



Audio Physic Avanti | Stereo speakers | £4280

"Subtlety and emotion, breathtaking crispness"

FOR Crisp, articulate sound; fine build; clever engineering

AGAINST Sound appeals to the head more than the feet



Why should you buy Audio Physic's Avantis when there are a multitude of better-known speakers from the likes of B&W, Focal and PMC? At first glance that's not an easy question to answer. The Avanti looks like just another premium two-way floorstander, and the world is hardly short of those.

But those familiar with the brand - probably not so many in the UK, admittedly - know that these towers are likely to have considerable substance. Over its 30-year history, Audio Physic has turned out more than its fair share of fine speakers, and this current Avanti can be counted among them.

Where's woofer?

Despite appearances, these floorstanders are three-way designs. The tweeter and midrange drivers are obvious enough, but where's the bass unit? Usually, it would be found on the front or one of the sides, but here it's hidden inside the cabinet, mounted to the base, and ported through a slot below the front baffle.

Here's where things get really interesting. The woofer - a 22cm paper-cone unit that crosses over to the midrange at around 130Hz - fires through the base. Take a look under the speakers and you'll find the base isn't the usual veneer-covered wooden board but is made of ceramic foam. This porous material not only adds strength to the

speaker's structure but also allows the sound from the driver to pass through.

The unusual bass arrangement helps make the speakers less fussy about room placement. It works, the Avantis sounding balanced across a wide range of positions. We wouldn't put them right up against a wall or in a corner, but given a little room to breathe they're perfectly happy.

At the other end of the frequency spectrum, what initially seems like a conventional dome tweeter turns out to be a far less common cone design. It uses a 38mm aluminium diaphragm. The metal theme continues with the 13cm midrange, which - like the tweeter - uses an elastic damping ring along the outer edge of the cone to control resonances. The midrange's chassis is unusual too. It uses a plastic basket inside the aluminium frame to deliver a structure that combines rigidity, low resonance and an element of decoupling. Clever.

Structural integrity

The same could be said of the cabinet. Inside it's solidly braced, and lined using more of that ceramic foam, which not only adds to rigidity but also improves the vibration damping of the enclosure.

We're impressed by the lovely glossy finish too, and every panel lines up just so, giving the Avantis the air of quality designer furniture - an impression reinforced by slanted design.

There are several finishes available, from the usual walnut, black ash and cherry to the fetching ebony of our review sample. For an extra £1000, there's also a premium all-glass option, which looks stunning in the right surroundings.

No devils in this detail

Audio Physic's company motto is 'No Loss Of Fine Detail'. Not the catchiest tag line, but it describes the sound of the Avantis pretty well. Connected to our usual reference system - Naim's NDS/555PS streamer, the Clearaudio Innovation Wood turntable, Cyrus's Signature phono stage/PSX-R2 and the Gamut D3i/D200i pre/power combination - these speakers impress.

Our first impression is of a remarkably clean presentation. The Avantis deliver an up-front and detailed sound that positively brims with agility. Give them a sparse recording such as The xx's *Angels* and they shine, rendering the group's vocals with considerable finesse.

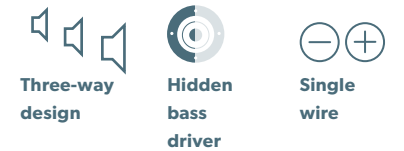
The Audio Physic capture the subtlety and emotion of the track beautifully, with each part of the minimal instrumentation rendered with breathtaking crispness. Leading edges are superbly defined, but never over-emphasised. It's an articulate sound too, right from the lowest bass notes upwards.

Tonally, things are a touch brightly lit, a little lean and can be provoked with aggressive recordings or edgy systems. But if carefully matched, the presentation remains balanced enough to convince. The integration between the three drivers is seamless, which points to a carefully calibrated crossover.



Several finishes are available - including a stunning all-glass option - each one built to the highest standards

KEY FEATURES



The Avanti's low-end is pleasingly taut and punchy, and delivered with far more authority than most would credit from such a slimline tower - these floorstanders may be 109cm tall but they're only 17cm wide. This helps to make them an unobtrusive addition to any listening room.

Extended seasons

Switch to Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* and these speakers respond positively. They cast an expansive soundstage that extends well beyond their physical form. It's nicely layered and stable, even when the music gets busy. We're also impressed by the Audio Physic's composure. They always sound unflustered, regardless of the music's complexity or, to a large extent, volume level.

Dynamically, the Avantis are pretty good. They deliver large-scale swings with confidence, though by the highest standards (and we must apply those here) they stop just short of conveying the ebb and flow of Vivaldi's music with total conviction.

Radiohead's *In Rainbows* shows another minor crack in the Audio Physic's case. For all their considerable talents, these speakers aren't particularly great at communicating rhythms. While each note is defined with clarity, they aren't strung together well enough to convey the hard-charging momentum of *15 Step* with the energy it deserves. This shortfall doesn't go so far as to spoil our enjoyment, but it certainly takes it down a notch.

Powerful pros

We still like the Avantis, though. They're smart, elegant and packed with clever engineering. Their sound brims with agility and clarity, and it's all backed up with class-leading build and finish. They're worth a serious audition.

WHAT HI-FI? says

Rating ★★★★★

SOUND ★★★★★

COMPATIBILITY ★★★★★

BUILD ★★★★★

VERDICT The Avantis are well built, elegant and deliver a sound packed with clarity and agility. Surprisingly muscular bass, too

"We're impressed by the lovely glossy finish too, and every panel lines up just so, giving the Avantis the air of quality designer furniture"