

Everything But The Box Terra III loudspeaker

By Alan Sircom

We British have a terribly parochial attitude to continental Europe at times. Mention Bulgaria to the average UK hi-fi buff, and they'll probably start talking about Georgi Markov, umbrellas and ricin. OK, so the whole spycraft aspect of Markov's murder on Waterloo Bridge remains grimly fascinating, but that happened 34 years ago. It's time to move on. People don't think of British people as gobbing punks anymore. OK, actually they do... but the point is Bulgaria is home to a lot more than CSS agents with murderous rainware. It's home to Everything But The Box.

More fool us. Everything But The Box is a Bulgarian company that's been going for just under a decade, making a range of small, but perfectly formed loudspeakers and subwoofers. And by 'perfectly formed', we are a long way from small 'monkey coffin' rectangular wood-finished cabinets; we're talking music of the spheres here. The Terra III for example. The company's top of the line is front ported two-way standmount, which looks like a scaled-down version of Pete's Dragon carrying a door. Aside from the drivers and the composite front baffle (made from an amalgam of corn, granite and ricin resin, no less), everything about it is aluminium, right down to the HF equaliser knob at the rear. And everything about the fit and finish is exemplarily, like that aforementioned contour knob, which has a laser-etched earth logo cut into it. The aluminium exterior is pressure cast and acts as a monocoque. It's then finished in the richest lacquer you can imagine this side of a Bentley and finished in one of 16,000 different shades. Er... yes, sixteen thousand colours (including Bentley colours); more if you include two-tone shades. They can even have a corporate logo sprayed on the front. My pair came in a neat shade of, well, black.

The Terra 3 uses a 100mm Morel poly cone woofer coupled to a 30mm silk dome from the Chinese manufacturer Wavecor, which sits in a deep brushed aluminium horn. Two gold-plated Supra connectors and three custom made aluminium feet complete the package.

It's an easy package to drive too, a comfortable eight-ohm nominal load, with only a couple of dips below five ohms in the published impedance plot. The speaker is a moderately insensitive 86dB efficient design, and that places a limit on loudness relative to amplifier power output, although the Terra III is rated at handling up to 150W amp designs. In reality, unless you are after high volumes in big rooms

or wanting to use three-watt SET designs, the Terra III is perfectly comfortable in replay.

We live in a world that can't make up its mind between desktop audio and mainstream audio, but that's the joy of the Terra III; it's happy in either setting. That treble equalizer knob at the back is almost perfectly designed to adjust between the two



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► uses of the Terra III, and the combination of front port, backswept baffle and treble tuner makes this a loudspeaker that works in a wide range of rooms and less-than-ideal settings. It’s less room fussy than most boxes. In fact, the only operational issue in install is those three feet splay wide and if you plan on using speaker stands, use ones with a large top plate.

This is not to say the Terra IIIs are unfussy about where they sit. They need careful positioning, ideally clear of rear and side walls and quite strongly toed in, to hear them at their best. They also need – and for that matter – deserve good, massy stands. The EBTB speakers have a relatively wide dispersion characteristic, so imaging is not a one-person experience, although when at their best with a sharpish toe-in, they do have a distinct sweet spot.

That all said, this is not a loudspeaker that needs a lot of acoustic treatment to sound good. The light-step it treads in the bass means there isn’t much need for bass trapping and the sloped front baffle is very good at eliminating some of the need for first reflection treatment. No, the Terra III is not immune to room acoustic anomalies and placing a speaker this good in a bad room is something of a travesty, but the speaker is less fussy about its surroundings than it is about its positioning.

EBTB is creating a stir in the pro market, and if the Terra III is anything to go by, it’s not hard to see why. These are tight, fast and precise loudspeakers, detailed and insightful and fundamentally neutral, with a lot of clarity in the

often hard to resolve upper mids. While not a three-way design, you could almost swear there was a dome midrange unit in the mix, such is the definition of that mid-band.

But, of all aspects of the EBTB’s performance, it’s the speed that’s most notable and most alluring. It’s a quicksilver design, paced more like a small sealed box or even an electrostatic than a ported two-way; playing some fast stick work from Art Blakey on the *Moanin’* album was not a problem, and it even got past the slightly syrupy mix of the first Lady Antebellum album to dig up the quality of Dave Haywood’s picking (it’s a mark of how little Country matters in the UK; Lady Antebellum’s first album went double platinum in the US and got to 191 in the UK charts... shame really, it’s a good album).

There’s honesty to the sound of the Terra III that manifests itself in the speaker’s every action. It doesn’t try to force you into listening to a particular genre, it doesn’t hide the truth about bad recordings and compressed mastering, but neither does it prevent you from hearing just how good the best recordings can be. If only more mastering suites used EBTB speakers!



► It's funny how our biases work against us. Part of the reason why I'm banging on about not dismissing these speakers out of hand is that is almost precisely what I did. Not in the "it's Bulgarian" sense (good audio is truly international these days), but I admit that I thought the shape was indicative of style over substance. Then you hear them, and realise this speaker design is backed up by some seriously smart, audio-savvy guys (specifically, Kamen and Dobromir Dobrev). The shape isn't there for decoration; it's there because it helps knock out internal standing waves and cabinet resonances. And those audio smarts prove themselves in the quality of the sound; it's honest and beguiling in the extreme.

Nevertheless, there's an issue to address; on desk, the Terra III is perfectly fine, but in the room, you'll probably end up adding a REL or similar subwoofer to fill in the bottom end. Although it cites 59Hz as its lowest point, sound falls off quickly below 100Hz. This is not such a problem as might first seem as it's a very clean roll-off, lending itself perfectly to use with a good sub. There's no lumps or bumps in the bass, it just falls away progressively after about 100Hz, and you just find the sound of bass instruments is leaner than

usual. This is rare in any loudspeaker, but in a ported speaker, it's almost unheard of. There was absolutely no sense of the port chuffing along at about 80Hz, all you had was just a gentle distancing between you and the bass; it retained the complexity and expansiveness of Mahler's Symphony of a Thousand, but it lost enough bass and baritones to make it the Symphony of About Eight Hundred. But the fact remains, if you are using these speakers away from the nearest of near-field, a subwoofer is going to feature in your future pretty damn soon.

Don't dismiss the Everything But The Box Terra III as a styling exercise or a mug's eyeful or even as a desktop speaker. It's more than that. This is a loudspeaker of great clarity and detail and speed. It's a studio monitor for people who want their monitors to look good, too. OK, so in most domestic listening rooms, the monitor comes with a need for some low-end reinforcement in the shape of a subwoofer, but if ever there's a next-generation candidate for 2.1 or 2.2 channel stereo systems, it's the Terra III. Very highly recommended. +



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Two-way ported standmount design

Tweeter: 30 mm silk, neodymium

Bass-mid: 100mm neodymium, shielded

Frequency response: 59-25kHz

Nominal impedance: 8 ohms

Sensitivity: 86db 1 watt/1 meter

RMS Power: 150 W

Dimensions (WxDxH): 21x38x28 cm

Weight: 5kg

Finishes: 16,000+ options

Price: £1,000 per loudspeaker

Manufactured by: Everything But The Box

URL: www.ebtb.eu