



Field Test: American Acoustic Development Model 7001



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HIGH-END, TRANSPARENT MONITORS FOR MIXING AND MASTERING

From Phil Jones — designer of the Acoustic Energy AE-1, Boston Acoustic's Lynnfield 300 and 500 monitors, and the AAD 2001 — comes a new challenger in the near-field of high-end monitoring. The two-way American Acoustic Development (AAD) 7001 has a 5.25-inch woofer and horn-loaded neodymium ribbon tweeter. Power handling is rated at 100 watts minimum, 1,000W maximum, with sensitivity rated at 86 dB, 1W/1m. As an alternative to the more common ported enclosure, a rear-firing, 6.5-inch tuned passive radiator has a neoprene suspension that's capable of excursion in the 2-inch range.

Like most speakers at this performance level, you can bi-amp each driver separately or use the shorting bars to strap both woofer and tweeter together using the built-in crossover (12dB/octave starting at 3 kHz). Standard banana plug connections are suggested, but twist-on connectors will do the job just as well. I used two 4-foot segments of 12-gauge solid-copper wire for my testing with a 700W Phil Jones amp (supplied by AAD for this review).

HEY, GOOD LOOKIN'

Available in aquamarine tiger maple, piano black or cherry finishes, the cabinets alone are a work of art. Their exquisite side panels also have lead dampening, which — along with the half-inch aluminum-slab front/rear baffles and 1.5-inch thick MDF side panels — surely adds to each speaker's 77-pound-per-box heft.

Not for the weak of back, companion speaker stands (included with the 7001s) are also very heavy, although you won't find a safer or more solid means of supporting the speakers than these stands. As a plus, the overall sonic image resulting from such stability is superb.

Although designed and touted as “near-field” monitors, the AAD 7001s have a much wider sweet spot than expected, making them equally desirable in home theater and listening environments, as well as for mastering and critical monitoring apps. My own tests verified the manufacturer's claims of nearly full energy at 90 degrees off-axis. The best results occurred when sitting between the suggested 40 to 60-degree angle, but they sounded great almost anywhere in the room, and I didn't need to sit quite as close to them at all times either. There were instances when I would “sneak up” on my own mixes from outside of the room, and it was quite startling to hear full details coming from behind the speakers and off to the sides.

AAD suggests some burn-in time with the 7001s. In my case, after about a week of use their overall response went from somewhat cold and brittle to a much more rounded, musical sound.

CRITICALLY LISTENING

I was working on several critical projects when the 7001s arrived, so after breaking them in I employed them immediately. With my Lipinski L-505 passive monitors already in use on location, I needed a reliable “second opinion” for audio reference back at home base for sessions ranging from a film score mix and CD mastering to several FM radio broadcasts. I placed the 7001s in a free-field environment in my then-temporary production studio, roughly 10 feet from any walls, ceilings, corners or reflective surfaces, and away from my already-cluttered normal mix position as I wanted to hear them in their most neutral state.

In the studio, they opened up an entirely new, richly detailed sonic landscape for my mixes, including the soundtrack for the new Warner Bros. animation DVD Tom & Jerry's Nutcracker Tale with a 60-piece orchestral score, which required daily spot-checks away from the recording venue. For another project — a live recording for FM radio broadcast of Grammy-winning jazz pianist Danilo Perez's band with saxophonist David Sanchez — I relied solely on the AAD 7001s for my references and mixes, with excellent results all around. Last but not least was the sheer pleasure of a simple piano and solo soprano voice recording/mastering project that left the clients nearly in tears of joy during final playback.

ARE THEY A FIT?

What did they sound like? Absolutely nothing at all, returning exactly what I fed to them with a clarity and depth that I've only heard on the best speakers I've reviewed over the years. Surprisingly, I felt less of a need for a subwoofer with these speakers than with many other speakers I've auditioned, but I would probably add one for professional use. Their stated response is 25 to 60k Hz (± 2 dB), so perhaps that explains things a bit. The AAD 7001s were never harsh or fatiguing, and with a sweet spot that's wider — and a bit higher — than one might expect with boxes of this size (16.5×9.8×16.5 inches), they more than deliver on their reputation and promise as an excellent choice for personal or professional monitoring in the near-field.

Every once in a while, you encounter a very special product that leaves little room for doubt as to its potential. The AAD 7001 is one of those pieces of gear, especially where critical listening, mixing and non-fatiguing mastering sessions are required. With their substantial weight and steep pricing at \$12,499.99 per pair, these are serious tools for serious users. Anyone who thinks they've “heard it all” should give these a try — but prepare to be surprised.

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