

### Avid Evo Four small speaker huge dynamics

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### Avid Evo Four loudspeakers

Since first hearing Reference Series loudspeakers from Avid I've wanted to try some of their designs in my own system. When the Evo range was launched the designs became more affordable and I was delighted to be offered the Evo Four two-way to audition the Avid sound.

#### Turntables and more

Avid is probably best known for its turntables and, indeed, this is where company founder Conrad Mas began back in 1995 although his fascination for record decks began in 1977 when the then 16-year-old saw a friend's home constructed design. This triggered a lifelong obsession to create a genuinely flawless turntable, one without compromise.

He spent his time meticulously re-examining and questioning every element of existing turntable design and manufacture, even questioning the textbooks. His conclusion was all turntables were limiting their true fidelity, typically because they concentrated on the technical values of rumble, wow and flutter measurements without attacking the real problem which is vibration. That philosophy has been carried over into loudspeakers including the Evo Four reviewed here.

Family connections provided Conrad with access to universities that wanted to test his new theories, patents were applied for and the young man even started working in a foundry to better understand the process of casting metals. Little by little new designs emerged, step by step a radical project moved from paper into production and after almost two decades the Acutus turntable was born.

### Design

The Evo Four is unusual in being deeper than it is wide or tall. It sits above an integral lower plinth with a downward-firing reflex port for bass extension. Its footprint makes the optional Atacama Audio stands attractive as they are made-to-measure.

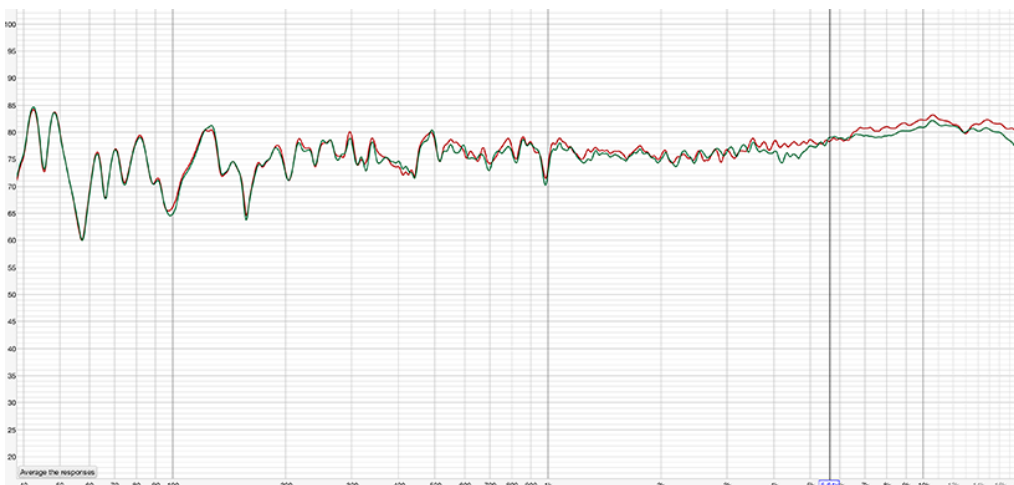
The speaker is built in a wooden cabinet but with thick aluminium front and rear baffles, whereas the more expensive Reference series are housed in a totally metal enclosure. Behind the front baffle, the drive units are mounted to an aluminium frame with inbuilt vibration absorption.

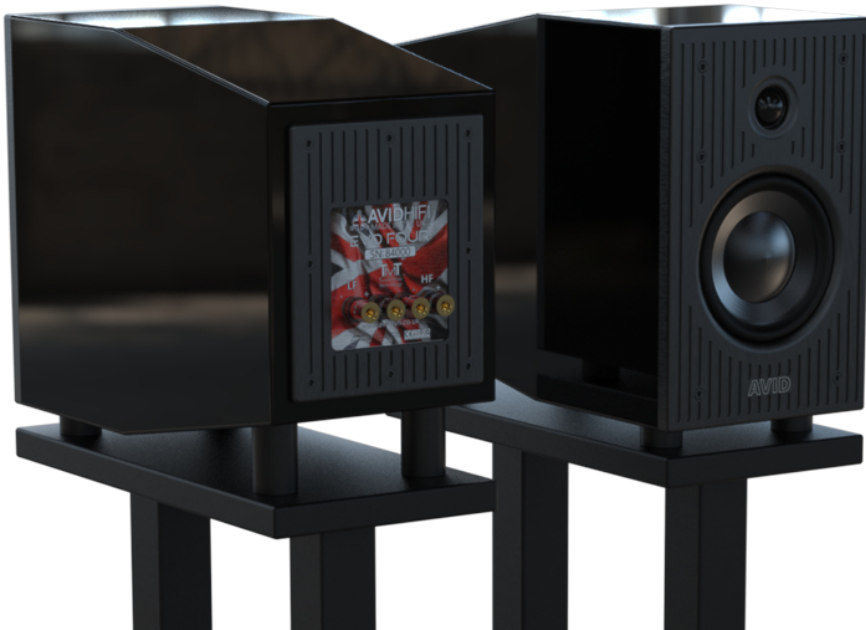


A union flag design is incorporated into the back panel and it's a shame that this is generally hidden against the rear wall, out of sight. We are treated to a pair of top-notch binding posts to allow for bi-wiring/amping although high-quality linking wires are included and were used for single-wire use during the review.

The drive units are from tried and trusted Morel who recommend their drivers are part of a reflex design rather than used in sealed infinite baffle boxes, Conrad explains. The 28mm tweeter relies on Acuflex technology which sees a specially-engineered damping compound applied to its soft silk dome for break-up mode cancellation to address distortion artefacts. This driver has a powerful vented ferrite magnet and a Hexatech aluminium voice coil, it is rigidly coupled to the front baffle which itself is machined with an Improved Dispersion Recess, a shaped inset which increases the high-frequency output of the off-axis response.

Coupled to the tweeter, a 160mm mid/bass driver is housed in a Uniflow aerodynamically designed basket with Avid's tuned mass technology damper to address unwanted vibrations, Avid's raison d'etre. While it's common to address this issue through cone material composition, Avid believe in tackling this at source and much R&D has gone into this proprietary solution.





Both drive units feature external voice coil technology, a design that places the magnetic drive system within the voice coil with the aim of eliminating stray magnetic flux, improving heat dissipation, and reducing cone breakup. The second-order crossover (circa 2kHz) uses Claritycap capacitors with Avid's inductors which are wound with 1.25mm self-bonding enamelled wire on air core bobbins.

The speakers are offered in just two finishes alongside the brushed black anodised front: gloss black or gloss white cabinet. Both are exquisitely finished, with the white option probably more modern and creating a 'look at me, I'm a loudspeaker' effect while the all-black is the more discreet.

### Sound quality

Connecting my Hegel H600 integrated streaming amp to the Evo Fours, I wondered whether the voicing would be very 'hi-fi' or more akin to the BBC-type of response that I am used to. Would we have that bass boost and rising treble of many audiophile designs to put entertainment to the fore, or would there be a balance such that the midrange dominates with clarity and resolution à la broadcast monitors?

Being rather deep, the loudspeakers project into the room even when placed very close to the rear wall where they seem to operate without issue thanks to that downward-firing port. In the event, Avid has opted for its own balance although there is clearly much LF oomph which adds weight and authority to replay, but there's also plenty of treble information with a noticeable peak around 10kHz evidenced by an in-room plot. This also shows a mild dip centred on 1kHz, so we definitely do not have a BBC-type balance. That said, midrange reproduction was not audibly compromised and voices came through well, even if not as clear as with my everyday monitors which prioritise this part of the spectrum. The off-axis response is commendable and explains the speaker's enormous soundstage generation and holographic ability.

The listening panel assembled and we began with two tracks by Todd Rundgren from his *Something / Anything* album: *It Wouldn't Have Made Any Difference* and *Sounds of the Studio*. We were blown away by the Evo Fours skills at creating a believable 3D soundstage. The level of transparency was appreciated as was the sheer weight and authority of the sound. Articulation was remarkable given the size of the loudspeaker but perhaps less so when considering the price point. These are compact speakers (at least looking front-on) with modest drive units but they can punch above their size. Todd's percussive detail was very entertaining and the Evo Fours can certainly time as well because, before we knew it, our feet were tapping involuntarily.

While the panel held the design in reverence, it took me a while to get used to the Evo Four's reproduction of human voice on speech-based material, probably because that crossover point means that much of it is from the silk dome tweeter rather than a plastic-based cone as I am used to. Avid have made sure they get the listener involved with high-quality bass that drives the rhythm. Then we have detailed treble to add top-end excitement so the midrange is left to be 'in proportion' as opposed to the 'main theme' as in my daily reference. Once I

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understood this, I could appreciate the speakers no matter what the source material and grew to enjoy their immense ability and levels of bass which opened up new avenues to enjoy music. The 1988 recording of the Tallis Scholars' *Mass Sequentia* is outstanding in so many senses. The Evo Fours did it proud with a spine tingling reproduction that brought the performers home in an extremely evocative way through an open and glorious top-end that made me come to appreciate the speaker's tonal balance. The sheer sense of space combined with speed and articulation, alongside some micro detail that I'd forgotten was on the recording, surely guarantees the Avids a five-star rating for ability and especially for that coated tweeter which is a delight to listen to.

With the neighbours away it was an ideal opportunity to turn up the wick and see how the Evo Fours perform at higher SPLs. The answer: remarkably well. They play loud, and even very loud if needed, as the KLF's Last Train to Trancentral from the early 90s blasted out. Not my usual listening but the panel revelled in how the Evo Fours handled its technical brilliance, not least that iconic rap that thunders along. Here's a track that doesn't sound anywhere near as good, as realistic on BBC monitors and is probably one that the Avids were just made for although the panel also had remarkable success with everything they tried during the protracted session: from solo piano to oratorios; jazz ensembles to large-scale orchestral forces. The panel noted how nothing seemed to faze the Evo Fours which are capable of huge dynamics when the occasion demands.

### Conclusion

Quality comes at a price and the Evo Four is no budget two-way. The engineering quality is superb and we are assured of total UK manufacture, even down to the exemplary packaging which other manufacturers could learn from.

These are compact cabinets with modest drive units but pack a big punch, notably with a heavyweight bass response and fine treble reproduction. What helps to justify the price tag though is the fact that the Evo Fours virtually disappear such that the listener is left with a sonic stage of great width, depth and height. Their 3D capabilities are remarkable. What's more staggering is that these are just the babies in an Evo range and then, again, that the Evo range is an admitted compromise over the company's Reference series of loudspeakers.

As with most superb designs, they have their roots in the range toppers and that technology drips down to other models. That's the case here and as a result the Evo Fours are one of the best stand-mount hi-fi loudspeakers I have heard for musical involvement.

