

Future perfect

Offering 3,000 watts of total power output, **Ed Selley** is blown away by this six-driver, DSP-controlled active loudspeaker system

There is a line of thought that truly game-changing products rarely appear from already established companies because to release such a thing is to admit that everything produced before it was somehow flawed. While I don't completely agree with the thinking, the radical speaker system design you see here is from fairly new German-based manufacturer Kii Audio.

Distributed in the UK by Sound Design Distribution, Kii Audio was founded by Bruno Putzeys – a man who has had a considerable input into the refinement of Class D amplification (see *HFC* 425) – and whose company exists solely to make active speakers. The THREE is not a traditional fusion of amplifier and transducer, being equipped with its own decoding and DSP control to form a complete system.

Putzeys set out to create a speaker with a response that is flat to within 0.5dB between 30Hz to well beyond the threshold of audibility. It can do this while removing any induced colouration from room interaction. The claim is nothing less than perfect sound almost regardless of the situation it is operating in.

To do this, the THREE is equipped with six drivers per cabinet. At the front, a 25mm waveguided tweeter ▶

COMPONENTS

Kii AUDIO THREE

A six-way active speaker boasting 3,000W per pair powered by high-quality Class D amplification that uses a sophisticated DSP system to ensure it produces a single, cohesive point of sound that can be adjusted to fit the behaviour of any room it's placed in.

Kii AUDIO CONTROL

The optional controller/preamp adds digital coaxial, optical and USB inputs with support for PCM files up to 384kHz and DSD128. It provides volume, source selection and mute controls, as well as DSP boundary and contour filtering adjustments facilitated by a small OLED display.



Picture credit: Adobe Stock

and a 127mm midrange driver are arranged in a relatively conventional fashion and then augmented by four 165mm bass drivers – one on either side of the cabinet, and a pair on the rear that has a different role. The drivers on the side augment the bass response, while the rear ones cancel out the performance behind the speaker. The result is that all the sound they produce is perceived to emanate entirely from the midrange driver.

Power ranger

To provide the power to make this happen, each speaker has six channels of amplification claimed at 250W each. The THREE decodes PCM to 24-bit/192kHz and with the optional CONTROL (£1,495) preamp this rises to 24-bit/384kHz and adds DSD128 support. Alternatively, the THREE can be attached to a preamp of your choice if you want to break yourself in gently to the cleverness, or it can be expanded to a floorstander via a pair of BXT bass array modules (£7,500 each) adding eight drivers a side and an extra 4,000W.

The decision to use a painted outer chassis with a darker insert means that

the aesthetic has more in common with a supercar than a speaker cabinet. Quite how arresting this is, is up to you as any colour is available to order. The contrasting white of the review sample looks good, but to my mind it has even more impact with a dark grey finish.

The way the THREE sits on its dedicated stands (£995 per pair) in a room is also different to a conventional system. With all amplification built in,

The THREE has exactly the scale it needs to convince – no more, no less

the speaker becomes the sole focus and – as noted – this can be as subtle or as eye catching as the fancy takes you. For those that are perpetually ashamed at the responses of “How much?!” when explaining what they’ve spent on a system, the THREE offers the chance to own a high-end setup that will pass unnoticed by ‘civilians.’

At no stage of a varied and demanding program of listening material is there the slightest hint of

Above left:
Rear-facing drivers help shape the performance

Above:
Comprehensive inputs help the THREE work in a variety of setups

Above right:
The excellent design and build helps the Kii look good in all spaces

the technology at work. You don’t hear six drivers. You’re not aware of the software removing the ‘first boundary’ response of sound hitting the floor before making it to your ear. Instead you’re treated to a performance that quite simply shouldn’t be possible from a cabinet of this size.

How low can you go?

Take the wonderful *Goya Soda* by Christine And The Queens as an example. This suspends Héloïse Letissier’s delicate vocals over a heavyweight synth line with sparse percussion. At various points, the synth drops off into the realms of subsonics – usually going inaudible as the frequency drops. But here it remains completely perceivable as it falls to a point where it’s felt rather than heard. The effect this has on the reproduction of the vocals is none. Zero. Zip. Zilch. Letissier is smack bang between the speakers, a living breathing presence that’s utterly unaffected by the low-frequency fury at work at the same time.

Not content with a complete rewrite of the sort of punch that a standmount should be capable of, it’s the soundstage

that truly astounds. Given a live recording – such as Public Service Broadcasting’s *Live At Brixton Academy* – the effect it generates is borderline incomprehensible. The lack of interaction with the room means that the main stage at Brixton is in front of you. The crowd becomes a living entity at about the point where you are and the performance – and be under no illusions, it is a performance rather than a recording – unfolds in all its glory in the room right in front of you.

Heart and soul

What is notable is that none of this order and cohesion gets in the way of musical joy. The wonderful sequence in *The Other Side* where the Apollo 8 capsule goes out of signal behind the moon is gorgeously atmospheric. The elation in both the music and the audience response at the crescendo is writ large into the recording and it’s impossible not to be caught up in it all. Neither does the performance have to be big for this emotional content to hit home. The wonderfully loping and intimate, *You Can Bring Me Flowers* by Ray LaMontagne has exactly the scale it needs to convince



DISTRIBUTOR
Sound Design
Distribution Ltd.

TELEPHONE
0800 0096213

WEBSITES
sounddesign
distribution.co.uk;
kiaudio.com

– no more, no less. Nothing sounds overblown or forced and it does a fine job of finding the soul of the recording as well as the detail.

That’s not to underplay just how detailed this speaker is, though. Freed from any congestion from the room and marshalling its huge decoding and amplification power, it goes about finding new information in albums

It possesses a level of performance that shouldn’t be possible given its cabinet size

you thought you knew back to front. This could easily be ferociously analytical and joyless, but it isn’t. Instead you are treated to the music you love augmented with every last nuance of the artist’s input there for your further enjoyment.

The finishing touch to this masterclass is that the ‘limits’ (and I use the word for want of a better term) of the THREE are so far outside the realms of what almost any listening space in the UK will take, they might as well be

unreachable. There’s nothing I can do during listening to unsettle the imperious scale and lack of compression – even when the volume level is firmly into the point where the force on display is visceral. Wind the volume back to late-evening levels and still that incredible space and three dimensionality remains. All too often speakers that are effective at one of these extremes, suffers at the other. That is clearly not the case here.

Mission possible

Should you be in any lingering doubt, this is a truly extraordinary system. The Kii Audio THREE is an incredible demonstration of the fine art of the possible. It has attributes that I haven’t experienced in any other loudspeaker at any price point and as a technical accomplishment, it warrants every accolade that’s thrown in its direction. This only tells half the story, however. Kii Audio has managed to achieve these technical heights without compromising on the joy that comes from a stunning looking piece of kit playing music that moves the soul. And it is this that makes it truly beautiful ●