audio's high-end technology as possible. The company's engineers haven't held back, as the price difference between the standard F501 and SP versions indicates.

A flare for timing

Like all of the company's premium speakers, the F501SPs use an IsoFlare drive unit array. The IsoFlare array places the tweeter in the throat of the mid/bass unit, which allows a degree of time alignment so that the sound from each drive unit reaches the listener at the same moment. Additional advantages include improved integration between the drive units and more consistent dispersion characteristics.

The array used in the F501SP has a 25mm magnesium dome compression tweeter coupled to a 15cm multi-fibre mid/bass cone. The surround on the mid/bass (and the partnering dedicated bass driver) is fluted so that unwanted mechanical energy in the cone is controlled more effectively, leading to cleaner, more detailed results.

A downward firing port augments the low-frequency output from these drivers. The standard F501s have a wooden plinth and diffuser arrangement that the port fires onto, but the SP version takes things to another level. Here, it's a highly engineered twin-level aluminium set-up, echoing the designs used on the company's high-end models.

This downward facing port and diffuser arrangement is designed not only to produce deep and controlled bass, but also to make the speakers less fussy about room placement.

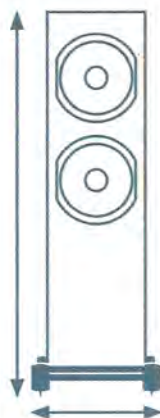
KEY FEATURES



IsoFlare driver array

91dB

Sensitivity 91dB



Dimensions (hwd)
98 x 29 x 32cm

Given room to breathe, the F501SP towers will really shine



The F501SP's drive units are linked with a new hand-built crossover network and the whole lot is connected with upgraded silver-plated Van Den Hul wiring. Even the cabinets have changed; the panels using denser MDF and lined with three damping materials to control resonances. These SP floorstanders come in a trio of classy gloss finishes - walnut, black or white.

While these towers are fairly tolerant of a close to wall placement, they really shine when given room to breathe. Angle them slightly towards the main listening position to solidify their stereo imaging.

Energy providers

If you're looking for excitement and energy, we can't think of a better alternative at the price. Play Nirvana's *Nevermind* and the sound erupts from the speakers, generating a sense of drive and attack that makes it hard to sit still.

These are relatively compact towers, but partner them with capable electronics and the deep, punchy quality of low frequencies is impressive. Kurt Cobain's vocals come through loud and clear, and never get lost in the mix. These towers have enough finesse to texture his voice convincingly and capture the fire in his delivery.

WHAT HI-FI?

★★★★★

Dvořák's *New World Symphony No.9* shows another side to the F501SP's character. They have the dynamic reach to cope with the music's powerful crescendos and the authority to do justice to an orchestra in full flow. It's an organised presentation that pulls every instrumental strand together to produce a cohesive and musical sound.

Tonally, these Fynes aren't the smoothest performers. That IsoFlare array doesn't tend to produce the sweetest highs or offer the even-handed neutrality of the best alternatives. But the F501SPs are more than acceptable in these respects, provided the partnering electronics are chosen with care.

The difference in price between the standard F501 and the SP version is huge, but so is the jump in performance. These are thrilling speakers that bring music to life in a way that eludes most rivals. If you're contemplating a purchase at this level, make sure you have a listen before buying anything else.

WHAT HI-FI?

RATING ★★★★★

SOUND

★★★★★

COMPATIBILITY

★★★★☆

BUILD

★★★★★

FOR

- Exciting and detailed sound
- Impressive bass weight for size
- Fine build and neat finishes

AGAINST

- Can lack refinement if poorly partnered

VERDICT

Fyne's F501SPs are one of the most entertaining pairs of speakers we have heard at this price

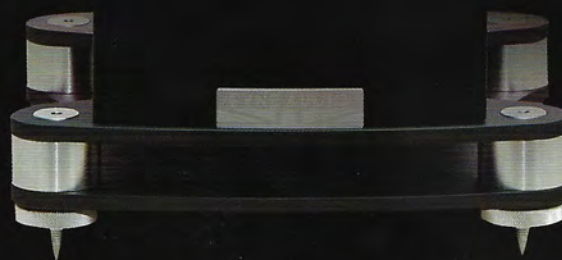


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AUDIO



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Building on the outstanding sonic performance and aesthetics of the original models, the F501SP and F502SP brings Fyne Audio's advanced engineering and high-end acoustic design principles of the F700 Series into the classic F500 Series cabinet design. This significant use of trickle-down technology delivers unrivalled performance and outstanding value across two stunning Special Production loudspeakers, designed and built in the UK.



MANUFACTURED IN THE UK



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