

Atlantis Lab AT16 Pro floorstanding speaker

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I am a sufficiently simple soul that receiving something without preconceived ideas about how the product will look, feel and perform is still wholly satisfying. Prior to being asked to review the AT16 Pro, I was completely unaware of Atlantis Lab or the brand's sonic characteristics. This is despite the company (based between Clermont-Ferrand and Lyon) having been in business for nearly thirty years.

The design of the AT16 Pro is sufficiently distinctive that there aren't many points of comparison with other designs at this sort of price when it comes to how it might perform. At the front you will find a pair of drivers, and the mid-bass unit is reasonably conventional. It's a 13cm dynamic unit made of polypropylene and featuring a prominent dust cap. It has been designed for lightness, rigidity and responsiveness, and this final virtue is why it is the size it is rather than any larger.

Rearward peering

What makes things interesting is that if you peer around the back of the cabinet, you'll find a second 13cm driver mounted directly behind the one visible at the front. This significantly increases the available radiating area, but Atlantis Lab is keen to stress that the presence of this driver does not require the AT16 Pro to be placed a significant distance from rear walls. There is a port, a significant one too, but it's on the front panel and mounted at the bottom of the cabinet.

The HF unit that these two drivers hand over to is more unusual. It's a



25mm compression driver. High-frequency energy is directed into a narrow aperture and projected out via a short horn. Compression drivers can be somewhat challenging to integrate with other drivers, and Atlantis Lab has developed a bespoke crossover with extensive filtering to ensure that the three drive units work together correctly.

The reason the company has gone to the effort of doing so is that the result is impressively sensitive. Atlantis Lab cites a figure of 94.5 dB/W, and while it falls outside the scope of what I can accurately measure here, there is no arguing that this is a very easy speaker to drive. It's worth noting that this figure is given at an impedance of four ohms, so the AT16 Pro isn't a true 'drive it with a stiff cough'- style speaker, but it's impressive for a relatively conventional cabinet-style design.

More impressive

This figure becomes even more impressive when you consider that the AT16 Pro is usefully compact. It stands 81cm high, 24cm wide at the base and 29cm deep. There are very few spaces it won't fit into, and this runs counter to several sensitive designs that often end up on the wide side. The next surprise the AT16 Pro delivers is that Atlantis Lab claims it will reach 40Hz within a ± 1 dB margin, which is a wholly impressive level of clout for a speaker this size. In the current listening room, a space that is positively merciless at consuming low-end output from speakers, the AT16 Pro didn't quite manage this, but there is a wholly gratifying level of shove from a relatively small speaker. »



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» All this comes encased in a design that is distinctive yet attractive. There are two finish options, both of which combine a central section covered in faux leather, either black or beige, with oak side cheeks. The review samples had the black leather option, and the result is an impressively looking and feeling speaker for the asking price, particularly since that price includes building it in Europe. Details such as the beautifully finished metal feet (designed by Pann Audio), the company's custom-made pure copper terminals, and Esprit Audio cabling behind the plate make a difference. Factor in the small, flush-fitting grilles covering the mid-bass drivers (the tweeter's design means it is effectively covered all the time), and this doesn't feel like an 'artisanal' product but something you'd spend your hard-earned on.

Atlantis Lab recommends a 30-hour break-in period, but, as with many review samples, the units arrived already run-in. Testing the Atlantis Lab AT16 Pro began with a connection to the resident Chord Electronics CMP3350 integrated amplifier. With comfortably north of 200 watts at its disposal, this might not sound like an immediately fruitful combination, but it was instructive and revealed some immediately positive attributes of what the Atlantis Lab can do. The first is that, over and above its sensitivity, the most immediately apparent element of the performance is its startling immediacy.

Potent and engaging

This means that when you play the *Cowboy Bebop* score [EMI] via the AT16 Pro, the effect is immediately potent and engaging. The opening salvo of brass on 'Tank!' (and if you question whether brass can be delivered as a salvo, you probably need to have a listen yourself) has a punch and tangibility that is impressively invigorating. There's no trace of bloat or overhang anywhere in the frequency response, including the usefully deep bass extension. When you factor in the subtle yet noticeable contribution of those rear-firing drivers, the effect is at times closer to a panel design than to a dynamic-driver speaker.

However, not everything at the Chord/Atlantis Lab meet-up was entirely positive. It would be pushing it to describe the combination as 'bright', but Goldfrapp's *Black Cherry* [Mute] didn't have the lushness it demonstrates on some other speakers in partnership with the Chord. When you combine this with the slightly hair-trigger effect of running a high-power amp with a sensitive pair of speakers, the result isn't always a perfect partnership.

Switching the Atlantis Lab AT16 Pro to being fed by the Cambridge Audio Edge A immediately worked in its favour. At 100 watts, this is still probably more power than the Atlantis Lab will ever need, but the result was manageable and required no conscious thought in day-to-day use. More than this, the Edge's tonal balance immediately gelled with the AT16 Pro, benefiting both devices.



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» Profoundly satisfying

Listening to Woodkid's *S16* [Island] on this combination was profoundly satisfying. At points where the material is delicate, the same immediacy and transient speed that the AT16 Pro excels at are there to give everything the lightness of touch it needs. When things get heavier and more electronic, the AT16 Pro manages to sound smoother and more cohesive while still delivering a wholly gratifying level of low-end shove for what is a relatively small speaker.

Being at my most critical, it might be fair to say that the Atlantis Lab AT16 Pro is not a truly 'ballistic' speaker; that impressive transient speed doesn't always translate into true head-nodding urgency, and *Boy King* by Wild Beats [Domino] isn't the sonic riot it can be when played via the Edge with some other speakers.

The counter to this is that when you do give the AT16 Pro material that suits it, it produces results that aren't simply 'good for a speaker at the price'; they're good, full stop. I spent an afternoon playing a selection of Penguin Café, Cinematic Orchestra, Bonobo and other material featuring real instruments played together in a group setting. The result was consistently impressive because even large and complex material is handled with an immediacy and engagement that has you listening through the speakers rather than to the speakers themselves.

Fine valve partner

Some brief tests with a diminutive Chord Electronics Anni and Qutest also suggest that the Atlantis Lab AT16 Pro can genuinely be run on the end of a relatively limited amount of power, should you wish. Some of the bass impact that the Cambridge extracts from the AT16 is slightly softened, and there are limits to the absolute headroom on offer, but it does suggest that this could be a fine partner for valve amps and other low-power designs.

The Atlantis Lab AT16 Pro is not a true 'play anything with anything' speaker, but we already have more than enough of them. When partnered with any degree of care and used to its strengths, the AT16 Pro can do things that very few others at this price can match, and it does so while being unfussy about its placement and attractive to look at. The results of my first encounter with Atlantis Lab have me rather enthused and intrigued about what the rest of the range can do. +

Technical specifications

Type: Two-way, three-driver, reflex-loaded floorstanding loudspeaker

Drive unit complement: 1x 25mm compression driver tweeter, 2x 130mm 'Eighteen Sound' woofers (one front, one rear mounted, back to back)

Frequency Response: 40Hz-22kHz (± 1 dB)

Impedance: 4 Ω

Sensitivity: 94.5dB

Power Handling: 125W (250W peak power)

Recommended Amplifier Power: 6W – 200W

Finish: Black or beige faux leather, elegantly combined with oak

Dimensions (HxWxD): 81x24x 29cm

Weight: 19 kg

Price: £2,950, €2,680, \$3,250 per pair

Manufacturer Atlantis Lab

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