



Solid as a Rock

Thanks to its organic shape the Nordic Tone looks different and highly attractive from every angle. Apart from the baseboard, there are no flat surfaces. Even top cover and baffle are slightly curved. Equally alluring: the lower section of the speaker, where the two bass drivers

are mounted, has an appreciably lower cut than the top.

In photos the speaker looks much bigger and mightier than it is in reality. In fact, the sculpture is no more than 108 centimetres tall. Alongside many loudspeakers almost as tall as a man in the €30,000-league the Norwegian seems almost dainty and compact. If not before, you notice that the speaker, finished in two-tone grey gloss lacquer, is not made in any normal way as soon as you try to adjust its angle. A full 75 kilograms need to be moved on each side, around three times as much as for an average speaker of this type of volume.

A further 'aha' moment comes with the knocking test. No matter where on the casing my knuckles knock, acoustically nothing happens. The walls seem stone dead in a way that I have rarely experienced. No rattle, no clatter, simply silence. Leaving just aching knuckles and respect for a quality of finish that seems designed to last an eternity. The two-part cabinets are produced from cast aluminium in a complex process, with the average wall thickness being just 7 millimetres. How-

The cabinets are cast in a complex process from aluminium 7 millimetres thick. The internal sides are lined with sheets of bitumen, which absorb any resonance at high frequencies. The visible parts are finished in a high-gloss lacquer.

ever, the units are extremely rigid, with a major part in this played by the spherical shape. This design moves any appearances of resonance into non-critical frequency ranges, where they are easier to control.

The internal sides of the cabinets are clad with bitumen mats, which comprehensively absorb any remaining, high-frequency resonance. This also reduces the escape of any dulling, inversely phased sound leftovers from inside the cabinets. The base section houses a crossover network fitted with high-class components from Cologne-based specialists Mundorf. The fronts with the flush-mounted drivers are separately made and not fitted until the end.

In the bass range the Nordic Tone is designed as a closed, infinite-baffle speaker, without reflex ports or transmission line. The Norwegians have thus not only opted for this concept with in principle the best impulse processing, but they also maximise in this way the benefits of aluminium construction. As no low bass range elements need to be caught, the cavities inside the speaker can be optimally deadened. This is done using wedges of rock wool, the absorption characteristics of which are tailored to the speakers. The inside of the speaker looks like an acoustically dead room and behaves that way, too. Developing the cabinets was such a complex and costly process that it was financially supported by the Norwegian government. In theory, configuration as a closed box design can be somewhat at the expense of efficiency. In practice, however, the Norwegian proves very frugal on power, presumably in part because the extremely neutral housing units give off practically no inversely phased energy.

Norwegian manufacturers Electrocompaniet are known largely for their high-class amplifiers. What few know, however, is that they also make loudspeakers. Of particular interest to high-enders is the Nordic Tone Model 1. Its housing units are elaborately cast from aluminium and are of outstanding neutrality.

WRITTEN BY Wolfram Eifert

Electrocompaniet buys in the drivers from specialists Scan Speak and Seas, who enjoy an excellent reputation. The woofers' magnesium-based cone diaphragms are generously proportioned in relation to the volume of the cabinet, not least in order to compensate for low bass support provided by port and detour tubes, which a closed box concept does not provide.

Initial concerns that due to its purist concept the Nordic Tone may be handicapped in terms of maximum SPL proved

to be unfounded. The test lab showed the Norwegian to have a maximum volume of a mighty 108 decibels, more than many vented speakers. And more than the mere number would suggest, the sound remains clear and stable for a long time, even when the speaker is being energetically used. Clarity is indeed the right key word to characterise the Nordic Tone. Its sound lacks any inclination to slather, boom or thicken; even when played particularly quietly comprehensibility is therefore excellent.

For a closed-box speaker its hunger for power is very moderate. 30 watts at the terminals produce in mathematical terms an SPL in the range around 100 decibels, which signals to those in the know that there is little point when choosing the amp in going for an over-the-top giant. You should merely ensure that current delivery is not too limited, as with an impedance minimum of 2.4 ohms in the bass range the speaker rates as a rather low-impedance representative of its breed. >



The different sized parts of the housing are additionally stabilised by horizontally running struts. Wedges made of rock wool (red and yellow) fill the cavities. The frequency separating filter sits on its own in the base.



The acoustically advantageous shape looks interesting from every angle. The rounded fronts get fitted last.

The woofers from Seas have parameters for enclosed cabinets and a magnesium-based high-strength diaphragm. A very open design ensures compression-free ventilation.



Within the Norwegians' electronics portfolio the AW 400 monoblocks for a good €10,000 are seen as the gold standard for controlling the Nordic Tone. For those on a lower budget national sales manager Matthias Roth recommends the EC15 MKII, which costs just under €4,000 and was highlighted when tested in our sister publication 'stereoplay' in November 2010 for playing in a very calm and concentrated way. Which just leaves the question: what drives a successful electronics manufacturer to develop such an ambitious speaker?

One of the motives is of a pragmatic nature: they were tired of having to demonstrate their components in the trade and at shows using third-party and also constantly changing speakers, which clearly does not always lead to harmonious results. This dependency is now history, as this much is already clear after just a few beats: the Nordic Tone is an excellently and fully developed, neutral loudspeaker, which has no need to shy away from competition with the products of established speaker specialists. The fact that the speaker is frequently sold as part of a package with the company's own amplifier electronics makes perfect sense, as the latter's tendency to well-measured richness marvellously matches the neutral, dry and precise character.

That products from the same manufacturer work particularly well in harmony together is no real surprise. For auditory precision tuning of their loudspeakers other full-range manufacturers also prefer to use their own amplifiers and thus achieve a particularly harmonious overall sound. The Nordic Tone's bass and kick bass range felt leaner than is usual in this class, though for many users the supposed frugality will probably turn out to be a blessing. In contrast to many competitors in this class the speaker also tolerates being set up fairly close to a wall without starting to sound too dense or boomy. And it soon becomes clear that the aluminium speaker does not necessarily produce less bass energy than any others, but that any resonance probably decays faster and therefore subjectively it seems leaner than many ported or even transmission line designs.

Indeed, you have to say that this exceptional speaker offers state-of-the-art precision and, contrary to any negative suggestions that "the truth is hidden between the lines", that statement does not mean any loss of sensuality or acoustic versatility, quite the opposite! It's the kind of speaker where you have a hard time deciding what to do first: let yourself be overwhelmed by all its involving musicality, or go on a treasure hunt with your favorite records, re-discovering them by hearing exciting new details around every musical corner.

In 'Quality Of Mercy' folk singer Michelle Shocked sings about the social consequences of the death penalty in the USA. Originating from the soundtrack of the film 'Dead Man Walking' (Columbus), the work provides a tough test of the pulse response with meaty bass sequences and her raspy singing voice. The Nordic Tone shows up excellently here, effortlessly moving along with the countless dynamic graduations. If all speakers sounded so neutral and precise, we testers would have to think up something else to do. <

Electrocompaniet The Nordic Tone Model 1

List price: €28,000
Warranty period: 5 years
Weight: 75 kg
Size (W x H x D):
36 x 108 x 52 cm
Surfaces: High-gloss lacquer,
two-coloured

Sales:
MRV Matthias Roth
Rathenaustraße 18
91052 Erlangen
Germany

Telephone: 0 91 31 / 52 99 6

Website: www.mrvaudio.de,
www.electrocompaniet.com



Test CD Dead Man Walking (Columbia)

Featuring Bruce Springsteen and Tom Waits, this soundtrack from 1995 has a high-profile line-up. The enormous acoustic density is a challenge for any system. Suggested track: Michelle Shocked with 'Quality of Mercy'.



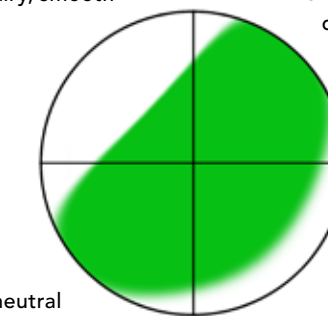
The Writer Wolfram Eifert

A graduate of media technology, he has worked as a hifi journalist for around 20 years and knows the scene better than almost anyone else. For his home system neutrality is the most important quality. True to the motto 'Emotions emerge in the mind, not in the machine'.

AUDIOophile character

effortless
airy, smooth

Gripping
emotional
dynamic



neutral
authentic

direct
high resolution

AUDIOophile potential

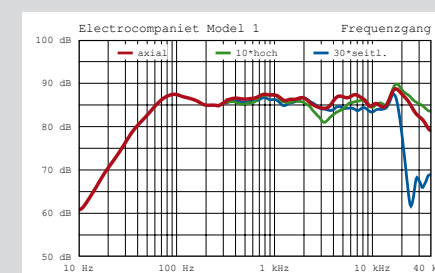


System recommendation

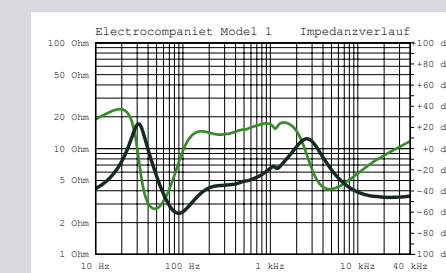
The Model 1 favours normally damped rooms and may also be positioned close to a wall. The amp has to cope with low-impedance loads and should sound full-bodied.

Measurements

Frequency response



Impedance vs Frequency



The Nordic Tone behaves in a markedly balanced way with no significant deviations from ideal to be noticed anywhere. Equally good is its off-axis performance, even at 30 degrees (blue) to the side. Typical for a non-vented speaker concept is the gentle drop in bass with a slope of just 12 decibels per octave.

With just one impedance peak in the bass range the Nordic Tone shows that it is a closed box concept. The minimum is reached with 2.4 ohms at 90Hz. The amp's current output capacity is particularly called for here. The maximum SPL is 108dB. The low bass range extends to 51Hz.