

## Contour Sub



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Dynaudio Contour Theater Speaker System by Chris Lewis

If you like speakers, you have to like a company like Dynaudio. You don't necessarily have to like what they offer - their stuff is either going to sound good to you or it isn't - but you have to admire their dedication to the craft of speaker building. Regardless of whether or not you ever buy one of their products, you should be happy that companies like this are around. Any company can sell speakers (and good ones at that), but the backbone of every industry are those companies that develop, design, and build the components that drive it. Dynaudio is probably better known for their long history of supplying drivers to any number of different speaker companies than they are for their own speakers - although that's starting to change.

Building on the success of their Contour series and intended as a home theater speaker line that doesn't compromise musical performance, Dynaudio's new Contour Theater series arrives officially with the floorstanding T2.5 (\$4,499/pair), the multipurpose T2.1 (\$1,799), and the Contour Theater subwoofer (\$2,999). Both the T2.5 and T2.1 employ a 1.1-inch soft-dome tweeter that is based on the company's highly regarded ESOTEC D260 design. The tweeter utilizes a hybrid double-magnet system (neodymium/ferrite) with a damped rear chamber and is set into a cast-aluminum front plate for increased rigidity and cooling. Both full-range models also employ dual 6.7-inch midbass drivers with one-piece cone diaphragms made from a Dynaudio-developed magnesium-silicate polymer (MSP) to help minimize audible distortion and coloration caused by cone breakup. A 12-inch version of the same driver anchors the sub, along with a conservatively rated 210-watt amplifier. The back panel offers phase and level controls, as well as adjustable crossover settings of 80 hertz, 95 Hz, and bypass. All of the drivers use pure-aluminum-wire voice coils.

Build quality on the Contour T series doesn't end with the top-shelf drivers. The cabinets, which are built in an entirely separate Dynaudio facility than the drivers and crossovers to avoid contamination of any kind, feature a unique dual-enclosure construction that is effective in reducing resonances and other image smearing cabinet colorations. Beneath the outer cabinet is a second, internally damped enclosure with no rigid connections to the outer shell. Based on precise measurements of problematic frequency nodes, additional internal bracing and damping are applied throughout. The relatively inert cabinets are constructed from two layers of MDF with a 1-inch-thick baffle, and they have a single set of Dynaudio's gold-plated WBT binding posts. Custom-built first-order crossovers are applied to both the tweeter and woofer sections, delivering considerable linearity and phase accuracy. The upper woofer in the T2.5 is electrically adjusted in phase to reduce early floor reflection.

My demo time with the T series was two-fold, starting in a large room with a more elaborate seven channel rig that included a set of T2.5s in front and T2.1s pulling center-, side-, and rear-channel duty. Two Theater subwoofers rounded out what proved to be a prodigious bottom end. Starting with "The Haunting" in THX Surround LX, I was immediately taken by the full-range punch and thunderous low frequency response of the system. Granted, two healthy subwoofers had much to do with this, but they weren't the only explanation behind the successful combination of widely dispersed, well-layered definition and raw rumble that this setup offered in the lower regions. The T2.5s are hardly bass shy, and the T2.1s deliver well in the neighborhood of their 30-Hz low-end rating. The ominous foot-steps of the evil spirit as he chases our hapless heroine literally shook the room and, having lived in LA. long enough now to understand the potential of a gyrating ceiling, had me relocating to the perimeter of the room - near the door.

Make no mistake, this setup will shake a brick wall without breaking a sweat, but this combination is not without its softer side, as well. DTS-mixed music tracks from Sheryl Crow and Roy Orbison offered a big, open soundstage full of detail and a wide array of delicacies. The sub's aggressive approach to movies was tempered here with a subtle but still ever-present demeanor that mixed nicely with the rest of the system. While the T2.1s did tip their hand at times as surround speakers in terms of localization with soundtracks, these direct-radiators knocked out the rear channels of multichannel-music tracks with the best of them. The rear sound-field was deep and airy, with a nice punch and a truly consistent timbre that helped greatly in re-creating a sense of you-are-there realism. Given that the only vocals delivered during the Haunting chapters that I used were screams of terror, these cuts also gave me my first real impression of the T2.1's center-channel abilities. Voicing was accurate and natural with female and male lyrics, and both horizontal and vertical dispersion were well-addressed by the T2.1's efficient and highly effective crossovers.

A bit of downsizing was in order for our more-intimate listening room. The T 2.5s remained in front, along with a single Theater sub, while the T 2.1 continued to handle the center-channel signals. Employing only 5.1 channels this time, I added a pair of direct-radiating 1.3 mklls from the main Contour line as the rear channels (as yet, there are still no dipoles in either Contour series). This is a pugnacious little speaker that won't fool you like a dipole but handles surround duties nicely and is highly musical for a relatively inexpensive bookshelf model Lexicon's MC-1 pre/pro and the combo of B&K's 4430 and 4420 amplifiers were the original electronic back-bone, although I found the B&Ks' mix with the Dynaudios to be too subtle. I was a bit surprised by this, considering how good the seven-channel setup sounded off very similar B&K amps and the fact that these B&Ks have performed rather nicely with other speakers. However, rather than waste time playing scientist, I simply swapped out the B&Ks for the Krell.KAV-500 multichannel

amp and immediately found the results more to my liking, although still a bit conservative overall.

The front stage was virtually bulletproof, thanks in no small part to the identical driver complements of the T2.1 and T2.5. As I mentioned before, the crossover configurations are slightly different between the two to account for their different cabinet structures, but phasing remained highly accurate for most of the material I put through the system, and crossover gaps were never a problem. Both the car chases from "The Blues Brothers" and sonic trails of bullets and artillery shells from "Saving Private Ryan" deliver distinct front pans that the Dynaudios handled particularly well. Front-to-back pans weren't quite as convincing as they were on the seven-channel setup, but holes in front were difficult to find, to say the least.

The T2.1 continued to impress me as a center channel. The audio track for the Blues Brothers DVD unfortunately isn't the cleanest around (it is, after all, a Dolby Digital remix of a comparatively unsophisticated original track), but the center-channel image was again natural and articulate with both vocals and music. The sax from the Peter Gunn theme that runs throughout the movie was particularly crisp and memorable, and this flick's classic quips were rendered nicely, despite the inherent hollowness that this soundtrack occasionally displays.

Music in two channels gave the T2.5s a chance to strut their solo stuff. They offered up significant detail and superb imaging on Sara K's "Brick House" from Chesky's "Super Audio Collection, Part 1". While the Theater sub has musical talents to go along with its considerable soundtrack prowess, the agile and deep response of the T2.5's dual 6.7-inch woofers won't have you missing the sub with music. The entire presentation is clean and tight from top to bottom. Having been in a Jimi Hendrix mood lately, I gave "Electric Ladyland" a spin, as well, and let the T2.5s take a crack at its wide range of sonic imagery. Again, resolution was outstanding, and - while they weren't as dynamic with music as some of the pairs I've heard in this price range, including the excellent Contour 3.0 - they suffered very little from audible distortion or colorization. Given their relatively low sensitivity (86 decibels), more amplifier power can go a long way in opening the T2.5s up to their full potential.

Aesthetically, the Contour T series exhibits class and craftsmanship rather than flash. Even a cursory glance around the cabinets reveals that advanced assembly techniques were applied here for a finished look similar to high-end furniture. A variety of natural veneers or matte-lacquer finishes are available on the full-rangers: rosewood, cherry, black ash, and beech are standard; bird's eye maple, walnut, black lacquer, and white lacquer add 10 percent to the final price. Rosewood and cherry are the stock veneers for the sub, with other finishes available by request. The T2.5s include an integrated stand attached to the cabinet base with neoprene bushings - which helps explain why they weigh in at a solid 53 pounds each. Dimensions are 40.4 inches high by 8 wide by 12.3 deep. The T2.1 measures 22.4 inches high by 8 wide by 11.8 deep and weighs 28.8 pounds, while the sub lists at 28.9 inches high by 13.1 wide by 21.9 deep and 101 pounds. All of the cabinets are bass-reflex enclosures. The T2.1 ports to the rear, while the sub and T2.5 port to the front. The cabinets are magnetically shielded, and the T2.5 and sub are fitted to accept adjustable floor spikes.

Quality is never cheap in this business - or anywhere else for that matter. But quality breeds confidence, and that's something that is hard to overestimate when you're talking about laying down thousands of dollars for a speaker system. Whether or not a Contour T system is for you depends on your ear - once you reach this level of quality and performance, subjective opinion often goes from being the main factor to the only factor in the final decision. Still, these are excellent-sounding speakers that exude build quality and should give you several years of top-shelf performance. Give them a listen and a look for yourself and I think you'll agree.

Build Quality: 94  
Value: 87  
Features: 88  
Performance: 90  
Ergonomics: 87