

Waterfall Victoria

Can this French-built glass loudspeaker sound as transparent as it looks? The Waterfall's secret is in the damping

Waterfall Victoria TWN

PRICE £3000/pair

On the face of it, glass is an unlikely choice for a cabinet material, but Waterfall points to its density, reminding us that sand (or silica, the prime component of glass) has occasionally done sterling service as a damping medium in some high-end designs. Unlike sand, though, glass is highly reflective, which threatens mayhem in an application where a substantial part of its remit would ordinarily be to contain sound from the rear of the drivers.

The enclosure can't be damped (well, it can if you don't mind seeing a filling of absorbent wadding, or use opaque glass), Waterfall figured, but why not apply damping 'at source', using tubular extensions located immediately behind the drivers? Thus was born Waterfall's ADT (Acoustic Damping Tube), a 70mm long, 120mm inside diameter, 4mm thick cardboard tube in

seven-component crossover (air-cored chokes and polypropylene capacitors) is built on a small PCB in the plinth from which three neatly strung wire pairs feed up to the drivers and can be seen through the baffle. There is no provision for bi-wiring (just two gold-plated 4mm socket/binding posts). The feed to the two bass drivers is paralleled; this is a three-driver, two-way design.

With a nominal impedance of 4 ohms (and it never goes below this) and a sensitivity of around 90dB (for 2.83V at 1m) the Victoria presents a straightforward load.

First impressions are the most critical and mine were: how remarkably unbox-like this speaker sounds; how articulate it is in the mid and treble; and how convincingly it establishes an image. I have some reservations about the bass, which seems to increase the 'bloat' of bass-heavy orchestral material yet is well paced with lighter scored material, while a fairly evident contribution in the octave below middle C tends to warm the

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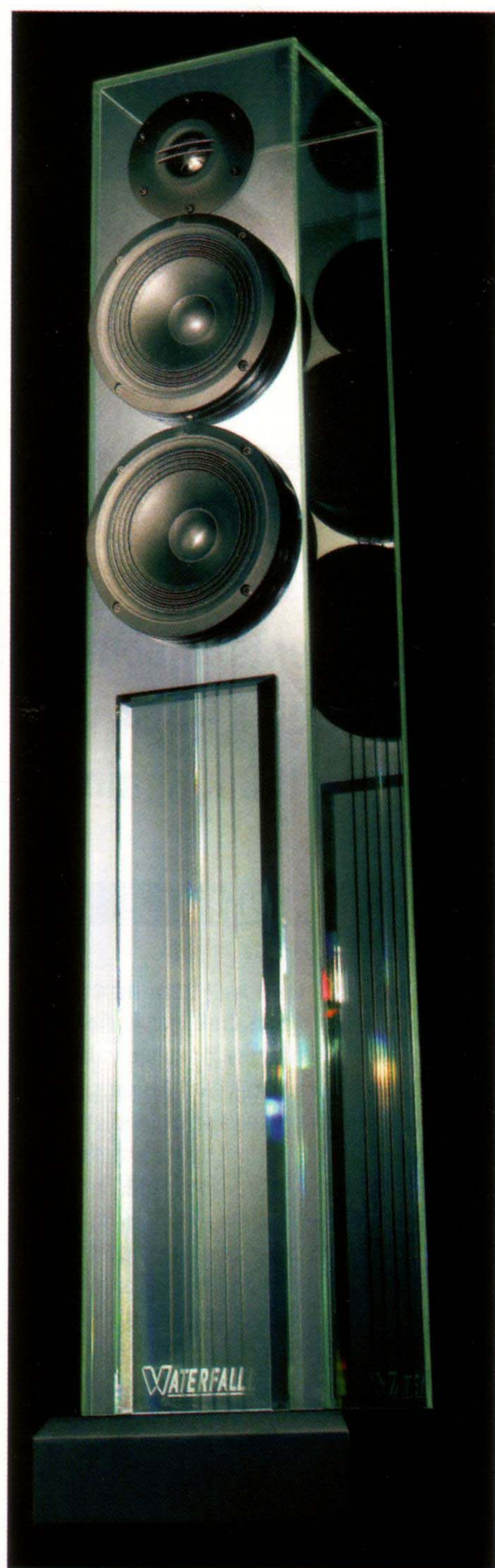
which the rear of the bass driver (in this case, drivers) sits, and whose otherwise open far end is policed by a thin open weave foam disc preceded by a layer of acetate fibre wadding (it's amazing what you can patent). This subdues midrange energy and pacifies cone excursion at low frequencies, and is claimed to be a 'perfect insulator between the driver and the glass'.

The Victoria TWN is the top model in a range of three freestanding speakers, all having plan view cabinet dimensions of 215 x 215mm. Below it in height and bass extension come the two-way, two-unit Iguasçu TWN and two-way, single-unit (coaxial) Athabasca. The 150mm bass/mid drivers are made by Triangle and have a doped paper cone with a pleated woven surround and 'spider', all built on to an impressively rigid cast chassis. The sealed 20mm metal-dome tweeter is from Atohm and has a neodymium magnet. The

tonal character. Spoken word is lucid, though, and solo piano – a severe test – is very well conveyed, both in weight and its inherently percussive nature.

These foibles can be tempered to an extent by experiment with positioning. They're also relatively mild so that after a while the ear easily hears through them. Certainly I soon came to appreciate the intrinsically musical character on offer here and found myself listening at great length over several weeks, fascinated in hearing new detail in recordings I thought I knew inside out.

As ever, you'll get the best results with a powerful amplifier, but this is not a speaker for the Wellington brigade. It holds its focus extremely well across a range of quiet to moderate sound levels but will tighten if pushed too hard (will it fail before it shatters, I wonder?). My cynicism at the thought of a glass cabinet was almost entirely



confounded in reality. With closed eyes I was substantially won over by the sound; with them open again I was intrigued by their novel, room-friendly appearance. Not quite the pinnacle in each world but possibly the best of both. ■

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Hi-FiNews verdict

A surprisingly capable and coherent performer. Excellent detail and generally smooth tonal balance with only some warmth in the lower midrange complicating an otherwise clean sonic signature. Best at quiet to moderate sound levels.