

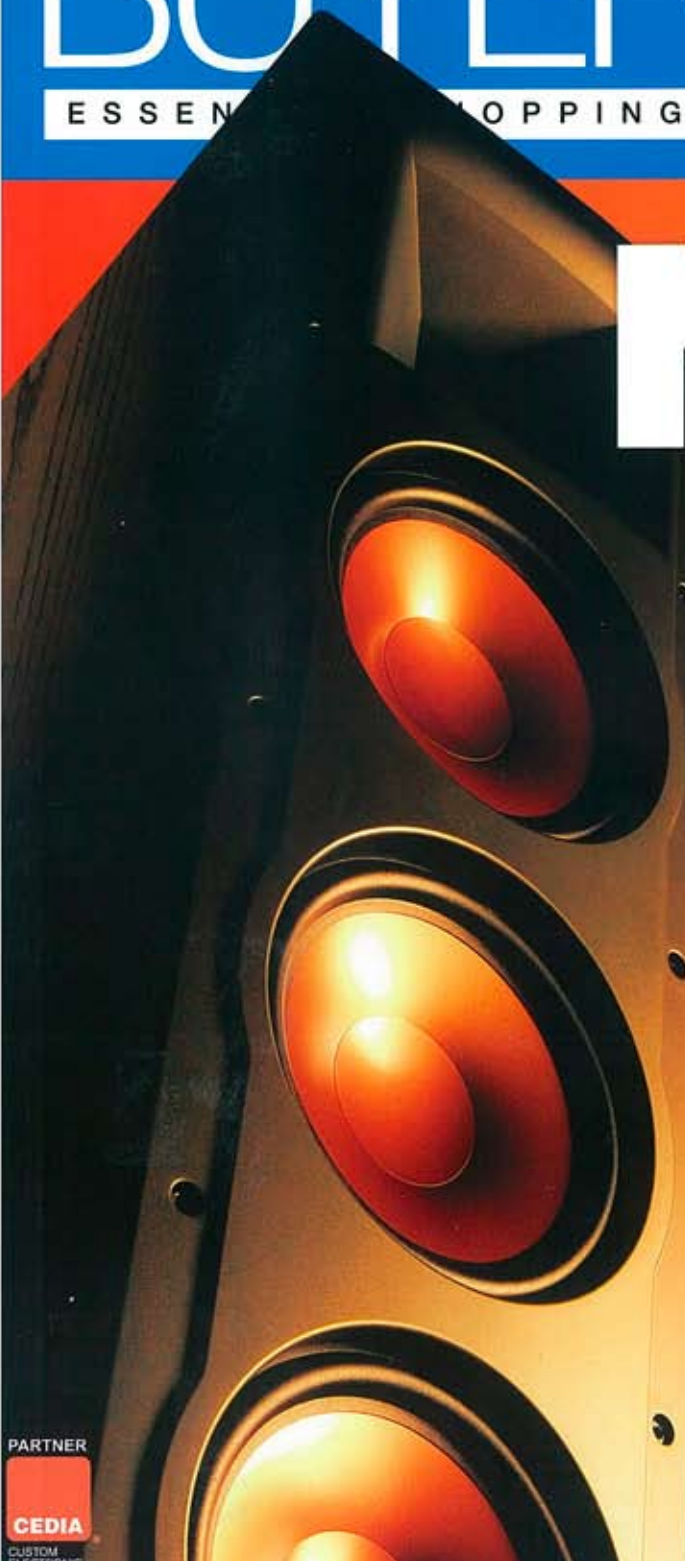
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Loudspeaker design is not a perfect science – performance gains in one area are balanced against losses in another, even in the world's most expensive speakers. The key when auditioning is to listen not for the perfect sound, but for the sound you like. Pictured: Bowers & Wilkins 800 Series (above) and Focal Grand Utopia (right).



“If it comes to a choice between \$2000 loudspeakers with \$1000 cables, and \$2950 loudspeakers with \$50 cables, the latter is more likely to give you the best performance”

The frequency response is usually expressed as something like 30 to 20,000 hertz, +/-3dB. It is the '3dB' part that specifies how balanced, or smooth the response is. The smaller that figure, the better.

It would also ideally be distortion free. But there is no such thing. Instead we seek loudspeakers that keep distortion to below audible levels. Almost no manufacturers publish distortion specifications, so we have to literally go by ear with this. What you should avoid are loudspeakers that sound harsh as the volume level increases up to your preferred listening levels.

In general, higher volume levels are achievable with loudspeakers that are higher in 'sensitivity' and to which more power is available from the amplifier. Sensitivity is a measure of how much sound you get out of them for a given level of input power. A figure of about 88dB or 89dB (measured at one metre for a 2.83 volt input) is about average for high quality loudspeakers. Loudspeakers with their sensitivity rated 3dB higher achieve much the same effect as employing an amplifier with twice the power output.

But many loudspeaker makers sacrifice some sensitivity in order to engineer better performance in other areas.

An obvious choice is between floorstanding and 'bookshelf' sized loudspeakers. Even if you love your bass, don't automatically rule out the latter. Good stand-mounted loudspeakers can sound better than equivalently priced floorstanders, thanks to tighter construction and more money being put into the drivers, rather than the larger cabinet.

A final and subtle area of vital importance for loudspeakers in stereo systems is their 'imaging'. That is, their ability to create a realistic sound aural sense of a musical instrument or a voice coming from between the loudspeakers. This image should be reasonably sharp - you should be able to close your eyes and point a finger directly at it. And 'between' the speakers can be quite a broad term. High quality stereo loudspeakers lend the 'sound stage' they present an ability to deliver a sense of depth and height as well as width, and sometimes the width can extend even wider than the locations of the speakers themselves.

“They produced plenty of deep grunt and the bass drum in an orchestral crescendo was delivered without any sense of limitation”

FOCAL CHORUS 726V

French loudspeaker maker Focal has one of the most extraordinarily wide ranges of loudspeakers on the market, and most of them are marked by an unusual tweeter design. Called an 'inverted dome', the sound-radiating surface is concave rather than convex. Does this make a difference, given that everyone does it the other way around? Not according to my listening over the years.

In this pair of Chorus 726V floorstanding speakers, this tweeter is supplemented by three 165mm drivers. One is a midrange unit and the other two provide the bass. The enclosure is bass-reflex loaded.

The styling was unusual (hey, it's French), with a shallow V-shape atop the cloth grille, over which peeks the metal-grilled tweeter. Both grilles are removable.

Another point of variation from usual practice is that only one set of terminals are provided for each loudspeaker, not the usual bi-wiring arrangement. I think it makes no difference but fans of bi-wiring should take this into account.

Focal rates the sensitivity of the Chorus 726V speakers at a rather high 91.5dB, and they did prove to deliver higher sound levels than the others for a given amplifier power. Despite their size and solid construction (23.5kg!), the bass end is rated down to a modest 48 hertz (at -3dB).

They certainly didn't sound like that. I found they produced plenty of deep grunt and the bass drum in an orchestral crescendo was delivered without any sense of limitation.

Despite the large midrange driver, it and the tweeter seemed particularly well-matched, giving a clean and very precise stereo image, although there was not quite so much a sense of air or roundedness in the image as the Tannoy or Cabasse speakers. Still, the result was a very up-front and transparent performance; one that was very revealing of all the musical content of the discs I tried.



- Excellent tonal balance
- High sensitivity allows high volume levels
- Stereo imaging lacked a little depth and 'roundedness'

RATINGS

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EASE OF USE



VALUE FOR MONEY



SPECIFICATIONS

Category: Speakers

Price: \$2999

Warranty: Five years

Contact: Audio Marketing Pty Ltd
(02) 9882 3877

www.audiomarketing.com.au

Features: 3 way; 1 x 25mm TNV Aluminium/Magnesium inverted dome tweeter, 1 x 165mm polyglass midrange, 2 x 165mm polyglass bass; **Frequency**

response: 48 to 28,000Hz +/- 3dB;

Sensitivity: 91.5dB; **Impedance:** 8

ohms; **Recommended Amplifier**

Power: 40 to 250 watts

Dimensions (WHD, Weight):

222 x 990 x 375mm; 23.5kg