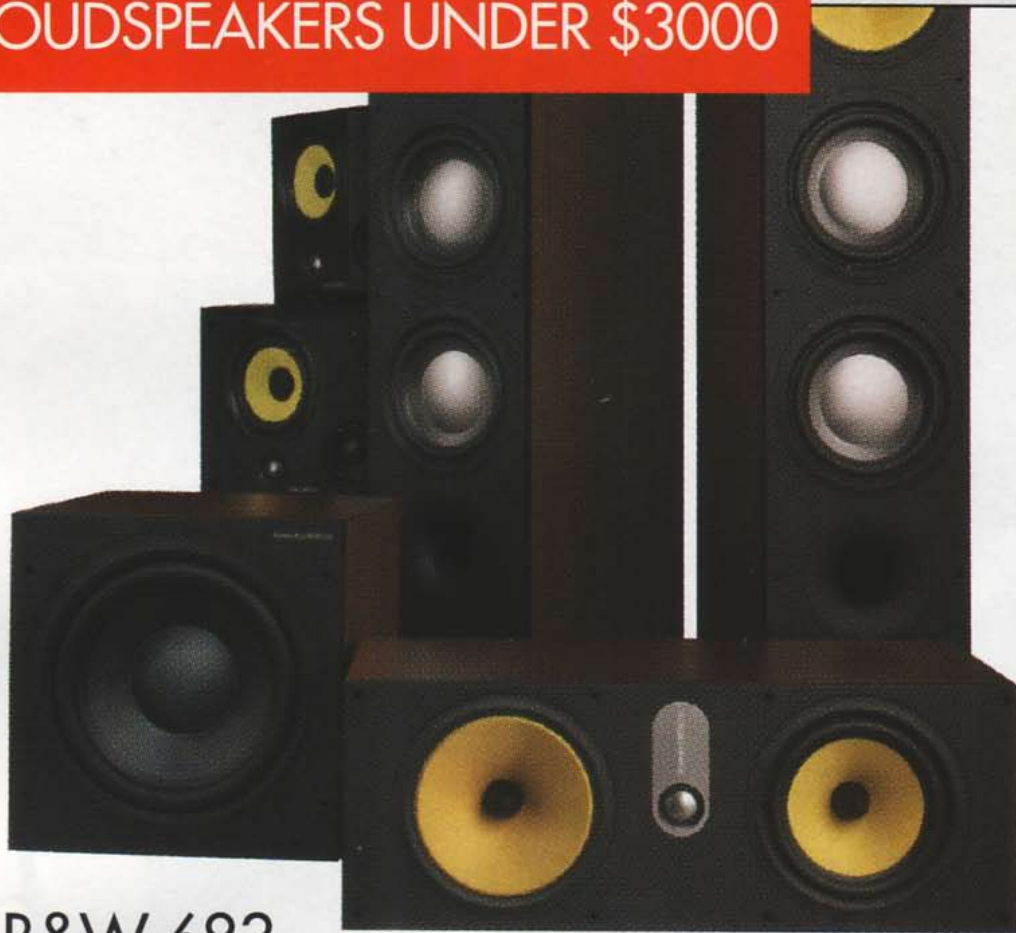


## BEST LOUDSPEAKERS UNDER \$3000



### B&W 683

[www.e-hifi.com.au](http://www.e-hifi.com.au) | RRP: \$2699

The 683, which sits in the middle of the new 600 series speaker range and is notable for the FST midrange unit from the 800 series, is a dynamic and revealing loudspeaker design that's going to set the standard for years to come.



### Tannoy Mercury F4

[www.syntec.com.au](http://www.syntec.com.au) | RRP: \$1299



### Focal Chorus 816V

[www.audiomarketing.com.au](http://www.audiomarketing.com.au) | RRP: \$2499

# Bowers & Wilkins

THIS MAY NOT BE IN THE TOP-END PRICE RANGE OF FINE HI-FI, BUT IN ITS CATEGORY, IT'S A REAL STAR

The 683 is the top model in B&W's most recent incarnation of the entry-level 600 Series. It's not a speaker range to be taken lightly, especially given that B&W is one of the largest dedicated loudspeaker makers in the world and thus one of the biggest players in the audiophile market.

The new 600 Series is smaller than previously, and there are just two standmounts, the 686 and 685, and two floorstanding stereo models, the 684 and 683. There are also three subwoofers: ASW 608, 610 and 610XP (the '8' and '10' refer to the driver size in inches, and XP essentially just means bigger and better). There are also two centre speakers and a surround speaker.

While the standmounts are very similar, except for the size of main driver and box, the two floorstanders are distinctly different. The 684 is a two-and-a-half-way with two matching Kevlar cones (one dedicated to bass, the other to bass and mid), while the more expensive and taller 683 takes an FST midrange unit from the 800 series and augments it with two new bass drivers. All 600 series models have the same aluminium tweeter set in its distinctively offset face plate.

The FST midrange driver makes the 683 the most interesting speaker in the new range. This is the same midrange technology that you will see on all of the three-way 800 Series (much costlier) models. Okay, the 683 doesn't have the fancy 800 Series cabinet work, nor the Matrix internal bracing, and its tweeter is not on top in a separate enclosure. However, there is a Nautilus tube behind the 683's tweeter and bass drivers with metal cones.

The aluminium dome tweeter has been heavily revised for this series, its neodymium magnet giving it increased sensitivity while copper plating of the polepiece extends the frequency response. Mass has been lowered with an edge-wound voice coil, and the resonant frequency of the system has been reduced with a new surround material.

The FST midrange is distinguished by its very thin foam surround, which is a termination rather than a suspension as such (FST stands for Fixed Suspension Transducer). The driver can work this way because it is limited to the midband and does not have a great deal of travel. B&W says that to bring the price of this drive unit down to the point where it could be used in the 600 it just simplified the mounting method to a conventional bolt-on approach, rather than the suspended, single point fixing used in the 800 Series. There is also another major factor that we will return to. The bass drivers here are aluminium cones with a paper/Kevlar skin on the back – the combination giving stiffness and damping and ending up with the same mass as the carbon fibre/Rohacell-sandwich cones on the 804S.

The 683 is a lot of loudspeaker for the money, it weighs in at 28kg and looks great in its Wengé vinyl skin, rubberised front panel and high quality bi-wire terminals. Moving the 600 production line from Worthing to its own facility in China means B&W can offer so much value for money.

## Performance

The results are pretty damn impressive, if perhaps a little darker or more subdued than one might

B&W 683

\$2,699

SPEAKER

See it:

[www.e-hifi.com.au](http://www.e-hifi.com.au)

## OVERALL

★★★★★

expect of a 600 Series speaker. Having run them in for 24 hours things did change – the balance becoming more lively and up-front. They did this to the extent that we went from an on-axis set-up with the speakers pointed at the listening chair straight down the room, parallel axis arrangement. Something to bear in mind, when auditioning a new pair.

We would be very impressed if any other companies could compete with the 683's bandwidth and resolution. You can hear right into the mix, easily picking out the fine details. This applied equally to differences between voices in a choir and to a piece of hip-hop. This is partly because of the 683's wide dynamic range, its sensitivity to the smallest notes even when there are far louder ones. And also, great separation of instruments and voices.

The 683's bass extension and power adds genuine gravitas to piano and orchestra, and even the likes of Dr. Dre, where the floor literally starts to resonate at specific frequencies, while also delivering tunefulness and control at low frequencies.

## Conclusion

We found little to criticise in this speaker given its price. It inevitably doesn't have the slam or depth of image of more expensive designs. But when it comes to sheer resolution and lack of colouration from a speaker that also does proper bass, it is in a class of its own. With an FST driver in a sub- $\$3K$  speaker B&W has raised the stakes for the whole market. You may be able to get real veneers on smaller speakers but you will struggle to find the combination of resolution, timing and energy in this sector. ■

