

Bowers & Wilkins loudspeakers need no introduction to anyone with even a faint interest in audio products. One of the top three speaker manufacturers in the world, B&W is also one of the most prolific, offering a massive range of speakers to cover every situation.

The model under test here is from the upmarket 700 series, one series down from the legendary flagship 800 series speakers as used in many high-profile recording studios and top high-end systems.

The 705 is a large standmount two-way using high quality proprietary drivers. The 25mm aluminium tweeter is a direct descendant from the Nautilus research project, and it contains simplifications of the many innovations used on that groundbreaking speaker. One of these is the tapering funnel placed behind the diaphragm used to control and diffuse the tweeter's back wave for a claimed cleaner, more detailed sound. The tweeter has a separate housing on the cabinet's curved top surface, which aids dispersion characteristics. Being set back from the baffle plane also allows for driver time alignment.

B&W has been using Kevlar as a midrange driver material for many years now, and the 705 has the latest 16.5cm version. The distinctively bright yellow, phase-plugged, woven-Kevlar diaphragm is treated with polymers and resins and then cured in stages, resulting in a damped, stiff and very light membrane. The reflex port is configured with B&W's proprietary 'Flowport' golf-ball dimple pattern, which promises better air-pressure release from the cabinet interior, therefore avoiding port chuffing and claiming a tighter bass.

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B&W quotes frequency response of 46Hz to 25kHz at a ± 3 dB range, with sensitivity at an above-average 89dB/W/m and an impedance of 8 ohms. The 705 measures 421 x 222 x 319mm (hwd) and weighs 9.5kg. Good quality gold-plated bi-wirable speaker binding posts are provided.

Also supplied is a rather scant instruction manual, an assortment of rubber feet and two foam inserts which fit inside the Flowport to tailor the bass response. Fitted in, they reduce and tighten bass output, making them suitable for small rooms where the 'unplugged' version may overload the room with bass.

The higher price bracket brings in real wood veneers in place of the vinyl wraps, and the 705 offers a wide range of finishes.



Incidentally, the 705s have the most solid-to-the-knock enclosure of the group, which seeing that it weighs the same as the others, means skilful internal bracing is used. The fit and finish is typical of B&W speakers; first class and seamlessly veneered.

Listening impressions

Probably a testament to the inert enclosure, the B&W had the most uncoloured and neutral midrange in this group. This, of course, was most noticeable on vocals, so that Jackson and Nils' voices were cleanly and richly reproduced on their respective tracks. This level of mid-band neutrality made the 705 seem totally transparent to the musical signal fed into it.

This level of accuracy also continued into the tweeter's domain. On Jackson Browne's CD, the drummer's skill and dexterity with his instrument taxes average tweeters — this guy really likes his cymbals. The 705's Nautilus-inspired tweeter did a superb job of separating different treble sounds, so cymbals, wind chimes and the like were reproduced with lifelike clarity, delicacy and realistic harmonics and decay.

What came as a surprise during listening sessions was the small driver's capacity to punch out the bass. The 705's bass prowess was 90% of the extraordinary Focal's 18cm driver in terms of depth and power, but

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with superior detail and punch. Kick drum and electric bass really powered, propelling and boogieing the music along. Frequency-wide dynamics were quite startling, on par with the Focal, and again surprising for a small speaker.

The same could be said about the Kevlar driver's way with the midrange. The light and stiff driver is lightning fast, making transient attack on acoustic guitar, for example, very snappy, and heightening the sense of reality. Speech intelligibility in our television tests was spot on, too. Every

word and vocal nuance in heavy dialogue, even within the context of high level backing music, was understood without effort. The impression of the Kevlar driver's presentation, in summary, seemed to be one of transparency, accuracy, resolution and speed in the midrange *and* the bass.

Imaging and soundstage were exemplary, as promised by the location of the tweeter on the top-angled baffle. This clever bit of design effectively places the tweeter in a baffle-less position where horizontal and vertical dispersion are unhindered by reflections from the enclosure's walls. This topology created a wide, high and deep soundscape with instruments able to be pin-pointed within the space.

The Bowers & Wilkins 705 speakers impressed with their surprisingly robust bass and fast and resolved midrange. The tweeter's resolution was also a stand-out, as was its delicacy with detail and harmonics and in terms of its ability to unravel complex recorded information.



- Very detailed and airy treble
- Uncoloured, fast and resolved midrange
- Superb bass performance
- Nothing!