

HiFi World



MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Our frequency response analysis shows the Kensington GR measures flat across most of the audio band, so it is fundamentally accurate. Bass peaks up at 55Hz by +8dB, but a higher definition mls analysis shows this is a narrow band effect that doesn't encompass much energy so it will be less audible than might be expected. All the same, it does mean the Kensington GR is not lacking bass and, at this frequency, a boost to subjective speed is provided. The forward firing side ports, concealed in the hardwood edge trims, provide a little support (+2dB at 80Hz) to lower frequencies. All the same, although the Kensington is big and produced loud bass cleanly, it does not produce sub-sonics, cutting off sharply below 40Hz. Our impedance plot adds further to the picture, showing narrow damping of the basic cone/cabinet resonance at 55Hz.

Upper treble rolls down slowly with the front adjustment screws for treble Energy and Roll-off set 'Level'. Roll-off had little affect, reducing upper treble (above 10kHz) by a few dB. The Energy screw had most affect, and when set to +2dB raised output of the concentric horn-loaded treble unit by +2dB or so above 3kHz, enough to audibly brighten the sound, but not in a gross fashion.

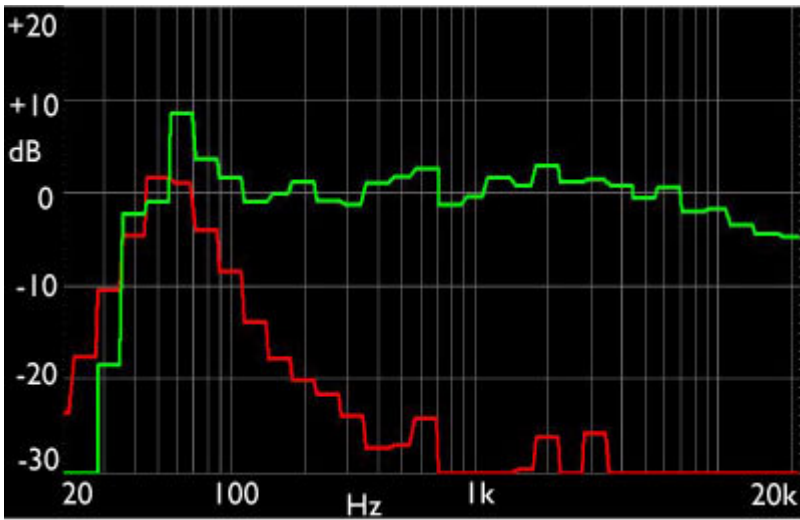
The treble horn integrates smoothly with the bass/midrange unit at all angles off-axis, laterally and vertically because of concentricity. The pepperpot waveguide keeps response smooth on-axis and off-axis too. Smooth off-axis results mean the Kensingtons do not have to be toed in.

A 200mS decay analysis interestingly showed very low coloration from 20kHz down to 200Hz. Below 200Hz the Kensington GR becomes a tad 'hot' and predictably has a resonance and associated overhang at 55Hz, but it is less 'hot' than smaller cabinets all the same. Overall, decay analysis shows a very clean result, and a low coloration 'speaker'.

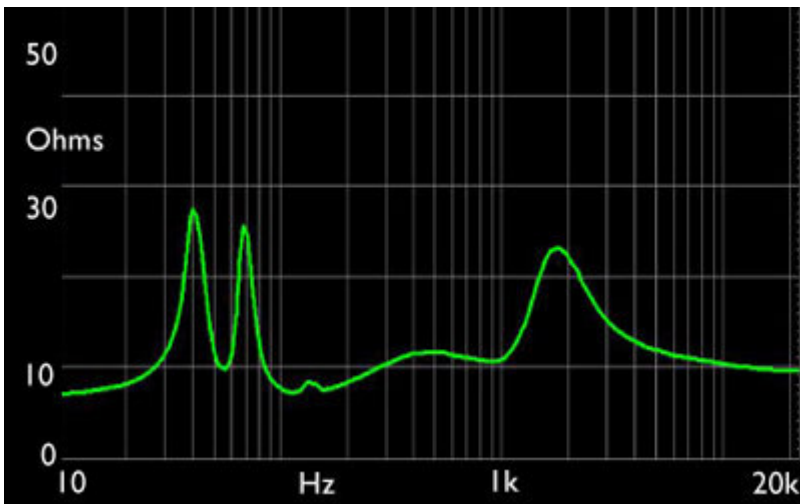
Sensitivity measured 91dB from one nominal Watt of input (2.8V), so the Kensington GRs need just a few Watts to go very loud and 40 Watt amplifiers are more than adequate to drive them very loud, in large rooms. As a load they measured 6 Ohms and have a minimum DCR of 5.7 Ohms so sensitivity is not gained by low-loading a constant current source, meaning the Kensington GRs are efficient and don't load an amplifier heavily.

The Kensington GR offers a very typical Tannoy measured performance, with a smooth and accurate audio response, plus a slow roll-off in high treble to ensure an easy sound lacking 'sting'. Bass will have speed and weight, without being overblown. **NK**

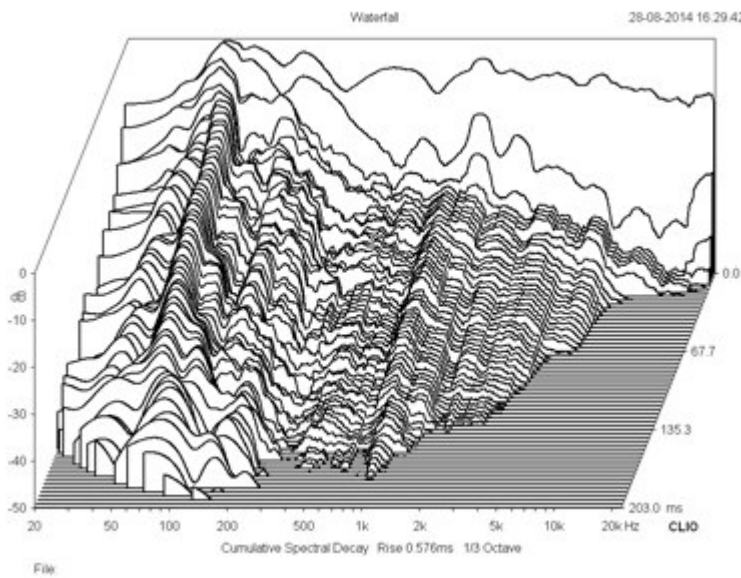
FREQUENCY RESPONSE



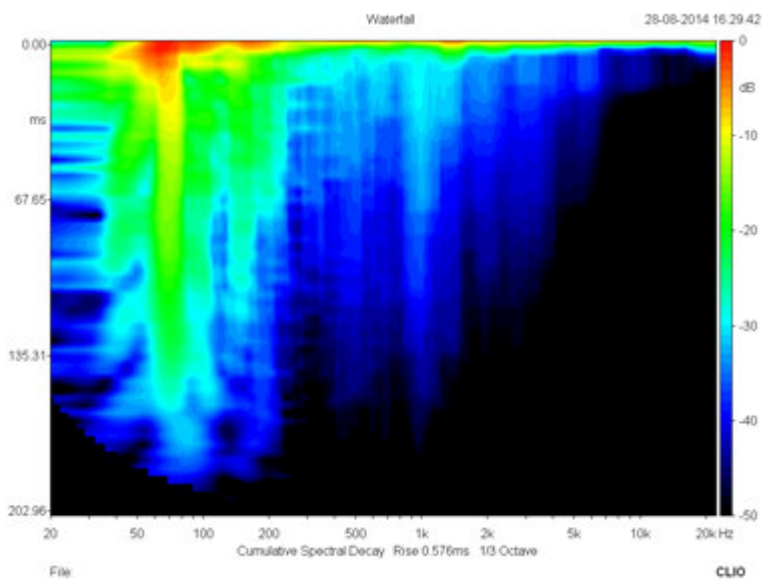
IMPEDANCE



DECAY SPECTRUM (200mS)



DECAY MAP (200mS)



At £9950 you may need to be a native of Kensington to afford a pair, but you get a classy product, Noel Keyword finds.

Not so long ago our office building was demolished, not by us playing too loud, but to make space for much needed new homes in Kilburn, north-west London. We had to find new offices and a key requirement and big issue was that they suit Tannoy's. This isn't favouritism: big Tannoys are physically challenging and if we could review them properly, we could review any loudspeaker properly. The new Kensington Gold References I'm reviewing here illustrate our dilemma.

Doorways and goods lift had to be big enough to accept Westminster Royal SEs, the biggest speakers Tannoy make and a size benchmark for us. And I knew from my time with Yorkminsters that we also needed a listening room that was big – and neighbour free.

Put together, these requirements were nearly impossible to meet, but in the end we found a building able to survive the onslaught and reasonably free of humans. Tannoy obligingly announced a new range of Prestige loudspeakers at around the same time, so a large lorry duly arrived and left in the street, sitting on a palette, two huge boxes, vinyl wrapped together. We had to get them in-doors quickly before Notting Hill decided the date of Christmas had been changed.

When we used Westminster's at a show demo in Manchester some years ago it took three men to move each one. The Yorkminsters needed two men and the Kensingtons need around one and half men. Each one weighs 37kgs and stands 1.1m tall. As most floorstanders are 1m tall and big ones 1.2m, the Kensingtons are not in truth so high, even by UK standards. But they are relatively wide (405mm) and quite deep too (350mm), meaning they loom large in a room. But there's "nothing like a good big'un" when it comes to loudspeakers and these dimensions give a generous 105 litres (3.7cu ft) to load the 10in Dual-Concentric bass unit, for "real bass".

What you get with the new Kensington Gold Reference is a large and very heavily crafted traditional looking loudspeaker in a big, but not impossibly large cabinet. The Yorkminster had a 12in Dual and the Westminster a 15in Dual, so they are larger speakers all round.

The Kensington tops the 10in Dual-Concentric equipped Prestige loudspeakers and will fit a typical UK lounge, even if it is more likely to be bought elsewhere, especially the Far East where they love traditional style and values – and Tannoys.

A price tag of £9950 may seem high, but the new Kensington GR offers a lot for this and of course, with its old-world styling and high quality of finish is almost alone in any case.

And it's a Tannoy, which truly does mean different and very, very good. I'll always miss the Yorkminsters, no other loudspeaker ever moved a room like they did, but I needed a new home to suit them and couldn't afford one big enough!

The Kensingtons have been carefully and subtly tailored to suit medium sized rooms, around 18ft-20ft long. They'd likely even work in my lounge at 16ft long (I didn't try – it's three floors up and I don't have a goods lift), which the Yorkies nearly demolished, but I'll go into this in more detail later.

What you have in the Kensington GR is a Tannoy 10in Dual-Concentric drive unit, loaded by a front ported cabinet. The ports are slots concealed in each front, hardwood corner trim, at left and right and effectively facing forward.

The Dual-Concentric drive unit houses a large 2in (50mm) aluminium dome tweeter, loaded by a brass plated central horn with 'pepperpot' waveguide, that you can see in our pictures. Most tweeters are 1in diameter, so this one is twice as large. What that means in principle is that it goes lower than other tweeters – and this is good. When designing World Audio Design loudspeakers for Hi-Fi World it became obvious to me that a lower crossover frequency largely eliminated the phase error problems that conventional tweeters impose on loudspeakers (this is all due to distances and wavelengths). Tannoy's large tweeter all but eliminates crossover phase error and you can hear this as a less phasey and indeterminate quality from the loudspeaker. It sounds solid and consistent, especially as you move your head or move around.

The 10in paper cone bass unit handles everything below 1.5kHz, quite a big task for a large paper cone but there are no hand-over issues between bass and midrange our measurements show. Tannoy have continued to develop their

Dual-Concentric drive unit so it meets modern demands and expectations, and in the Kensington GR you get a technically refined performance, that is smooth in nature, carefully avoiding emphasis or aural artifice.

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Treble energy and roll-off can be adjusted separately; there are 'lift' and 'lower' settings.

Those big cabinets are made from plywood, which is more durable than MDF. They are finished with an oiled Walnut veneer and protective Walnut hardwood corner trims; Tannoy recommend the cabinets are waxed and not stood in direct sunlight, to avoid fading. They sit on an integral plinth, with four feet; spikes are not available.

The front grill can be removed, unlocked with a key. Beneath, on the veneered front baffle, lies a heavy machined brass adjustment panel that employs thumbscrews to select treble level and roll off. As delivered these are set to Level and that's what our measured frequency response shows. Treble can be lifted or lowered and the upper limit reduced if desired, by small amounts that effect subtle changes. Tannoy consistently voice their loudspeakers to be smooth and accurate and, if anything, a tad mild at high frequencies; they don't come with obvious or fierce upper treble. There are treble lift positions to increase midrange output to give more thrust, if you wish.

Because the horn loaded tweeter is very well integrated with the bass/midrange unit, there is no crossover suckout to soften the sound, and the horn is forceful in any case so the Kensington doesn't come sounding laid-back; quite the reverse it has a lot of midrange push and strong insight and detailing.

The crossover is Cryogenically treated (deep frozen) and this does improve insight I feel, subjectively lowering the noise floor to reveal fine low level detail. It adds air and space into the sound.

Tannoy use sturdy, high quality WBT screw connectors with removable wire links for those that want to bi-wire. As always, there is an earth terminal so the metal frames and parts can be earthed, lessening their sensitivity to RF (Radio Frequencies).

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SOUND QUALITY

Our measurements show the Kensington produces powerful deep bass, but not subsonics, so it will work in medium sized rooms and not over-drive them. Having said that, there is a peak at 55Hz, but you'd need a small room 10ft long to excite this; there'd hardly be space for the cat. It suggests length and width dimensions greater than 10ft – let's say 12ft for safety – will work best, which is why I predict this speaker will suit medium sized rooms.

Our listening room (25ftx18ftx13ft) is large enough to accommodate and suit Yorkminsters or Westminster, or any other minster or monster, but in this room the Kensingtons sounded just right: bass wasn't heavy, so much as firm and in good balance. A room this size does not emphasise bass from any but the largest loudspeakers, because its main axial modes are so low (if you want to check your room, go to an on-line calculator such as <http://amroc.andymel.eu>). So for us the Kensington was not a bass heavy loudspeaker. In a smaller room, resonant axial modes will in most seating positions strengthen bass, making it more obvious, but not over powering I suspect.

We didn't run-in our samples because they came run-in, because we prefer used speakers, not new ones. This way, anything that's going to fly off has flown off, and any damage we can blame on previous users. We do use loudspeakers hard and the Kensingtons were wheeled out regularly for The Beatles in Mono box set listening sessions for all the many people interested in hearing these new LPs, which included Guy Hayden, Vice President of Apple Corps.

I tried many different power amps, including Quad QMP monoblocks, but in the end felt that Quad II-eighty valve monoblock power amplifiers worked best with them. Tannoy's midrange horn suits valve amplifiers but makes transistor amps sound like – er, well – transistor amps. And of course, being Tannoys you need just a few Watts to go really loud; at 91dB from 1 Watt the Kensingtons are massively sensitive: 20 Watts will lift the roof.

With LP I used a Timestep Evo turntable (upgraded Technics SL-1210 MkII Direct Drive) fitted with SME 309 arm and

Ortofon Cadenza Bronze moving coil cartridge, feeding an Icon Audio PS3 valve phono stage. For digital, I fed the Quad II-eightys from an Audiolab M-DAC, using an Astell&Kern AK120 portable to play (ripped) CD and high resolution audio.

To summarise so far then, the Kensington Gold Reference is tailored to sound balanced in medium sized rooms; it doesn't have the massive bass of the 12in Dual-Concentric equipped Yorkminster but its 10in cone does reproduce bass cleanly and with ease. A large volume cabinet absorbs the back wave well, so there's less box boom than usual, and a big cone produces low levels of bass distortion. You get strong yet well controlled bass with plenty of impact, a big confident sound.

So with Lady Gaga's Monster (CD) the deep synth lines that are meant to provide a seismic backdrop did so. When I moved 16ft back from the Kensingtons to the rear wall I was hit by massive bass pressure waves that had me gripping the settee. These speakers go low and deliver awesome acoustic power with supreme ease - they're typical big Tannoys!

Spinning Jackie Leven's Some Ancient Misty Morning (LP) had underpinning percussion sending out a thunderous message: there was an ease and a power to the drums and bass line that was big, bold and yet easy to enjoy. No small drivers struggling here: the 10in Duals just pumped it out with alacrity, defining bass notes with ease. These are physically big loudspeakers that sound big too - powerful yet relaxed, as if cruising along.



The Pepperpot wave guide, at the base of the treble horn.

The central midrange/treble horn loaded tweeter endows the Kensington with strong midrange detail and insight, shining a bright light onto an aurally sensitive area, making the 'speaker quite forceful in its presentation. Cryogenic treatment does reveal low level filigree detail and also improves resolution of ambience, obvious when spinning The Beatles 'This Boy', from Mono Masters. The Kensingtons let me hear the studio behind John Lennon's microphone, making for an atmospherically live presentation. It was obvious that John was singing intensely, right into the mic. and this track became something of a demonstrator with visitors eager to hear our new The Beatles in Mono box set. The Kensingtons gave the song a sense of scale and solidity, as well as dynamic excitement.

Because the deep bass cone and horn at its centre project forward strongly, but less so to walls, floor and ceiling, the Kensingtons, like other Dual Concentric Tannoys, stayed both intense and well focussed as I moved backward from

them, and at 16ft away there was noticeably less room muddle from reflections affecting the sound stage than I am used to from normal multi-driver loudspeakers. This contributes to their general sense of clarity and their insensitivity to room size.



Large WBT connectors accept spades, 4mm plugs and bare wire. Bi-wire links are shown here, and Earth terminal.

Another interesting property of the phase-aligned Dual Concentric in the Kensington GR was that its sound balance did not change at all as I moved up or down in front of the cabinet, or even when I walked around the room. Conventional multi-driver loudspeakers, other than KEF Uni-Qs, change their sound, due to inter-driver phase cancellation, as you move around in front of them; in some cases this imposes quite a tightly defined and specific listening position, Yamaha's NS-F901 Soavo loudspeakers I reviewed in our September 2014 issue being a good example. The Kensington GRs are - almost uniquely - completely free of this problem. Their perfect phase matching helped give singers a sense of solidity and body. Add this to their powerful low frequency output and the reason for the Tannoy sound becomes clear: from the Kensingtons you get scale, body, power and ease of delivery all in one. Result – happiness!

CONCLUSION

As Tannoy continue to refine their Prestige Series loudspeakers they get ever more impressive. The new Kensington Gold Reference is a carefully balanced design suitable for medium-to-large rooms, where it will impress by dint of sheer impact. This is a loudspeaker you feel – as well as see. It is fabulously well engineered all round, with its big Dual-Concentric drive unit and lovely traditional cabinet. I did at times have the Kensingtons pumping out massive volume from our 80 Watt Quad valve amplifiers and loved every minute of it. They play from soft to Rock-Concert loud without difficulty, always sounding lively and engaging. And our new offices haven't been demolished I'm happy to say! It's a pity the Kensingtons' price will exclude so many of us, because big loudspeakers like these are an experience worth having. I'll always love big Tannoys; they sit in a world of their own.

Tannoy Kensington Gold Reference
£9950.00



OUTSTANDING - amongst the best

VERDICT

A fine loudspeaker, beautifully crafted. We loved them.

FOR

- powerful and focussed
- insightful
- need few Watts

AGAINST

- expensive
- large
- no port tuning