

Playback

ELECTRONICALLY REPRINTED FROM JULY 2008

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Vandersteen Model 1C

I know this speaker well. The Vandersteen Model 1C tower speaker is not so different from the 1B model I sold when I worked as a hi-fi salesman in the mid '80s to the late '90s. The original came out in 1981 as the Model 1, and the "C" debuted 15 years later. The 1C is a fairly compact floorstanding speaker and will do its best in smaller rooms. The 1c is, by a big margin, the least expensive speaker in our survey, though you wouldn't necessarily know that from its sound.

FEATURES

Though it looks like a box speaker, the 1C is no such thing. Behind the wrap-around black cloth grille is a "minimum baffle" design—the revised 1-inch ceramic-coated, metal-alloy dome tweeter is mounted in free space atop the 8-inch polycone woofer's enclosure (check Vandersteen Audio's Web site for a picture of a naked 1C). In other words, the baffles are small to minimize reflections that would color the sound. The net effect is that the 1C sounds more like a panel speaker than a conventional box design.

Vandersteen offers a dedicated stand/base for the 1C, and I'd definitely recommend getting it. The heavyweight, cast-metal base allows you to precisely tilt the speaker back to ensure the sound from the tweeter and woofer reach your ears at exactly the same time (a chart lists listener heights and seating distances from the speakers to help you calculate the exact tilt-back angle to use). Another rather unusual feature is the 1C's Contour Control—essentially a tweeter level knob on the rear baffle that lets you fine tune the treble to compensate for room acoustics or personal taste.

Specs & Pricing

Vandersteen 1C: Two-way transmission-line tower speaker

Driver complement: 1" dome tweeter, 8" mid/bass driver
 Frequency response: 38Hz-22.5kHz
 Sensitivity: 90dB
 Impedance: 6.8 ohms
 Recommended amplifier power: 20 to 100 watts maximum
 Dimensions (HxWxD): 36" x 12" x 10"
 Weight: 44 lb. each
 Price: \$995/pair, \$105/pair for the Vandersteen stands

VANDERSTEEN AUDIO
 (559) 582-0324
vandersteen.com

SONIC CHARACTER

The Vandersteen 1C doesn't sound like a box speaker. It has the open quality of a panel speaker, and its center image is remarkably solid and focused. Soundstage depth is superior to most box speakers priced under \$2K. Bass isn't pants-flapping deep, but definition is another strong point.

MUSICAL EXAMPLES

The *David Johansen and the Harry Smiths* CD [Chesky] sounded shockingly realistic. The ex New York Dolls front-man's blues foray was mostly an acoustic affair with just a couple of guitars, bass and drums, but there was electricity in the air. I was present at the session in late 1999, and the Model 1C brought it all back home. David Jo's big bellowing vocals are front and center, and the 1Cs let me hear them reverberating and filling St. Peter's Episcopal Church where the recording was made. The guitars over on

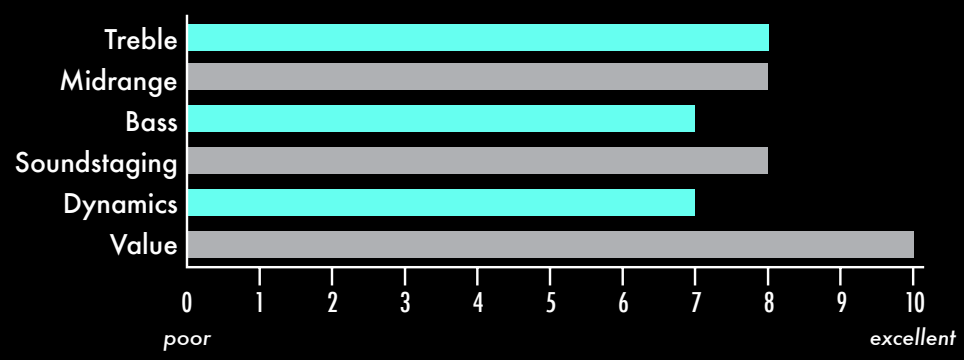
the left and right are perfectly rendered. The drums are further back in the soundstage, behind Johansen. Kermit Driscoll's acoustic bass had a palpable, tactile presence. Vandersteen's minimal baffle design approach really works—we noted the stereo image stretched way beyond the actual edges of the speakers.

Sticking with the blues, I popped on the Black Keys *Attack & Release* CD [Nonesuch]. Oh boy, the guitar and drums blues duo opened up their format, adding more instruments for some tunes and it really works. Thing is, the 'Keys heavyweight dynamics were reigned in a bit by the 1C, and the lower bass slam wasn't rocking my world. I detected some strain when

BOTTOM LINE: *There are huge advantages to building essentially the same design for more than a quarter of a century. For one thing, Vandersteen has held price increases to a minimum. Fit 'n' finish are exceptionally good, Vandersteen still builds all of its speakers in Hanford, California, and every 1C is tested and measured in the factory's anechoic chamber. It's a timeless design. PB*

I nudged the volume higher. Easing back to more moderate levels restored my admiration for the 1C. If you like the basic sonic flavor of the 1C, but could go for deeper bass and more expansive dynamics, consider Vandersteen's next bigger model, the 2CE Signature II, which sells for just a bit over \$2k/pair.

VANDERSTEEN MODEL 1C
 (relative to other sub-\$2k tower speakers)



LAST WORD



- Considering the brand's deep audiophile roots and stellar build quality, the IC is an amazing value.
- Electrostatic-like coherency and imaging.
- Made in California.



- Aesthetics too austere for some tastes (apart from wooden end caps, the speaker's outer surfaces are covered in plain grille fabric).