

SOUND

SUPERIORITY

Arendal Sound's 1528 Tower 8 is one of the most massive traditional floorstanding loudspeakers to appear in quite some time. And in this case, traditionalism is a good thing: by taking a straight-to-the-point approach, the design succeeds in achieving something fundamentally sound and effective.

Norwegian Jan Ove Lassesen founded Arendal Sound in 2015 after, by his own account, becoming tired of the audio industry's "lots of talk, little substance" mentality. He therefore created a business model in which the brand delivers its products directly to customers through its own distribution system — straight to the front door, without dealers or retail networks. Costs are kept under control partly by designing the speakers in Norway while manufacturing them in China. In this, and many other respects, the company is very open, explaining its operating principles and goals in detail on its website.

Arendal Sound offers, among other things, a 60-day home trial, free shipping (on orders over 500 euros), a 10-year warranty, and the option to upgrade from a cheaper product to a more expensive one at discounted prices. In other words, the manufacturer clearly has strong confidence in its products. The brand also has a certain charm thanks to its honest, warm-hearted DIY spirit — which, alongside serious speaker manufacturing and marketing, even includes running a knitting club as a nod to its Norwegian roots.

TWO- AND MULTICHANNEL SOLUTIONS

The ten-year-old Arendal Sound currently offers three speaker series: the affordable and straightforward 1961 series, the mid-priced 1723 series, and the slightly more expensive 1528 series. Each line includes floorstanding, standmount, center, and surround speakers; subwoofers are available in the 1961 and 1723 series.

The true flagship of the range is currently the limited 10th anniversary edition of the 1528 Tower 8, restricted to just 25 pairs. Apart from its handsome rosewood finish, it is

essentially the same speaker as the standard three-way 1528 Tower 8 reviewed here, featuring four 8-inch woofers, a 5-inch graphene-cone midrange driver, and a 28 mm lithium-magnesium tweeter.

The six drivers are arranged conventionally and with generous spacing on the front baffle, with the woofers lower down and the midrange-tweeter module at the top. The front baffle is slightly curved to improve time alignment, and the tweeter is mounted in a waveguide.

On the rear panel you'll find genuinely high-quality binding posts in dual configuration, as well as the option to fine-tune treble and midrange output by ± 2 dB via a sturdy switch. The base model's price of 9,900 euros is undeniably high, but in return you get substantial size and construction quality.

To be honest, the 1528 Tower 8 does not project a particularly "high-end" aura. Instead, it feels like an honest, heavyweight floorstanding speaker, carefully executed without unnecessary gimmicks. Finish options include a matte black version suited to home theater use and the matte white version tested here, which gives a slightly lighter visual impression than the darker alternative.

A HUGE BUT SMART PACKAGE

Despite their brutal size, the Tower 8s emerge from their boxes surprisingly easily — provided you have at least one helper and enough space. Space is indeed required, as each speaker measures a commanding 143 cm in height, 47 cm in width, and 54.8 cm in depth including feet. Each speaker weighs a full 79 kilograms.

Overall construction is extremely solid and sensible. The large feet, screwed into the base and extending well beyond the cabinet sides, ensure the speaker stands firmly in place and does not budge even when pushed hard.

Everything inside the refrigerator-sized cartons, right down to the screws, feels high-quality and fits together with reassuring firmness. Separate plastic discs for sliding the speakers on carpet or hard floors and finding the correct listening angles are neatly stored in their own compartments, as are the feet and mounting rails. The package includes everything needed for installation, grille covers for the woofers, and foam plugs to block the bass reflex port located at the bottom of the cabinet. Overall, packaging and accessories are excellent.

The manufacturer recommends around 50 hours of break-in. In our experience, the sound did not change significantly over the long test period. Most listening was done with the rear-panel jumpers set to the “ref” position, mainly because other configurations did not seem to bring meaningful changes to the already solid tonal balance.

POWER WITHOUT EFFORT

It is rare to hear a floorstanding speaker that reaches such deep and clean bass so effortlessly — even with the reflex port plugged. In practice, the listener’s tolerance is reached long before the speaker’s performance shows any sign of strain. In this sense, size and mass fully deliver on their promise.

Equally remarkable is how dynamically, cohesively, and evenly the entire frequency range is presented. The sound does not harden, tighten, or compress at any frequency. Still, a small and difficult-to-define, more soundstage-related “wow factor” remains just out of reach. The sound is extremely clean, precise, and theoretically correct, but in character closer to controlled studio monitors than to more personality-driven, indulgent loudspeakers. That said, this quality can hardly be described as a flaw.

This honesty is further supported by the anechoic frequency response measurement published on the manufacturer’s website, which shows the 1528 Tower 8 to be very linear from just above 50 Hz all the way to 20 kHz. The gentle shaping in the upper midrange and treble is so restrained that it is unlikely to color the music in either direction under sensible acoustic listening conditions.

One might wonder whether the 1528 Tower 8 is simply a bit too large for a 28-square-meter listening room, and whether this limits the sense of depth and immateriality that room support can provide. However, this is room-dependent, and results may well differ in larger spaces. Indeed, the manufacturer recommends rooms larger than 30 square meters, which seems a sensible guideline.

If one were to assemble a 5.1 home theater system from the 1528 series, the level of immersion could already be overwhelming based on this two-channel experience alone.

MATERIAL FOR ALMOST ANY PURPOSE

The Arendal Sound 1528 Tower 8 is an exceptionally large and heavy floorstanding speaker with seemingly endless dynamic reserves. Its very direct frequency response is clearly audible, as it does not significantly color the music. Playback is dynamic, clearly articulated, and effortless across the entire frequency range. Bass reaches nearly to the limits of human hearing, while the treble extends smoothly to the opposite extreme — without unnecessary loudness emphasis.

The only noteworthy caveat is that the 1528 Tower 8 requires a sufficiently large listening room to perform optimally. The manufacturer's recommendation of rooms over 30 square meters is worth taking seriously, even though results remain convincing in slightly smaller spaces.

Fortunately, the manufacturer's lineup also includes options for smaller rooms, such as the three-way standmount model Bookshelf 8 from the same 1528 series. We liked the Tower 8's strengths so much that we plan to investigate how the smaller standmount version performs in the near future.

PROS

Solid and sturdy construction

Good accessories and packaging

Impressive sound

CONS

Requires a genuinely spacious listening room

MIKAEL NEDERSTRÖM

A very neutral loudspeaker, mostly in a good way. The sound is dynamic and detached, tight and well separated. The treble is bright yet sufficiently soft and clean-sounding. The midrange is sharp and articulate, though on some recordings perhaps slightly cool or dry. Dire Straits' electric bass is easy to follow, though not quite as richly textured as it can be at its best. This effect is partly recording-dependent. Metallica can become a bit fatiguing at higher volumes, while Black Sabbath's *Master of Reality* does not sound aggressive and instead plays lively and engaging.

Micro- and macrodynamics are well under control, and power never seems to run out with any material. There is plenty of precision and separation, especially in the bass region. The skins of Kodo drums are beautifully defined in the soundstage, as are metallic objects left in the background. The sound remains stable and unwavering throughout. The very lowest frequencies are missing, which is somewhat surprising given the speaker's dynamic capabilities. On the other hand, bass quality is so good that a subwoofer is rarely missed. Overall, a very convincing package with very little to complain about.