

Audioengine HD3

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By [Tim Gideon](#)

In an era of booming, tweaked bass and highly sculpted frequency responses, Audioengine continues to remind us what accurate audio is. At \$399, the new Audioengine HD3 are stereo [Bluetooth speakers](#) that can also be used in multiple wired scenarios. Want to use them with a subwoofer? No problem. Just don't expect the speakers to deliver intense sub-bass depth on their own. Where other manufacturers try to coax bass depth of subwoofer-less systems with the now-ubiquitous "passive bass radiator," Audioengine just focuses on delivering pristine highs and rich, articulate lows and mids through the HD3's tweeters and woofers. When there is low frequency presence, it is rich and full, but not booming and rumbling. For audiophiles on a budget, the HD3 allow for an ideal combination of high-quality Bluetooth streaming and wired playback at a reasonable price, earning them our Editors' Choice award.



Design

With so many manufacturers focusing on all-in-one speaker design, it's refreshing to see Audioengine developing a wireless bookshelf-style speaker pair that allows for real stereo separation. Available in matte black or "furniture-grade" cherry or walnut wood veneer with aluminum trim, the left and right speakers each measure 7 by 4.3 by 5.5 inches (HWS) and are small enough to be used as desktop, computer speakers (wired or wireless), but powerful enough to fill a living room. You can use them as your left and right satellites for a home theater setup, though adding in a subwoofer wouldn't be the worst idea in this scenario. The speakers have an output and bass reduction switch for this exact purpose—more on that in a bit.

Removable grilles that snap on magnetically allow you to show off the drivers or hide them from view. Both speakers feature a 0.75-inch silk dome tweeter and a 2.75-inch Kevlar woofer. Each channel has a power rating of 15 watts RMS (30 watts peak).

The front face of the left speaker houses the power/volume dial, as well as a headphone jack and a button for Bluetooth pairing that glows or flashes white depending on what mode you're in. Pairing with the system takes seconds, and the HD3 can remember up to six devices, though it can only pair with one at a time.



The left speaker's back panel houses all of the connections, including the screw-on antenna for Bluetooth reception, the banana plug-style output that sends sound to the right speaker (a cable is included), an RCA-style stereo input and output, a 3.5mm audio input for mobile devices, and a micro USB input for connection to a computer—a way to bypass the digital-to-analog converter on your speaker's output and let the HD3 handle things. The latter is a wise choice, considering the HD3 employs the upsampling, 24-bit PCM 5102 as its DAC—a definite improvement over typical DACs found in computers and mobile devices.

The back panel also houses the aforementioned bass switch and the connection for the AC adapter. The power adapter has a long cable, making it easy to place these speakers just about anywhere in the house. Audioengine claims the reason for the inclusion of the bass reduction switch is twofold. First, if you wish to use the speakers with a subwoofer (the RCA outputs are full-range and designed for this very purpose, or for daisy-chaining multiple speakers), the bass switch helps ensure the speakers aren't doubling up on the same low frequencies. And yes, Audioengine does make a subwoofer, which can also be outfitted with the company's wireless kit. The second reason is to control resonance and bass vibrations that you might get from placing the speakers on a non-solid desktop or a bookshelf—wood can act as a natural amplifier for lower frequencies in these scenarios, and the bass reduction switch allows you to prevent things from getting too boomy in the lows.

One design choice we are less enthusiastic about is the decision to keep all inputs "open and active," as the manual asserts. This means if you have multiple sound sources connected simultaneously, they can all ostensibly output audio and be heard at once. This is not only true of the wired connections, but you can also play streaming Bluetooth audio through the speakers while also playing audio from a wired source. In other words, there's no input button or dial to switch between sound sources, and while you can keep all inputs connected, this means you'll hear audio from, say, your USB-connected computer while your stream from your phone. When you factor in that many sound sources will have wildly different output levels, this could cause some problems—turning up the speakers to hear your wired computer could result in some blisteringly loud audio if your Bluetooth-connected phone is at maximum volume and you get a text alert. This isn't a design flaw or a deal breaker, but it's something to be aware of.

The speakers ship with four microfiber drawstring bags, one for each of the speakers and another two for the various included cables. In addition to the USB audio cable, power adapter, and speaker-to-speaker cable, Audioengine includes a 3.5mm audio cable for wired playback from mobile devices.

Performance

On tracks with intense sub-bass content, like The Knife's "Silent Shout," the speakers solid bass depth. Since they can get extremely loud, it's quite possible to push the HD3 to distort on tracks like this. However, we won't view that as a negative—even at extremely loud levels, with an iPhone 6s streaming at maximum volume, distortion doesn't enter the picture. At even higher levels, when volume is maxed out on both the sound source and the speakers, distortion does occur, but it seems unlikely anyone will be listening at these insane levels. And, for what it's worth, the distortion only seems to occur on tracks with powerful sub-bass, like this one—tracks without deep lows don't distort, even at maxed out volume levels.

Bill Callahan's "Drover," a track with far less deep bass in the mix, give us a better overall idea of the HD3's sound signature. As has been the case with a majority of Audioengine products we've tested, the speakers don't invent bass where it doesn't exist, so the drums on this track don't have a lot of deep, added bass depth to them like they often do through bass-heavy systems. Most of the low frequency response seems focused more on lows and low-mids rather than sub-bass frequencies, thus Callahan's baritone vocals receive a pleasant richness. The high-mids and highs are crystal clear, giving the vocals plenty of clarity and contour, as well as some bright presence to the guitar strumming and percussive hits. This is a mids- and highs-focused sound signature. It sounds excellent, but bass fiends will likely be disappointed.

On Jay-Z and Kanye West's "No Church in the Wild," the kick drum loop receives plenty of high-mid presence, helping to accentuate its sharp, piercing attack. The sub-bass synth hits that punctuate the beat are delivered with a solid sense of depth, but nothing that sounds like there's a subwoofer in the room. Again, the focus seems to be on the mids and high-mids, resulting in excellent vocal clarity without ever drifting into harsh or overly-sibilant territory.

On orchestral tracks, like the opening scene in John Adams' *The Gospel According to the Other Mary*, the lower register instrumentation gets ideal representation. There's a pleasant level of bass presence, but the lows play a supporting role to the higher register instrumentation. The strings, vocals, and brass are delivered with superb clarity, never too bright. When there are occasional deep bass moments in the recording, they spring out beautifully, neither dialed back nor boosted.

Of course, in the reduced bass mode, all things sound a bit brighter and thinner, but, as mentioned, it exists primarily for use with a subwoofer or to tone things down on vibration-prone tabletops and shelves. A subwoofer could bring out the richer, heartier bass moments in all of these tracks, but whether you need one will come down to personal preference.

Conclusions

The Audioengine HD3 are an excellent choice for those seeking an accurate sound signature from their Bluetooth stereo speakers. Frankly, even without the wireless audio functionality, these are winners—the RCA, USB, and 3.5mm inputs make them exceptionally versatile for the price, while the 24-bit DAC ups the value even more. Most of the wireless speakers we can recommend in this price range are all-in-one systems, like the [Audioengine B2](#) and the [Marshall Kilburn](#). If your budget allows, the [Bowers & Wilkins Zeppelin Wireless](#) and [Vifa Oslo](#) are pricier options with a healthy dose of low end. However, if stereo separation is a must, the \$400 HD3 won't disappoint those seeking accurate wireless audio. They earn our Editors' Choice for bringing quality Bluetooth performance and a 24-bit DAC to the classic bookshelf design.