

Audioengine HD3 Loudspeaker System – Review

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AudioHead



Audioengine has really left its mark on computer audio. The small studio-oriented design of their basic 2 channel setup simply works, and work well with a desk and digital source.

The product offerings from AE have changed slightly over the years. Varying degrees of driver sizes and cabinets have laid the groundwork for the evolution into a more modern take of the new “HD” line. Gone are the smooth black (white or red) lines of the A series, replaced now with a more grown up look of finished wood in black, red or brown. Perhaps the most grown-up add-on feature of them all is the magnetic detachable grills which can be typically found making appearances around the full-size, high-end crowd. But to get a full grasp of what Audioengine is proposing with the powered HD line, you need to look beyond features like grills or finishes. The rear panel holds a cornucopia of connections to tease and please your gear-loving heart. But even more than that, the HDs offer built-in Bluetooth 4.0 (aptX included) for wireless capabilities to any phone, tablet or digital source. Even with its computer friendliness, the HD line still retains two analog inputs in the form of a 3.5mm and standard RCAs in case a vinyl lover happens to need a standalone attachment to accompany his/her collection of big black discs.



This of course, also allows for outside DACs to be introduced into the chain as well. Internal specs for the micro USB input include a Texas Instruments PCM5102 digital converter capable of up to 24/48 kHz in this configuration. A simple press of the back lit button on the front panel puts the device into pairing mode and connected easily with a laptop and iPhone. While other wired connectivity provided a bump in overall resolution, the Bluetooth feed provided ample clarity and dynamics across the wireless protocol, and is a perfect fit where the inconvenience of wires takes a priority. The volume control is now situated underneath the main driver on the right speakers front panel, allowing for easy access. The volume of the internal 30W per channel dual class A/B monolithic amplifiers won't blow the windows out of your living room, but suffice easily for near field listening and even do a decent job of filling medium to large room sizes with plenty of dBs. The website has the following to say about the built in headphone amplifier that feeds the 3.5mm jack next to the volume pot: *“The HD3 contains a high-performance headphone amplifier based on the OPA2134 low-noise opamp. This amp is able to provide low-impedance, high-fidelity audio and a 2-volt output which easily drives a wide range of headphones.”* The output was indeed quite robust, providing enough juice to drive even the power hungry Audeze LCD-4 to substantial levels.



The keys to the castle with this desktop-oriented product is convenience, and the feature set drives the idea home with authority. Everything you need to complete the neat and tidy experience is right there at your fingertips. Connections of every type, wireless, and now even headphones (once loved ones go to bed) work in harmony with each other to reduce the need for the usual disruptions in one fell swoop. Going the extra mile, Audioengine includes nearly every cable one would need to get started, right out of the box. Of particular interest this time around is the included speaker wire. A clear update from the more basic, standard wire of the A2+, the HD3 comes with a more solid, full wire terminated with banana clips for an even quicker (and more convenient) set up time.

The sound of the HD3 is fairly balanced from mid to treble. The physical restrictions of a 2.75" Kevlar woofers and 3/4" silk dome tweeter won't allow the low end to reach 20 Hz anytime soon, but the walkaway on the low end feels sturdy and definitely more than any internal computer system could ever hope to provide. *For the size*, it's a pretty level playing field across the spectrum, and narrowly avoids the pitfalls of manipulating reasonable bass out of tiny drivers. Audioengine's solution for bass addicts is clear, attached a separate sub via the variable output RCAs. With the flick of a switch (located on the rear panel) less bass can be applied to the 2 ways drivers, freeing them up for more control of their appropriately-sized frequencies.

While wireless convenience plays a big part in the freedom of the HD3 those seeking the utmost from the system will find solace in the 16/48 USB connection. From a Macbook Air the A/B comparison between the two leaned in the favor of the USB (sans aptX due to an older OS). With that said, the Bluetooth still did a very substantial job holding it down in lieu of wires. Dynamics, tonal color and unfettered energy all were easily conveyed, but the internal digital section took detail and instrument spacing just a little further.



The sonic response of the HD3 is delightfully transparent. Vocals appear to hover nicely over the computer screen and can be found front and center with a solid dimensionality to them. Tweaking the rotation in relationship to a subject's ears provided an interesting twist when optimized for near-field listening. While a toe'd in direct line provided the shorted route to ear, the soundstage wasn't as wide when compared to the same placement with rotation parallel (flat) with the computer screen. A raised position level with the ear is optimal, but Audioengine offers a selection of desk wedges that will raise the projection up off the ground as well. With proper placement, all manner of sonic staging illusions can be garnered from the HD3 and a decent source file.

The top end isn't overly aggressive and the ride down to the mids doesn't present itself as overly disjointed. Again, expectations need to be set in terms of bass response, but for the uses for which it was intended the HD3 doesn't fail to impress. A smaller overall size helps heaps for tight spaces where computer based rigs live and breathe. Larger traditional "bookshelf" sizes often crowd even oversized desks, especially when you consider amps and DACs still need to be integrated into the space. For nearfield listening on a desktop, these speakers reign supreme. That is to say, it sounds just as good when its at a reasonable level at close range – you don't need to turn up the volume very much to hit the sweet spot. Larger bookshelf setups comprised of separate components can sometimes

do an excellent job of filling a room, but at low levels and closes range lack some of their dynamic sparkle and authenticity.



Comparisons to the classic A2+ shared many sonic similarities. Tech specs appear equal on paper and a quick once over with the eye even confirms a visual consistency with the younger sibling. One aesthetic difference that jumps out is the outside-in mount of the HD3's 2.75" Kevlar woofer, whereas the A2+ appears to attach itself to an interior wall. Not a deal breaker, but the A2+ offers up perhaps a more finished look sans grill. The bass switch is a nice touch and for those who can do without, some additional nimbleness could be gained from utilizing the pair in the low bass position. The drivers of the HD3 stack a little higher due to the knob design, which along with the 3.5mm headphone output lay just in-between the main housing compartment and the front facing bass slot. The collective musical consciousness pushed forth by the bifurcated dual 1" dome tweeters and Kevlar woofers far outpace other one-piece, Bluetooth solutions that current occupy the market with sorted affairs of all manner of wild color, shape and size.

Conclusion

The new HD3 from Audioengine throws down a large collection of features, all packed into perhaps the smallest frame on the market. For the size, the drivers perform above par. For the features, consumers get a substantial value for purchase price. Bluetooth, headphone, internal DAC, the possibilities are numerous and the versatility is wide open. The HD3 sets a new bar for a true just-add-music experience.

More info: <http://audioengineusa.com/>

On Amazon: <https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B01MFD7N5T>