

home **tech** THREE CONTENDERS

Listen up!

Trust your own ears when buying floor-standing speakers, advises **Rod Easdown**.

People get passionate about speakers and that's probably because nothing influences the sound of your system as much as your choice of speaker.

It is easy to get carried away by the technicalities of this business but, in the end, there's really only one thing you should trust and that's your ears.

So let's help out with some terms you're going to hear.

Take the grille off the speaker and you'll see the individual drivers, the big ones handling lower notes and the small ones handling the highs. Here, we compare floor-standing speakers that cost less than \$2000. In this price range there are usually at least a couple of larger drivers (woofers) and a single small one (tweeter).

In a two-way speaker, both woofers reproduce the same lower notes while higher notes are handed to the tweeter. A device called the crossover allocates particular signals to a particular driver.

Some of the speakers here are known as 2½-way speakers and, in these, one woofer handles bass notes and mid-range notes while the other, of the same size, handles only bass notes. This increases the bass level, which is handy for home cinemas, but it can also enhance music, particularly rock.

A speaker with a separate driver for the bass, another for mids and a tweeter for the highs is called a three-way and there are four-ways, too, such as the Richter looked at here.

Floor-standing speakers on carpet can be unstable but this can be rectified by using optional spikes.

The spikes attach to the base of the cabinet and pierce through the fibres of the carpet (usually without damage) to mount the speaker squarely on the floor surface. This stabilises the speaker.

Audiophiles wouldn't be without spikes because they believe the greater stability created by the spikes stops the

speaker cabinet rocking slightly in sympathy to the driver cones punching in and out, therefore yielding more accurate, and better defined, music.

They also reduce vibrations from the cabinet to the floor, lessening transmitted noise. If you shop for speakers at specialist hi-fi stores, it's almost certain the speakers you audition will have spikes.

However, whether the speaker is two-, 2½-, three- or four-way, or whether it has spikes or can be bi-wired (so one set of connections can power the high notes and another the lows), it's the way the speaker sounds to you that will determine what you buy – and only you have your ears.

It's important, therefore, to listen to many speakers through equipment similar to your own. You'll be surprised by the variations you hear.



ORPHEUS AURORA 3

These are 2½-way speakers with two 16.5cm drivers for bass and mid/bass and a 2.5cm silk-dome tweeter. They have a wide soundstage, handle bass well, but also do justice to mids and highs with a delightfully clean top end. A bright, exciting sound. Dimensions: 93cm tall x 33cm deep x 22cm wide; 22kg. **RRP \$1795**



JM LABS 716S

These are 2½-way speakers with two 15cm drivers for bass and mid/bass and a 2.5cm inverted-dome tweeter. There is a powerful and rich mid-range that gives them lots of presence, along with rich highs and reasonably good bass. With a wide soundstage they are excellent all rounders. Dimensions: 95 x 30 x 22cm; 18kg. **RRP \$1699**

RICHTER DRAGON

These are four-way speakers with two 15cm bass drivers, a 15cm mid and a 2cm titanium-dome tweeter. They lack the sparkling definition of the Orpheus and have a more restrained sound that is disciplined across the audible range. The sound is more clinical, less spacious and tends to replace warmth and personality with accuracy. Dimensions: 98 x 42 x 21cm; 27kg. **RRP \$1995**

INFOFILE

Orpheus 9584 1822 www.orpheusaudio.com.au
JM Lab 9420 9467 www.focal-fr.com
Richter 9981 1844

THE VERDICT

The Orpheus speakers win this comfortably and are worth the extra \$100 over the JM Labs, which are probably an ideal speaker for a music system that doubles as a home cinema. To our ears, both produced better sound than the Richters.

NEXT WEEK

We compare \$5000 TV screens.