



## Tune Audio Prime loudspeakers

by Jason Kennedy

**M**anolis Proestakis of Tune Audio is a sensitive soul. As are his loudspeakers; the Prime tested here is rated at 93dB, and is thus ideal with amplifiers of the single-ended triode persuasion.

Tune Audio's range consists of three horn-loaded floorstanders and an active horn subwoofer. They are all designed and built in Greece, using Baltic plywood, classic drivers, and proper old school components with simple first order crossovers. All three models feature Fostex drivers, but where the larger Anima is a three-way, the Marvel and the smaller Prime two-ways make use of heavily modified Fostex drivers. In the Prime, these comprise a FE168EZ driver run virtually full range, coupled with a similarly extensively modified FT96H horn-loaded 'bullet' supertweeter.

The back of the main driver is loaded by a 2.48 metre folded horn that directs output to the bottom of the speaker, which also forms the mouth of the horn. If you lay the speaker on its side, you can see the inch thick ply and the crossover network attached to the back of the terminal panel. The latter has a few substantial components that are hardwired with waxed cotton insulated, oxygen free copper cables.

Its crossover is comprised of two NOS ('New Old Stock') military-grade paper-in-oil capacitors for the high-pass filter and an air cored coil for the low-pass. This last component is wound in-house, using the same OFC cable as the internal wiring, and is then bonded in beeswax to provide a degree of damping. The terminals are gold plated brass types of the expensive variety. The Prime is available in a selection of standard veneers, including the European walnut shown here, but it can also be custom finished to match an existing wood or paint finish for a premium.

Tune Audio does not detail how low the bass goes because horn-loading is so dependent on the room and how near you can get the speakers to the boundaries of that room, but I was told 35Hz is achievable. You can also alter the character of the

► bass on this speaker by adjusting how high the Prime is from the floor using the supplied gold-plated spikes; the higher it is the bigger the bass, it seems. And there's always Tune Audio's Pulse powered subwoofer, if you need to call for reinforcements.

The sensitivity is clearly a lot higher than most loudspeakers, and this means that level differences between tracks are far more obvious, which resulted in leaping for the volume knob when flitting between tunes on my Resolution Audio Cantata streamer. The Prime's presentation is also rather different to typical ported loudspeakers, making them seem timid and restrained by comparison. The Prime is bounding with energy in a fashion so exuberant that it takes some getting used to. Put on a tune (pun intended) with a bit of low end on it, such as Lorde's 'Royals' [*Pure Heroine*, Universal], and the whole room is clearly joining the party. Tune Audio recommends corner placement in order to reinforce the low end, but in my long and narrow room I had to bring the loudspeakers well away from walls in order to keep them on the straight and narrow.

When it's called for, the Prime does scale with no effort whatsoever; if you like your music to sound 'live' (read: energetic) then this speaker should figure on your 'must hear' list. It's also very strong on texture, and while the bass is not as deep as you'd get from a more traditionally aspirated box of this size, it makes up for the shortfall due to its timbral character, because many speakers tend to sound thick in the bass. Another bass-heavy piece, James Blake's 'Limit to Your Love' [*James Blake*, ATLAS], doesn't disturb the furniture in the usual way, but instead has an ease at higher levels that is very difficult to emulate with lower sensitivity speakers.

Amplifier choice proved fairly critical with the Prime. My current reference, the ATC P1, proved to be totally unsuited because its massive damping doesn't suit the high sensitivity of the main driver or the nature of the horn. In the end, I borrowed a Modwright KWI200 integrated from BD Audio and this worked a treat. It's a smooth, solid-state amplifier voiced in the style of a valve design, and this provided speed that the main driver was able to really make the most of, as well as fluid rather than bone crunching bass. The treble likewise became more open and relaxed.

With the Modwright the midrange was a little more forthright than could be considered neutral, but the timing was excellent. This is a very fast loudspeaker thanks to the stiff light paper cone and effortless definition of the horn tweeter. Henry Threadgill's 'Bermuda Blues' from *You Know the Number* [RCA Novus] is a jazz piece with some serious bass, drums, and horn action that the Primes delivered in spacious and dynamic fashion. There are acres of headroom for dynamic peaks to expand into, and this means every ►



## TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

**Type:** two-way, horn loaded floorstanding loudspeaker

**Driver complement:** 1x Fostex FE168EZ 168mm full range driver, 1x Fostex FT96H supertweeter

**Inputs:** gold-plated brass connectors

**Crossover frequency:** 6.3kHz

**Frequency response:** not specified (varies with room dynamics)

**Impedance:** 8 Ohms

**Sensitivity:** 93dB/W/m

**Recommended Amplifiers:** Low-mid powered tube or solid state with low or no feedback.

**Recommended Placement:** Near wall or room corner placement is desirable.

**Preferred clearance between speakers:** >1.5 m.

**Listening Distance:** >2 m.

**Dimensions (HxWxD):** 1160 x 280 x 490mm

**Weight:** 33kg/each

**Finishes:** Range of standard veneers, custom finish on request.

**Price:** £5,995 per pair

**Manufacturer:** Tune Audio

**URL:** [www.tuneaudio.com](http://www.tuneaudio.com)

**UK Distributor:** BD Audio

**URL:** [www.bd-audio.co.uk](http://www.bd-audio.co.uk)

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► gram of vitality is extracted from the signal, in which dynamic instruments like drums really revel. You can sometimes hear the box – that much undamped panelling will never be able to totally disappear – but it easily blends in with acoustic instruments. delicacy the Prime delivers through the mids, as on some Haydn piano played by Jean-Efflam Bavouet [*Piano Sonatas Vol 1*, Chandos], where the speakers revealed all the micro-dynamics of the playing, with both the speed and subtlety of touch given full exposure in the context of delightful immediacy.

This quality is also evident with voices. Paul McCartney's on 'Mother Nature's Son' [Capitol box set] reproduces so much of the room, the mic, and the recording technology that you are transported back to the late sixties and Abbey Road, just with his words to the engineer. It's worth noting that the Primes need to be on-axis for best results. The

dispersion from the drivers is not terribly even, but this is true of many horn designs. It's worth bearing in mind there is always a compromise in design; you get high sensitivity and all the benefits that accrue, but the trade-off is some tonal unevenness. A good modern speaker is a lot more linear in terms of tonal balance, but it's debatable whether they are as much fun. The strange thing about tonal variations is that because rooms themselves have a big effect in this respect, we are pretty good at hearing through them. After a while, they are less obvious.

The Tune Audio Prime is a balanced horn speaker that will really sing with the right amplification. There are surprisingly few such speakers available at this price and, while not exactly discreet, this will not be obtrusive in larger than average rooms. If you want to hear the life in your music they provide a powerful distraction from modern life. +