

Review of TAD' E1TX by Jeff Fritz, 09/2019 on :



TAD Evolution One TX Loudspeakers

In November 2017 I reviewed the [Technical Audio Devices Micro Evolution One](#) loudspeaker, aka the TAD ME-1. It now costs \$14,995/pair USD, including TAD's ST3 stands, and at the time we gave it a Reviewers' Choice award. The ME-1 is pretty small at 16.2"H x 9.9"W x 15.8"D, but its size had little correlation with what I heard. Of the many things I noticed about the ME-1's sound, what most surprised me was what I wrote about in the penultimate paragraph of my review: "It filled my Music Vault with full, rich, detailed sound that never fatigued me and never bored me."

About the word filled: How could such a physically small speaker not sound small in a room 23' 6"L x 20' 1"W? The ME-1 has a secret weapon: Although it looks at first glance like a small two-way speaker, it's actually a three-way. TAD has staked their reputation on the performance of their Coherent Source Transducer (CST), in which a tweeter is mated to a midrange driver in a coaxial arrangement. The CST in the ME-1 comprises a 1" beryllium-dome tweeter at the center of the magnesium cone of a 3.5" midrange driver, the CST itself mounted in a shallow waveguide. These coaxial drivers together reproduce everything above 420Hz; below that frequency, the CST hands off to a 6.3" woofer.



Never underestimate the value of a dedicated woofer -- three-way speakers generally have wider dynamic range and can handle more power than two-way speakers of similar size. The combination of this and the high quality of the drivers used in the ME-1 let it fill my former listening room, the Music Vault, better than most two-way speakers of the same dimensions ever could.

Of course, compared with the midrange-woofers usually found in two-way speakers, the ME-1's 6.3" woofer would be a strength. But when compared to big floorstanders with bigger and/or multiple dedicated woofers, would a 6.3" woofer prove a weakness? In absolute terms, of course it could, especially when mounted, as in the ME-1, in a cabinet of small internal volume. A woofer of that size with little air behind it can produce only so much sound. So despite the fact that the ME-1 fights well above its weight class, physics, as it always does, ultimately wins out: It's not a floorstander.

The E1TX

TAD's designers must have been thinking about the ME-1's single 6.3" woofer when they conceived of the new Evolution One TX (\$27,995/pair), aka the E1TX. It sports the same CST driver as in the ME-1, but instead of one 6.3" woofer the E1TX has two, housed in a much larger cabinet. It looks as if the TAD engineers decided to add to the ME-1's strong performance even wider dynamic range, and the ability to go significantly lower in the bass.



Those two 6.3" woofers have diaphragms made of TAD's Multi-layered Aramid Composite Cone (MACC) material, and are fitted with high-powered magnets for excellent power-handling capability. The woofers are vented with what TAD calls Bi-Directional Aero-Dynamic Slots: slit-shaped ports whose output is shaped by flared openings to prevent unwanted noise. On the lower portion of each side panel of the E1TX is a circular port cover, which at first glance looks like a side-firing woofer or passive radiator. TAD says that this arrangement prevents internal standing waves and results in clean, powerful reproduction of bass frequencies. The woofers, mounted vertically inline below the CST, operate from 420Hz down, as in the ME-1. Frequencies above that are sent to the CST, whose midrange driver operates between 420Hz and 2.5kHz, above which it hands off to the beryllium-dome tweeter. In short, the E1TX is a four-driver, three-way of still-modest dimensions (47.8"H x 13.8"W x 20.2"D) and easily movable weight (101 pounds).



The E1TX's specified frequency range is 29Hz-60kHz -- an impressively wide bandwidth for a speaker of this size. The upper-frequency limit of 60kHz is courtesy the small diameter (1") of the dome and its material, beryllium. The 3.5" midrange is also smallish, which promises good dispersion characteristics and acoustic matching with the tweeter -- it's more of a challenge to acoustically match the dispersion characteristics of a small tweeter to those of a large midrange. The E1TX's sensitivity spec is 88dB/2.83V/m, its power handling a healthy 200W. The specified nominal impedance is 4 ohms -- a strong solid-state amplifier would probably work best with these speakers.

I liked the looks of the E1TX. Its slightly raked-back stance, beveled vertical edges, and glass-smooth black paint give it the feel of an exotic sports car. The stainless-steel outriggers, to which the included spikes attach, stabilize the speaker laterally, though its relatively light weight of 101 pounds made positioning them easy enough for me to do alone. I found the quality of the finish, the tolerances of the joins, the machining of the metal parts -- even the application of the front-mounted badge and rear terminals -- to be among the best I've seen. I almost always see something slightly amiss -- it's a curse to notice such flaws in something you've just paid for -- but this time, nothing.



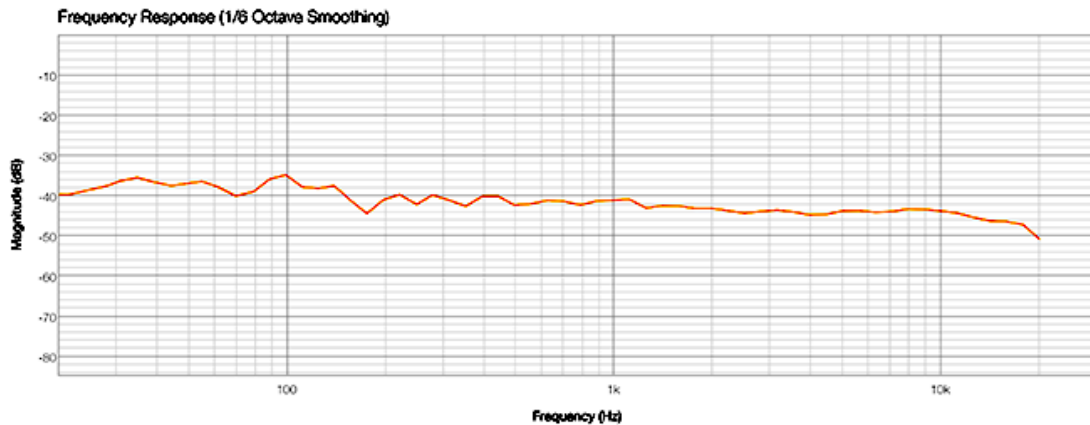
The T1EX's rear panel has two sets of custom-made binding posts, for biwiring, though jumpers are included for those who, like me, prefer single-wiring.

Setup

We've now lived in our new house for a year or so. Having measured and listened to six pairs of speakers in [my new listening room](#), I've narrowed down the spots where most of them sounded best -- that is, where they produce the most linear sound. But that doesn't mean that microdeviations from those speaker positions can't sometimes yield great improvements in a speaker's sound, so I spent some time and energy making absolutely sure the TAD E1TXes sounded as good as I could get them to sound in my room. Their rear panels ended up 3' 4" from the front wall, with 30" from the center of each tweeter to the nearest sidewall, 8' 6" from tweeter center to tweeter center, and 10' 4" from the tweeter centers to my ears when I sat down to listen.



I connected the TADs to my reference Boulder Amplifiers 2060 stereo amplifier with speaker cables terminated with spades at both ends. The Boulder was hooked up to a Hegel Music Systems HD30 digital-to-analog converter with integral volume control, which in turn was fed by my Apple MacBook Pro laptop running Mojave 10.14.5, Roon, and Qobuz. The MacBook and Hegel sat on an SGR Audio Model III Symphony equipment rack. All interconnects, speaker cables, and power cords were Siltech Explorers.



Sound

This review would be a lot easier to write if all I had to tell you was that the TAD E1TX sounded just like the ME-1, only with deeper, stronger bass. That's what you expect to hear when, as in this case, the many similarities between two speaker models from the same company are as obvious as their few differences: an additional woofer, a bigger cabinet. But that's not taking into account a critical element not revealed by a visual inspection, or even close study of the specs: the designer's voicing of the two models. The ME-1 was a detail monster, a characteristic of its sound that, as I listened to recording after recording, it wore on its sleeve. Although the outputs of the ME-1's midrange and bass drivers were seamlessly integrated with that of its tweeter, the stars of its sound show were always the highs -- not a bad thing, but an obvious thing.

But that obvious thing was not what I heard from the E1TX, whose sound had a slightly more forgiving signature that, I eventually concluded, was not merely a function of its producing more bass to balance out more prominent highs. Granted, its overall voicing was a tad warmer than the ME-1's, but taken on their own, the highs also presented fine detail more subtly. When I listened to "Gone, Gone, Gone," from Phillip Phillips's *The World from the Side of the Moon* (16-bit/44.1kHz FLAC, Interscope/19/Qobuz), the kick drums underpinning his voice from 20 to 37 seconds in had more weight than through the ME-1s, and Phillips sounded a touch less forward, more laid-back, than through the smaller speaker -- but I was also less aware of the pop processing that makes this recording merely decent instead of great. It sounded less harsh through the floorstanding TADs. The E1TXes didn't gloss over and obscure details altogether, but they also didn't push the music at me in a way that forced me to focus on their retrieval of detail. Whether you'll hear this sort of sound as more balanced or simply less detailed will depend on what you value in the reproduction of recorded music.

I next listened to "White Mustang," from Lana Del Rey's *Lust for Life* (16/44.1 FLAC, Interscope/Qobuz), a track I'd spent some time unraveling with the ME-1s. At first, I heard some similarities between the two TADs. The sense of space produced by the E1TXes was similar, and this had been a strong point of the ME-1s. The E1TXes could conjure up a vast 3D soundstage packed full of all sorts of sonic cues bouncing around my room. This is what audiophile dreams are made of: with the floorstanding TADs, I felt immersed in the soundscape, rather than merely peering into it from afar. There were also differences. Through the E1TXes, the deep bass of the Del Rey track pulsed through my room, letting me better feel the power of the music. According to the notes I took when reviewing the ME-1s, the whistling that begins at 2:21 sounded "crystal clear" -- now, through the E1TXes, it sounded more ethereal, more integrated into the music. The focus had shifted and was now less narrow: from the ME-1's emphasis on the treble to the E1TX's more balanced sound throughout the audioband.

When I listened to “Shining Woman,” from the Daughter of Swords album, Dawnbreaker (16/44.1 FLAC, Nonesuch/Qobuz), I appreciated the way the E1TXes unraveled the subtle percussion at the beginning of this track, and how the larger TADs revealed the fragile, fleeting singing of Alexandra Sauser-Monnig. The TADs could reproduce very fine detail, but with track after track, I found that this wasn’t the first aspect of their sound that I noticed. First and foremost, I tended to focus on their reproduction of space. No doubt this was partly due to the fact that their greater low-frequency output made recording venues easier to map. Still, I found the E1TX’s lower midrange a touch warmer than the ME-1’s, which made the soundscape denser and more palpable. I don’t want to overstate this, but the ME-1 sounded to me slightly more visceral than the E1TX, which sounded a little softer. But that doesn’t mean that the E1TX sounded as laid-back as do most speakers with, say, soft-dome tweeters. I predict that many listeners will appreciate their balance of warmth and detail retrieval.



Finally, “Who Am I,” from London Grammar’s Truth Is a Beautiful Thing (16/44.1 FLAC, Metal & Dust/Ministry of Sound), sounded awesome through the E1TXes. The image of Hannah Reid’s voice was huge -- that’s how this track was recorded -- and the TADs reproduced beautiful tonal colors across the audioband. The effortless delivery of sound at any volume level I played this track told me that the TADs could soar when asked to -- for a speaker this size, dynamic limitations were virtually nonexistent.

Comparison

I compared the TADs extensively with my reference speakers, the Vimberg Tondas. The Tondas retail for \$38,000/pair -- ten grand more than the E1TXes -- and physically they differ in many ways. The Tondas are much larger (56.69”H x 17.28”W with outriggers x 25.59”D), weigh more than twice as much (212 vs. 101 pounds each), and each Tonda has three 8” woofers instead of the E1TX’s two 6.3” cones -- far more surface area dedicated to the low end, and supported by a cabinet of considerably greater internal volume. To trigger my memories of the Tondas’ sound as much as possible, I listened to a number of tracks just before disconnecting them, then listened to them again as soon as I’d set up the TADs. The first one was “The Girl from Ipanema,” from Stan Getz and João Gilberto’s Getz/Gilberto, from 1964 (16/44.1 FLAC, Verve/Qobuz). Through the TADs, the main thing I noticed was that drummer Milton Banana’s cymbals in the left channel were lower in level than through the Vimbergs. Also, Astrud Gilberto’s singing was just, well, a tad more sibilant.

I next tested the TADs with loud rock'n'roll. "I Love It Loud," from Kiss's *Creatures of the Night* (16/44.1 FLAC, Casablanca/Qobuz), showed off the TAD's ability to really open up to produce low bass and punchy midbass. The opening seconds of this track feature some heavy drumming by Eric Carr. That the TADs could play this track loud without distortion was a testament to the high quality of their drivers. In fact, they could play almost as loud as the Vimbergs -- surprising, given their smaller number of smaller woofers -- albeit without quite the chest impact from Carr's drums in those opening seconds. The TAD E1TXes could play any type of music at virtually any sane listening level without my ever fearing they would break.

Last, I played the acoustic version of "Chandelier," from Sia's *1000 Forms of Fear: Deluxe Version* (16/44.1 FLAC, Monkey Puzzle/RCA/Qobuz), which sounds amazing when played at a realistic volume level. This track is so much better than the radio edit . . . you must hear it, trust me. Through the E1TXes, Sia's voice soared while remaining crystal clear, not harsh, and sounding entirely effortless -- with this track, that CST driver shone, and the E1TXes matched the Tondas note for note.

The Vimbergs and TADs both sounded effortless in the midrange and highs, not stressed or compressed, indicating not only the superior nature of their drivers, but their designers' abilities to produce loudspeakers that can play back challenging material at high volumes. The Tondas and E1TXes were both impressive at playing loud and clean across the audioband, and in that regard outpointed every other speaker I've had in my new listening room. Although the Vimbergs could produce more impactful lows and go deeper in the bass, the TADs put out larger bass than their size indicates. The TADs also produced slightly more treble energy at the very top than did the Vimbergs, though they sounded more subdued in the lower treble and upper midrange. Each speaker produced a different take on an overall neutral sound, and both could faithfully reproduce recordings of any type of music. Last, both speakers are built to the highest standards I've seen in the high end.

Conclusion

If you've heard Technical Audio Devices' Micro Evolution One and want that same basic sound with just a bit more bass, I suggest you listen to their Evolution One TX. In the E1TX, TAD has produced a loudspeaker that stands on its own, with its own unique sound signature. Like every TAD speaker I've heard, it sounds bigger than it looks, and a pair of them produced soundstages that enveloped me, totally immersing me in the music -- when a recording contained such information in the first place. I got all the detail I wanted, but never an incisive, overtly treble-centric sound. I found this a good thing -- the E1TX was very easy to listen to, regardless of what music I played, or the volume level, or how long I listened. Add to all that a cabinet small enough to fit into most rooms, and build quality that's sure to please even the most demanding buyer, and you have a complete package. I saw and heard lots to like in the TAD E1TX, and nothing that disappointed. It's easy to recommend, even to the most discriminating audiophile.

. . . Jeff Fritz