

Review of the NOLA Metro Grand Reference Gold by D. Mafrand in :

haute fidélité

(HS4 / 2015)

THE ART OF DIPOLE

The NOLA speakers officially landed in France on the spur of the dynamic distributor TecSart. The NOLA line offers two reference ranges whose speakers are equipped with midranges working in dipole mode and are equipped with ALNICO magnets.

The brand NOLA is a registered trademark of Accent Loudspeaker Technology founded in 2004 by Carl and Marilyn Marchisotto. Carl worked for fifteen years for the Dahlquist company. He developed the DQ-8 speakers, DQ12 and DQ-20. In 1991 he founded with his wife Marilyn, Acarian Systems : The company designed and manufactured ALON speakers including a model without compromise called the Grand Reference System. He will take over this name later in the most exceptional model of the NOLA brand, the Grand Reference VI consisting of two columns per speaker, one for the bass and one for the high-midrange with a total of 27 speakers.

Open Baffle and Alnico

Metro Grand Reference Gold (called GRG) is an improved version of Metro Grand Reference Series III model)

It includes four speakers in a three and one half way configuration. The bass is generated by two speakers 16 cm diameter originally Norwegian manufactured to specifications for NOLA. They are housed in separate volumes and tuned separately by twin bass reflex vents on the rear section.

Their magnesium cones are very low mass and very low distortion and are fitted with a central phase plug which is gold plated solid copper which improves damping and removes the last traces of coloration.

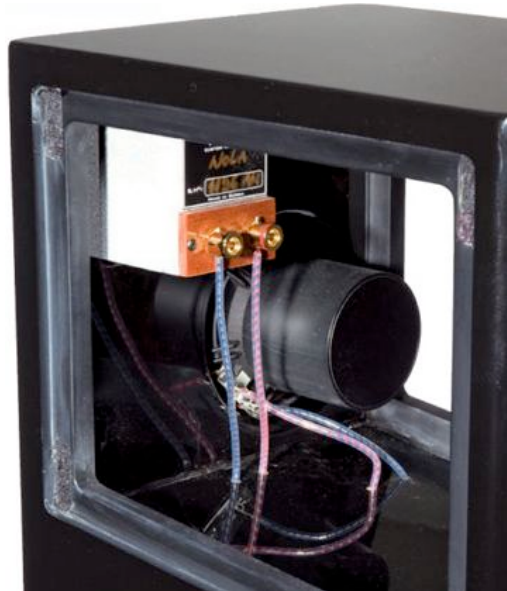
The assembly is driven by the magnetic field from an Alnico ring magnet Which increases the clarity and definition of the bass response.

For a long time, legendary speaker systems have used speakers with Alnico magnets: a metal alloy (aluminum, nickel, cobalt) with linear magnetic properties. Interesting, now, only a few manufacturers such as Norwegian SEAS - offers speakers with Alnico magnets in their catalog. The fact that Accent Loudspeaker Technology uses transducers with Alnico indicates a very upscale ambition sought by the manufacturer.

Reproduction of the midrange is provided by a speaker 11 cm. in diameter, with a proprietary NOLA treated paper cone and it is provided with a huge Alnico magnet.

Moreover it is mounted as a dipole. Apart from the speaker support on which it is installed asymmetrically to mitigate the comb effect (roller coaster response curve), there is no lateral and rear walls, so it radiates on both sides. Therefore no wall vibrates and interferes with the signal from the membrane- the gain in clarity is very obvious.





As for the tweeter it is the Serbian manufacturer Raal that the American manufacturer chose. NOLA did customize the tweeter according to its requirements, for a reference aluminum ribbon tweeter 70-10 showing the dimensions of the ribbon (70 mm long and 10 mm. wide) with a thickness of 0.004 mm. It is placed in front of Neodymium magnet bars and connected to an impedance transformer so the load seen by the amplifier is 8 ohms. The speed of the filtering is quite exceptional. The Unison type filter, a patented principle by NOLA, leading to a single terminal, and with each register having its own frequency filter mounted on a circuit board, coordinates the output of all the speakers.

Finally the base is formed of three plates. One is fixed in the Enclosure which rests on the two other separate and movable platforms on four steel balls housed in four small cavities and thus the speaker rests on the four balls making contact and is therefore de-coupled from the ground very efficiently. The bottom plate is mounted on four massive spikes.



MANUFACTURING AND LISTENING

Construction :

We had the opportunity to host the speaker designer of Nola during High Fidelity Lounge 2012. Carl was invited by the former representative of the brand in France which then showed a pair of Micro Gold and Metro Grand Reference exposed in static.

Visitors had been able to see the quality of manufacturing these models. We find this evolution of the Gold has the same concern for perfection. Not born of any fantasy, Metro GRG sports a classic aesthetic that the beautiful piano lacquer finish magnifies.

However, we issue a small caution about the base and its de-coupling system, effective in its role but the mechanical separators need careful leveling. Take care for proper set up.

Components :

It is rare to meet a speaker manufacturer who installs speakers with Alnico magnets. Neodymium is now the standard magnetic premium that qualitatively surpasses speakers equipped with ferrite magnets. "Neodymium all" in this option is the ultimate. With a premium price on the Alnico, neodymium, however, cannot totally bring the magic of Alnico listening. So when we know that Metro GRG provided with four units with Alnico magnets, we applauded. All transducers were manufactured to specification by major manufacturers. Furthermore the accessory equipment (terminals are Cardas pure solid copper, silver Nordost single stranded cables, high-tech Mundorf oil capacitors on the filter) is of the highest quality.

Bass :

The presence of two enclosure volumes differently tuned for the bass provides evenly allocated response in the bottom of the spectrum while avoiding the tonic effect often obtained with a single woofer.

Listening to "Moonlight on Spring River" shows the advantage of the principle that is well implemented on the Metro GRG.

The synthetic bass module has satisfactory intelligibility at different frequencies. It probably lacks a little tension. But we must admit that the absence of tonic and room resonance excitement when you turn up the sound levels, that the NOLA is actually quite convincing in this region of the spectrum, even when there are many concurrent sounds that vibrate in the room.

Mid-Range :

The presence of Alnico and the open air load is precisely revealed in this region of the audible spectrum, and it does not take long to appreciate the positive effects while listening. On "How it Feels" Sophie Zelmani, the voice of the singer will flow with a fluidity and superior neutrality than what we hear usually, and with more sensuality. The harmonic content is obviously different than with the traditional loudspeakers, we mean without Alnico and with a closed enclosure.

The lack of box reflections does not blur the transmitted signal.

The feeling is closer to reality, it is indisputable; the emotion, the inner details are faster. Moreover, with the mounting on the track "Saint-Claude" by Christine and the Queens, we at times have the unsettling feeling of being in the studio, very close to the performer. The tonal range appears extremely nuanced, contributing to more body, and more flesh to the harmonic texture of the message.

Treble :

The new custom RAAL tweeter, adapted to the needs of Metro GRG blends completely in the message.

It outperforms the aluminum ribbon tweeter from Raven in the previous version of the enclosure, the Serbian model is probably the current best tweeter in this technology.

Decays of notes extend to infinity with a remarkable harmonic delicacy. On the track "Moonlight on Spring River" the impact of the ball on the timpani sounds and then decays without it, gives the impression of exploding out of the speaker. Moreover reproduction of finesse with continuous sounds by the Metro GRG is quite exceptional.

We revel in the absence of whistling, hissing sounds or of other stridency- our usual landmarks like the track "Gotcha" where Patricia Barber emits "S" that is absolutely ruthless to an ordinary tweeter.

Dynamic:

One of the major qualities of NOLA Metro GRG is to restore all the emotional intensity of each work they reproduce. This expressive sovereignty fundamentally due to the high harmonic rigor with which they analyze each sound or separate note or reverb. These speakers are also conspicuous by their ability to "read each note as easy as the track". My treasure is both, the simple "Sinne Eeg" or as complex as the "March to Torture" derived from the Symphonie Fantastique by Hector Berlioz and the Scottish Chamber Orchestra.

Therefore forgive them most gladly the slight lack of amplitude felt on a well-known transient. (A timorous energy haired brass and timpani on the "March to the Scaffold"), which, however, retain a lot of fullness.

Attack of notes :

Metro GRG cultivates a curious paradox. They never gave us the feeling of being ultrafast or frankly unbridled. Yet they do not seem slow or motionless. Their tonal display comes very close to a certain perfection, which would tend to prove that the consistency of their harmonic gradient is real and realistic. Listening to a track like "Animal" by Francis Cabrel, they are quite capable of portraying the message, the pace and tempo of the beat of the drums.

They are perhaps a bit less tense than usual, but nevertheless have enough to surprise and to beat time.

Scene Sound :

The open midrange speaker brings undeniable benefits to the scale and breathability of the sound stage set up by Metro GRG.

The absence of walls allows the rear wave to propagate freely into the room, creating a particularly holographic illusion. On the track "Gotcha" recorded "live", Patricia Barber and her musicians are on a virtual stage that evolves distinctly positioned in the concert hall, with a layering of sound layers and separation of artists that is particularly accurate. The geometry of the place is remarkably proportionate both width and depth. The physical presence of sound on the opening of the track produces a stunning sense of realism.

Transparency :

The NOLA Metro GRG amazes by their great tonal fidelity, and by the neutrality of their musical purpose. The organic texture of the message is the translation of a breakout in harmonic content that shows familiarity with the sounds we hear. In this way more naturally and spontaneously, it reveals high fidelity and true musicality that these speakers possess, when comparing them to the competition. Balance is extremely linear and the bandwidth adheres to our natural perception of sounds. The Metro GRG did not need to emphasize any particular range. Everything flows from the Source.

Value for Money :

A newly imported brand in France does not yet benefit from the reputation it has built across the Atlantic in terms of great rewards.. I must admit that the unusual means used by the manufacturer leads to the mesmerizing musicality produced, a fact that cannot be challenged. That said to pay the price for a pair of GRG Metro is somewhat understandable, given the high production quality, exceptional speakers and high-flying reproduction...

VERDICT:

This column's test bench of the NOLA Grand Reference Metro Gold was revealed to be an extremely neutral speaker in listening. The technical solutions, outside the box, adopted by the manufacturer bring very plausible results in terms of fidelity, and spatial definition. The particularly careful manufacture gives a luxurious look to the product whose style remains however Classic. If competitive product does exist at this price level, the Metro GRG have that something organic added to the listening experience that reduces the gap between the perceived and real.

BUILDING	■■■■■■■
COMPONENTS	■■■■■■■
BASS	■■■■■■■
MID RANGE	■■■■■■■
TREBLE	■■■■■■■
DYNAMICS	■■■■■■■
ATTACK OF NOTES	■■■■■■■
SOUNDSTAGE	■■■■■■■
TRANSPARENCY	■■■■■■■
QUALITY / PRICE	■■■■■■■



Translated by Jean-Pierre Portier (2015/06)