



Review Tensor Beta:

**“This is one of
the best listening
experiences I have
ever had!”**

*Hjemmekino Magazine
(Norway), January 2009*

Active Adam

With built in amplification and high technological level, ADAM is determined to concur the market of audio products in the heavy high end class. We believe they have a good chance of achieving that goal, we were indeed very impressed.

There is something special with active speakers. Built in amplifiers and electronic cross overs of high quality like in this case, speaker drivers at the very highest level, together forms an impressive construction. That does not necessarily mean the speakers will sound fantastic, but it is a good place to start.

Design

We have heard quite a few expensive and exclusive speakers in the past, and we often let ourselves be impressed by the fantastic listening experiences, and in most cases, a fairytale like entertainment factor.

However, we are not always that impressed by the design and ease of positioning. In the last issue we had the beautiful Vienna Die Musik on test and they have a design you would be more than happy to put on display in a large living

room. With Adam, it is a bit different. I would be careful calling them „stylish“ or „interior friendly“, but maybe more of a tough or cool appearance. The laquered gloss surfaces does not make them blend directly with the environment. In our cinema however, the appearance does not count very much for the „wanna have“-factor. Instead, we focus on the sound and not much other stuff.

Tensor Beta has no less than five drivers. There are two woofers, one 11 inch in front and one in the back. The woofer in the front plays up to around 120Hz while the one in the rear only plays to around 60Hz. A real subwoofer that is also separated from the midrange/tweeter section by having its own enclosure. Each driver (including the three high section drivers) has its own 350W amplifier and is controlled by individual active cross overs. This also gives some possibilities for fine tuning the sound of each driver.

The 7 inch driver is being used to reproduce frequencies from 120 to 800Hz while the two ART drivers are covering the range from 800 to 50kHz. The cross over point between those two is around 2800Hz.

In the pictures you can see that the midrange and tweeter drivers are very closely mounted in



order to be able to perform as one single driver. They also sound like they are one driver, there is no doubt that Adam has accomplished to blend those two drivers perfectly together in an impressive way. The ART drivers (Accelerating Ribbon Technology) are often called ribbon drivers, but that is not the entire truth. They actually consist of a folded capton diaphragm that is pushed fourth and back by a very strong magnetic field. Imagine that the folds are pushed and stretched like a miniature accordion. That is a bit of a simplification, but should give a pretty good image of what happens.

Active cross overs

In normal loudspeakers there are passive cross overs. This often means a lot of coils, capacitors and resistors sitting between the amplifier and the drivers. In Tensor Beta electronic cross overs are being used to process the signal before it reaches the amplifiers. In other words, this is being done at line level - the same way as in active subwoofers.

This gives a much higher accuracy in the cross over and less influence on the signal on its way through the filter. In addition you have this unique oportunity to fine tune the level between the drivers, and because you can build equalizers into the loudspeakers, active loudspeakers will almost always be more linear than their passive brothers. If someone thinks that is important.

Many hifi enthusiasts wants to choose their amplifiers them selves, but here they have to accept that this choice has already been made for them by Adam Audio. This could be the reason why active speakers are not that popular among the enthusiasts, which is really a shame. They obviously do not have a clue what they are missing.

Tape measure is necessary

It is easy to imagine that a loudspeaker with rear firing drivers is not that easy to position. Luckily this driver only plays the very lowest frequencies, and that does not create very big problems. Anyway this is a large loudspeaker which needs some room. Our room is all in all 75 square meters and these speakers filled it with sound without any kind of problems. They can deliver astonishing sound pressure levels

with out the slightest hint of compression, and I often end up doing just that.

We have tested a lot of speakers with different versions of ribbon drivers and the experience is that these needs a bit of toe in towards the listening position. Therefore we chose to do that with these speakers as well and it worked great all the way from the beginning, but it appeared that these speakers are not that sensitive to positioning.

Some loudspeakers have to be angeled very precisely to give the balance, perspective and focus we are looking for, but here we have some margins in both directions. However, the listening distance is crucial even with the Tensor Beta, so here you have to find the tape measure.

Breaking in

With complicated drivers it is often necessary with a significant break in period. This is no exception. The tweeter and the upper mid range is being performed by the two ART drivers, and even though some people that means breaking in is not necessary, you do not need more than a few seconds of listening to these speakers to realize that they are not even close to delivering their full potential right out of the box. We gave them a couple of days, listened again, and gave them another 100 hours.



My god, what a change! They did not sound very different in terms of balance and tonality, but in terms of resolution, room and perspective, the break in had performed some wonders with the sound.

Center channel

Even though this is not a big part of this test we also had the center channel in for a short review during the test. Logically, it carries the name „center“, has built in amplifiers, two 9 inch drivers to play the bass/midrange and the same two ART drivers as most of the other Tensors.

With the center speaker on top of the rack it is almost like you consider only having one speaker in the system. It is so extremely accurate that this single speaker actually creates a scene, a perspective an a width I would hardly believe was possible with a single speaker. The resolution and ability to reproduce details is on the absolute highest level. Actually, the sound is so good, I immediately puts the Tensor Center on top of the list of the best center speakers I have ever heard.

The tweeter and midrange is off course on a very high level, but the accuracy and tightness in the bass region is so strikingly entertaining, and the rhythm and drive makes film sound tracks rush forward. Center is simply an unbelievable center speaker that without doubt defends its price and even a bit more.

Music from heaven

It is impossible to judge a loudspeaker from the drivers used, the technology, the cross over or the number of drivers involved. Earlier, one could often say, the more drivers, the bigger chance of failure. Now days, this is nothing to think of any more. One, two or five drivers can do just as good as anything else. One woofer can do as good a job as two, or three, and wether it is 6, 12 or 24dB filters does not do a big difference either. Old statements simply does not count anymore.

The first thing that strikes you when you sit down in front of these speakers is their enormous resolution and dynamic sound. Many people are looking for the beautiful sound of electrostatic speakers, but chooses differently because they do not get the dynamic sound they want. Here, the dynamic capability is no problem at all, paired with the ART drivers that lets through more details than I can remember to have ever heard in a very long time. Not even the TAD R1 will appear more detailed or with higher resolution than these.

The resolution and the extremely fine grained sound creates a gigantic sound stage. It is high, deep, quite and the focus, even far back in the sound stage, is brilliant. In addition the dynamic is just astonishing!



This off course, leads to some energy loads in the midrange/tweeter that appears a bit scary, but it is the way sound is in reality. A cymbal is not made of copper so it sounds soft and intimidating, and a snare drum that takes a beating from the sticks is supposed to mess with your ears. If not, something is very wrong.

The upper midrange and tweeter sounds like they are one driver and none of the test tracks or test tones were able to reveal any mistake in the upper mid/tweeter cross over. It is simply totally invisible!

The 7 inch driver does not work in a very wide range. But it has been given the task of looking after the lower midrange and upper bass, which it does very convincing. The sound is extremely clean and the dynamic and beat is blistering and the drive grips you as a listener, so to say. It gives a level of entertainment and enthusiasm that is very rare and here too the blend in with the other drivers is just fantastic.



The woofers keeps up very well, but the range below 120Hz is the only range where I get the impression that the speakers do not have the same excess of resources as the rest of the range. That said, you can play very loud without any hint of compression at all. They perform relaxed and very natural all the way, and many times you end up playing very loud without really noticing. It is when you try to speak with someone you realize how loud it is.

The music

With speakers like this in the test room I feel like beginning with a bit of careful classical music. The Kronos quartet have made many nice things and they get the honor of starting. With only two violins, a quartet is very transparent and naked, and in some cases, very vulnerable. With Tensor Beta, the strings have the right dimensions, the strikes have the correct amount of energy and all the ambiance of the instruments lasts a long, long time. The enormous level of detail brings the listener all the way in to where the bow meets the string, you hear the rasp of the hair that meets the string and you can almost hear the resin dust falling on top of the violin. It is almost a bit exhausting to keep this level of attention to the music for a long time, I start looking for other recordings.

To be honest, not one single loudspeaker test is being performed by us without at least one track from Kari Bremnes being played. I play the „Over en by“ („Over a city“), an like magic, I am suddenly in the recording studio where the track is about to be recorded. Some of the „Kirkelig Kulturverksted“ (The record company) trick is to record all acoustically in the recording room. No instruments are plugged directly into the mixer, so the guitars and synths should should work pretty much the same way in the recording room as the drums, piano and wind instruments. This technique obviously work very well, because to experience a closeness like this you have to be in the recording studio or on the stage. The voice of Bremnes is so intimidating and so „in the room“ that you start feeling you are starting to get to know the lady.

Well, really, it is more like she comes towards you, sits on your knee and sings only for you. Her blistering skills also prevents hard S-es

and Puh-s in the mic when she sings. The effect of this, or the lack of this, makes the focus on other details of the voice even better. It is hard to get any closer than this!

I switch to Infected Mushroom, the Gothan Projekt, and a couple of Rammstein cuts just to see if I am able to make the speakers struggle a bit, but on normal listening levels it seems impossible. Rammstein sounds very rough, dynamic and manly, with guitar walls in a class of its own. Rasping guitars and walls of distortion is just lovely. Imagine a wall of Marshalls and amps set at 11.

Infected Mushroom has a lot of phase shifts that gives you many nice surround effects and moving instruments and synth sounds, but they often get lost if the phase of the speakers is not correct. Adam has clearly done a great job at this point because not only are the sound effects very fun to listen to, but the effects above, behind or on side of you is even possible to keep in exact focus.

We test a large number of speakers every year. Some are good, some are fantastic, and some makes you forget to go home for dinner, or to buy 4 liters of milk and a bread on your way home. Tensor Beta is one of these loudspeakers that makes you start counting your money to figure out how to be able to purchase a pair. Maybe you do not have the money, but you will seriously consider it anyway. Sell the car, maybe?

*Written by Håvard Holmedal for Hjemmekino Magazine (Norway, issue 01/2009).
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Conclusion:

With Tensor Beta, you get a listening experience where the typical „filter“ you experience with other speakers is completely gone. They deliver a nearness to the instruments and voices that is totally unique.

One often talks about wanting quietness, „black background“ and things like that. With these speakers, it is almost ridiculous to talk about these things. With Beta you can see all the way through the sound stage.

It is like experiencing a summer day after the rain has washed the landscape. The sun looks at you between the clouds and the entire world is shining clean - through new clean „windows“ in your living room.

Reviewers opinion:

This is one of the best listening experiences I have ever had!

