

Affordable\$\$Audio

Issue Number 48: December 2009

Jungson JA88D Amp p.3	Acoustic Revive Isolation Platforms p.16	Matrix mini-I Balanced DAC p.29
Vista Audio i34 Int. Tube Amplifier p.8	Fritz Carbon 7 Speakers p.24	Visit With The SoundSmith p.32
Morrow Audio Speaker Cables p.12		



Fritz Carbon 7 Speakers

By Tim Thomas

Specifications:

Frequency Response: 39Hz-20Khz +/- 3 db
 Impedance: 8 Ohms nominal
 Sensitivity: 88 db (1 Watt, 2.83 V @ 1 Meter)
 Bass/Midrange Driver: 7" Carbon Graphite Fiber/Paper
 Pulp composite cone with non-resonant low loss
 butyl rubber surround & Kapton voice coil former &
 die cast frame with massive magnet, bass reflex
 loaded- rear port
 Tweeter: 28 mm 1.1 inch hand coated textile soft dome
 with non-resonant rear chamber & ferro-fluid cool-
 ing, aluminum face plate, SE model upgrades to
 the revelator tweeter
 Crossover: Series crossover without any capacitors in
 the circuit with the tweeter
 Dimensions/Weight: 16"H x 9"W x 12"D, 30 lbs (each)
 Recommended Power: 30 - 150 Watts RMS, without
 clipping
 Price: \$1750 specially priced
 Website: www.fritzspeakers.com
 Email: fritzspeaks@yahoo.com



Well to start out, I thought I provide a bit of background about myself. Aside from the occasional post on sites such as head-fi, audiocircle, audiokarma, and audiogon, this is my first attempt at a review. I've been a life-long music lover, but never seriously studied music or played an instrument.

About 10 years ago, I began to seriously get into music. Work was becoming very stressful and on advice from my doctor, he suggested spending some dedicated time each day meditating or listening to music. Having tried meditation before, with limited success, I opted for the second choice. With a limited budget, I started out first with headphones and a good amplifier based on some recommendations from www.head-fi.org. It was also during this time I grew to love classical music. As time past and my budget grew, it was time to look into getting a 2-channel speaker-based system. Headphones are fantastic for many kinds of music – especially chamber music – but lack the presence and that “at the concert” feel for large orchestral works or rock music.

My first high quality loudspeaker purchase was a pair of Totem Arro's. They were and continue to be very good speakers. I kept them for a few years, when the “upgrade itch” started to rear its ugly head. There wasn't anything “wrong” with the Arro's, far from it. But, I felt like something was missing. The detail and imaging were fantastic, but the speakers didn't “draw me in.” I didn't feel like I was at the concert.

It was during this time that I began to run across posts on audiokarma arguing that the “best bang for the buck” wasn't the top names in audio, but the smaller custom manufacturers. The claims were that not only was the service often better – in many cases you could order speakers in just about any finish you wanted, but that they often used the same drivers as the big names at a fraction of the price. Doing some more searching, I came across more than one post taking about speakers offered by Fritz available at www.fritzspeakers.com. After looking around his site and searching for some reviews, I sent Fritz an email. A couple of days later he quickly followed up with his phone number and offered to discuss my specific needs.

Our first phone call lasted well over 30 minutes, covering everything from speaker design, to musical preferences, speaker placement, and components. During the conversation, I came to find out that Fritz grew up in Michigan not far from where I currently live and that he would soon be back in the Detroit area. Furthermore, Fritz offered to bring over a pair of his “top-of-the-line” monitors, called Carbon 7s, for a lengthy in-home trial. How could I pass up that offer?

A couple of weeks later, Fritz was at my house helping me set up a pair of his Carbon 7s. A quick play from his frequency test CD showed that these babies could play low. The pictures on my wall were rattling!! Replaying the same track on the Arros did not elicit the same response. Moving on to music, the first track he played was from Eva Cas-

sidy, and the impact was immediate, the speakers were already fantastic! I couldn't believe how life-like the sound was from these two "simple looking speakers." After Fritz left, I did A-B testing with the Cassidy track between the Arro's and the Carbon 7s. While the Totem's sounded good, very good in fact, they just didn't have the presence that Carbon 7's did.

I kept the speakers for a little over two months, until Fritz came back into town and picked up the speakers for his room at AKFest 2009. By that time, Fritz had me hooked; these were great speakers at a great price. I give him a down payment and eagerly counted the days until I had My own pair in my chosen veneer pair. My speakers arrived a little over a month later and I've been very happy ever since.

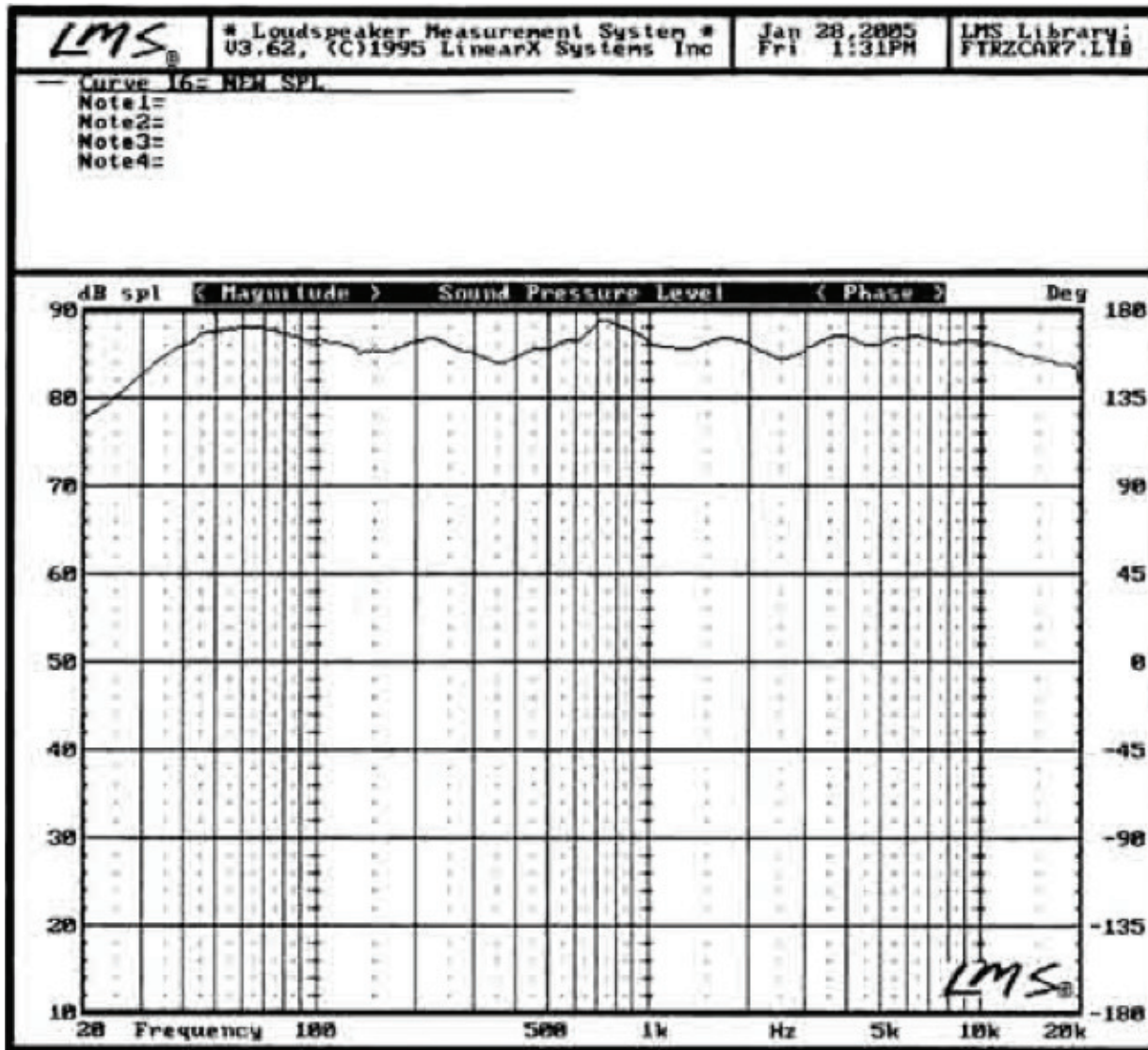
It was during this time on www.audiocircle.com that Jeff Brown from Affordable\$\$Audio submitted a post asking for suggestions on what to review. Shortly after my post suggesting Fritz' Carbon 7s, Jeff emailed and asked if I would be interested in submitting a review. It's been about 6 months since I agreed to write something up, and the result is what you read here. I began to do some serious listening about three months ago. My process was to choose a select

view records that I knew very well, and then listen to them several times. Each time I'd play a track once, take a few notes at the end, then play the track again, taking notes during the music. A few weeks later, I'd repeat the process again, in an attempt to make sure I captured my experiences and thoughts. Once I'd captured my notes, I spent a quite a bit of time comparing the same recording first with the Carbon 7s and then again with the Totem Arros. After which I'd repeat the process, first listening to the Arros and then the Carbon 7s. Once this was done, I'd jot down a few more notes. It turned out to be more work than I originally envisioned, but well worth it.

Serious Listening

When I received my Carbon 7s, I immediately set them up and

sat down to do some serious listening with a pair I could call my own. Now, Fritz had mentioned that as they were brand new it would take some time for the speakers to break in, and he was right. They didn't sound bad at first listen, but a bit tight. They didn't produce the smooth sounds I had come to love from his demo pair. So, I set them up to break in with a test CD, playing them every night when I went to bed for the next couple of weeks, as well as on the weekends. After a couple of weeks my Carbon 7s began to emit those beautiful sounds that made me fall in love with these speakers. Now, I was ready for some serious listening.



My first, reference CD is the Cowboy Junkies, Trinity Sessions. Margo Timmins has one of the finest voices in all of music and this (IMO) is by far their best CD. Recorded in an old church in Toronto, this CD truly shines. There's nothing to it – just a great band and a microphone – music at it's finest. In both listening to headphones as well as speakers, I've found that vocal works can be especially difficult to perfect. While very good, many speakers can sound somehow artificial – they sound as if you're listening to a recording, rather than live. From the first track, Mining for Gold, the Carbon 7s shine. Closing my eyes, after a few seconds, the speakers disappear and I'm standing in the church with Margo and the rest of the Junkies.

My second, reference CD is Mahler's 2nd symphony. For those not familiar with this work, it is symphony t that is meant to be played loud. There are dynamic shifts with basses, cellos, and horns crashing through the soundstage while very subtle violins contrast expressing longing and yearning. The Carbon 7s were up to the task, projecting masterfully as the symphony reaches its full glory with wall shaking collisions. Listening to other symphonic works such as Beethoven's 5th and Brahms' great Violin and Piano Concerto's through Fritz' speakers also brought the symphony into my home – much more so than the Totem Arro's ever had.

Moving to something a bit different, I spent considerable time listening to Perahia's recording of Bach's Goldberg Variations. Considered by many to be one of the pinnacles of piano achievement, reproduction of these great works is no easy task. Encompassing a multitude of emotions, Perahia's recording is hypnotic and addictive. Together with the Schiff's interpretations of the Well Tempered Clavier, I spent hours mesmerized by how sell the sound of the piano was reproduced.

The last piece of music spent I've considerable time with for this review are Bach's Cello Suites. It was, in fact, this piece of music that sparked my love for classical music. In the used section of a record store I had found a copy by the late Pablo Casals. Recorded in the late 1930's, the sound quality is relatively poor compared to more modern renditions by Ma, Fournier, Rostropovich, etc. However, none of the other recordings, seem to convey the emotion of the Casal's recording. On the Carbon 7s', Casal's love for these works is clearly evident. The sound is full and rich, with a very smooth presentation. While I had come to intimately know this work from many hours of listening on headphones, the presentation of the Carbon 7s brings my love for this work to a new level.

Other recordings that I spent several sessions with included Led Zeppelin II & III on vinyl, Chicago 13 on vinyl, Pink Floyd's Dark Side of the Moon, Diana Krall's Live in Paris, Miles Davis' Kind of Blue, Unplugged by Eric Clapton, and Stevie Ray Vaughn's Best of.

In each case, I was very pleased with the Carbon 7s. If I could come up with one word, I would choose lush. The speakers have a sense of life about them, presenting a warm and full sound, free of any sibilance or brightness. They are an open and inviting speaker that can be listened to for hours at a time. The soundstage is deep and wide, with solid instrument and vocal location. As someone posted after listening to them at RMAF, "the speakers did nothing wrong, and did almost everything right."

The Other Side of the Story

So as to not give the opinion that the Carbon 7s were perfect, there are some areas where the Totem Arro's were superior. Throughout the recordings noted above, the Arro's seemed to be more "accurate" or perhaps more "revealing." For example, the intake of Margo's breath on Mining for Gold is more evident on the Arro's as is the slide of Clapton's fingers on many of the tracks on Unplugged. For another example, listening carefully I was able to here the slow decay of piano key more easily on the Arro's.

Also, while I'm not a big fan of electronic music, I did listen to both the Arro's and Carbon 7s with a friend's "dance / electronica CD" (his name not mine). It was a mix of some of "currently popular stuff." With this CD, the faster attack of the Arro's seemed to better suited than the more "mellow" sounding Carbon 7s.

Lastly, while the finish of the Carbon 7s is very good, they don't have the WAF that the Arro's have. While some speakers have a piano finish or beveled edges, the Carbon 7s are fairly simple looking – very nicely made – but simple in comparison.

Set-up

Before closing, I'll leave you with a couple of comments about set-up. As part of the review, I played around with toeing the speakers in 30 degrees, as well as moving them much closer together – only 2 feet apart. In each case, the sound of the speakers was still very good. In only one case, where I put one of the speakers almost touching a side-

wall did they begin to sound poorly. I say this to indicate that these speakers are not fussy—you can get a very good sound with minimal set-up.

Concluding Thoughts

Having listened to the Carbon 7s for nearly 9 months, I have not once thought I made a poor decision with the purchase. They are a warm and friendly speaker, at a very reasonable price. While attending AKfest earlier this year (2009) I had the opportunity to audition several very expensive speakers as well as listen to several “home made” varieties. In only one case did I hear a speaker that sounded better than Fritz – and it retailed for over \$10,000. In many cases, the home-made speakers brought by AudioKarma members sounded much better than the “top named” brands.

If you're in the market for a speaker, do yourself a favor and give Fritz a call. Not only will you get first class service, but you'll get a great deal – a speaker using components founded in speakers costing over \$10,000 in a pair under \$2,000.

Review System

Van Alstine Insight+ 240 Pre-amp

Van Alstine Insight 240 Amplifier

Linn Sondek LP12 Turntable with Ittok LV II Arm & Grado Gold Cartridge

Jolida JD100A CD Player

The Carbon 7s sit approximately six and one half feet apart on a pair of custom maple stands in my living room. The living room is carpeted and measures 12-foot wide by 18-foot long but opens into the dining room beyond for another 15-feet. Both rooms have eight foot ceilings.

ZEBRA CABLES
Quality Audio/Video Cables For Less
<http://www.zebracables.com>

WIGWAM

ZeroGain.com

Music, HiFi and AV Discussion Forums