

Monitor Audio Gold 300 Floorstanding Speakers Reviewed

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Introduced at CES 2015, [Monitor](#) Audio's new Gold Series speakers represent the fourth generation of the Gold range, a lineup that is second only to the British manufacturer's flagship [Platinum Series](#).

Monitor Audio has been in business since 1972 and distributes its products globally. The new Gold Series represents an evolution of its predecessor, the Gold GX Series, keeping the same form factor while incorporating many refinements to the prior design that are intended to further enhance performance. Some of the refinements include a new bass driver, tighter production tolerances of its ribbon high-frequency transducer, and re-fashioned grilles.



The new [Gold Series](#) is comprised of eight dedicated stereo, center-channel, surround, and [subwoofer](#) models. I've been familiar with [Monitor](#) Audio for almost two decades and still enjoy the "full metal theater" surround setup in my family room. My speakers preceded the very first generation of Gold Series models. Shortly after CES, I spoke with Sheldon Ginn, V.P. of Sales and Marketing for Kevro International (the North American distributor for Monitor Audio), about a possible review. Based on my current system electronics and room size, I requested the new top-of-the-line [Gold 300](#) floorstander speakers (\$5,495/pair) in a piano-black lacquer finish. Monitor Audio actually sent me a complete Gold Series [home theater](#) ensemble that also included the C350 center channel (\$1,695), the W15 subwoofer (\$2,795), and the FX surround speakers (\$1,095 each).

The Gold 300 floorstander is a three-way, bass-reflex, rear-ported design with cabinet dimensions of 41.75 inches by 8.25 inches by 13 inches and an overall weight of 60 pounds. The cabinet is a rigid curved design with radial bracing and employing tensioned through-bolts to fix all drivers to the cabinet. These design elements are all intended to reduce vibrations of the cabinet itself, as well as the interface between the drivers and cabinet. An added benefit of the through-bolts is the elimination of screws on the [front baffle](#), resulting in a cleaner, upscale aesthetic...and that's a good thing because the Gold Series drivers, with their satin silver finish, provide a beautiful contrast to the high-gloss cabinet finish. Trust me, you won't want the grills hiding these beauties. However, magnetically affixed grills are included if you need to protect against possible damage caused by someone with curious little fingers getting too close to these gorgeous drivers. Drivers include twin 6.5-inch dimpled C-CAM (Ceramic-Coated Aluminum/Magnesium) Rigid Surface

Technology (RST) bass drivers, one four-inch dimpled C-CAM mid-range driver, and one C-CAM ribbon high-frequency transducer.

The C-CAM material originated in the aerospace industry for engine components, and [Monitor](#) Audio has been fine-tuning the material for its drivers for more than 20 years. C-CAM's light weight and extreme rigidity make it an ideal choice for drivers. The Gold 300's overall rated frequency response covers an impressive range from below 30 Hz to above 60 kHz, one of the largest for any speaker regardless of price. Frequency response is just one of the benefits of the unique C-CAM ribbon transducer, one of three standout features I discovered with the [Gold Series speaker](#) system under review. The ribbon transducer also tends to present a wider than average soundstage. Ribbon transducers are still fairly unique in speakers at this price point because they are more expensive and more difficult to manufacture than conventional dome tweeters.

The C350 center channel is the perfect tonal match for the [Gold 300](#), incorporating the exact same driver complement but tuned for the C350's sealed enclosure. The 21.75-pound C350 has a similar rigid curved design to that of the [Gold 300](#) with the side panels gently curving inward toward the back. The cabinet measures 10 inches by 22.88 inches by 13.13 inches.



The FX surround speaker contains an impressive array of six drivers, including a four-inch C-CAM midrange driver and a one-inch gold dome tweeter on each side of the cabinet. There is also one 6.5-inch C-CAM RST bass driver and one C-CAM ribbon high-frequency transducer mounted on the front surface of the cabinet. The six-driver arrangement provides the FX greater versatility, enabling it to be switched between monopole (music) and dipole (movies) playback modes, either manually or automatically via a [12-volt trigger](#). All of these drivers result in a much heavier-than-average wall-mount surround speaker at just over 26 pounds. Where most [surround speakers](#)' sound represents a compromise between music and movies, the FX's ability to be optimized for either at the flick of a switch was the second standout feature of the Gold Series for me. In monopole mode, just the two front drivers are active, similar to a bookshelf speaker. In dipole mode, however, all drivers except the ribbon transducer are active, intended to create a more enveloping sound.

Rounding out my review setup is the intelligent W15 [subwoofer](#), the third standout highlight of the Gold Series system. As you can probably guess from its moniker, the W15 sub has one 15-inch C-CAM driver in a sealed cabinet with internal bracing. It also features a sealed amplifier compartment for its 650-watt, DSP-controlled, Class-

D amplifier. The cabinet is compact for a 15-inch sub, measuring just 16.9 inches by 15.75 inches by 15.75 inches and weighing 77 pounds, 10 ounces. This enables the W15 to be more discreetly located, such as under an [end table](#). That can be important when placed in a multipurpose space. The W15 sports stereo RCA in/out, LFE RCA in/out, and [12-volt trigger](#) connections, and it comes with a remote control for calibrating the sub using Monitor Audio's built-in LEO (Listening Environment Optimizer) room correction software, with the included microphone and test tones. LEO is intended to eliminate bass boost from boundaries and corners, and that's important given the W15's seismic low-frequency limit of 18 Hz. Calibration takes just a couple of minutes to complete. The remote can also be used to set the low-pass filter and phase control, choose among four available equalization settings, or select from three custom preset programs that can be set and saved for easy retrieval later. In addition, there are buttons for navigation, power on/off, night mode, auto on, and mute. While all features can be selected from the LED display of the sub, the remote makes selection even simpler. The W15 truly is smarter than the average sub.

The Hookup

The [Gold Series speakers](#) were pretty straightforward to set up. Upon unboxing them, my attention was immediately drawn to the deep, lustrous piano-black finish that is the result of no less than eleven coats of lacquer. There are no sharp edges to the speakers. Instead, you'll find gently radiused corners for an elegant, high-end look. I first installed the two-piece, outrigger plinths to the bottom of the 300 towers using the bolts and wrench provided; it took less than five minutes. Next I screwed the optional spikes into the rubber-rimmed feet and placed the towers in the same position as my reference speakers: about 58 inches from the front wall, 24 inches from the side walls, seven feet apart, and slightly toed in. I experimented with their position but eventually settled on their original location.

I placed the C350 on my existing center stand and the W15 sub in the right front corner. The FX surrounds were placed on 36-inch stands close to the rear wall and about seven feet apart. The FX surrounds have three switches on the [front baffle](#) to adjust the ribbon transducer level, to set the speaker for right/left or forward/back placement, and to set the speaker for monopole (music) or dipole (movies) operation. Speaker binding posts and a connection for a 12-volt trigger are found on the back. I left the high-frequency transducer level set at zero, set the surrounds to the applicable right/left placement, and initially set the speaker operation to



monopole.

The floorstanders and [center speaker](#) are bi-wireable and bi-ampable with dual sets of gold-plated binding posts. If you choose to use just one set of speaker cables, as I did, [Monitor](#) Audio thoughtfully includes high-end silver wire jumpers with spades. I connected everything up with WireWorld speaker cables.

I calibrated the W15 using the sub's remote control, test microphone, and LEO calibration software to smooth out any bass boost at the boundaries and corners. Next I ran the [Audyssey MultEQ XT32 room correction software](#) on my [Marantz AV8801](#) preamp/processor to calibrate the other five channels. After some casual listening over the next week to break in the speakers, I was ready to start some critical listening.

When I was done evaluating the speakers in my media room, I took the opportunity to also evaluate them in my family room. My purpose was twofold. First, I was curious what differences I'd hear in this open-space environment with limited speaker-placement options, and I was curious to compare them to my trusty 15-year-old [Monitor](#) Audio speakers. I placed the [Gold Series speakers](#) in the same locations as my old speakers, meaning the 300 floorstanders were placed close (12 inches) from the front wall. Placing them this close required the use of the included foam plugs in the rear ports to quell the expected corner and boundary bass boost. The W15 sub was located along the left side wall, and the C350 center on a shelf above the [television](#). Read the Performance section of this review to find out how the Gold Series fared in this test.



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By: [Bob Barrett](#), August 10, 2015

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Performance

To start my critical listening, I kicked things off with some two-channel female vocals. If a speaker can't get the female voice right, I tend to lose interest quickly. I first switched the surrounds to monopole mode and then queued up the track "Songbird" from Fleetwood Mac (HDTracks, 24/96). I'm very



familiar with this song, having listened to the recording dozens of times and having heard Christine McVie sing it live on two different occasions. Immediately, I noticed an airy quality to the recording that I hadn't heard before, no doubt compliments of the extended high-frequency response provided by the ribbon transducer. The attack and decay of the piano's notes were palpable and had a tonal quality that was dead-on accurate.

Moving on to male vocals, I used the Tidal HiFi steaming service to play the track "Draw Your Sword" by Angus and Julia Stone (Netzwerk Productions) in full CD quality. For those who are unfamiliar, this song by the Australian brother-sister folk and pop duo starts off with the delicacy of a single, lightly strummed acoustic guitar. Then a piano joins in, along with Angus's initially whispering vocal. The track continuously builds to a fever-pitch crescendo. With a properly set-up high-end system, I've heard this track literally reach out and grab me with its presence. When Angus starts to sing, there is a real sense of aliveness, as he seems to appear right there in the room in front of you. I've also heard this track lack much of that presence when played through lesser systems. Well, the Gold Series did not disappoint in bringing out that presence. In addition, all of the micro details were present, from the fingertip friction sounds on the guitar strings to Angus's breathing to the decay of piano notes. Finally, the soundstage was very wide, again compliments of the ribbon transducer. And the Gold 300 speakers reproduced it all with the tonal neutrality found among only the best loudspeakers.

To evaluate how the Gold 300 and W15 sub combination handle music with deep bass, I played the Saint Saëns Symphony No. 3 "Organ in C Minor Op. 78 IV Maestoso - Allegra" by the Kansas City Symphony (Reference Recordings). During this selection, the organ starts things off in a big way, and the Gold 2.1 setup reproduced these low notes with such accuracy, conveying all of the majesty and scale of this excellent recording. The W15 provided an excellent deep-bass foundation, adding to the scale and impact of this selection. Having a sub such as the W15 that can reproduce notes down to 18 Hz is definitely essential for accurately reproducing the lower notes of organ music. At the other end of the frequency spectrum, the ribbon transducer again presented a much wider-than-average soundstage with more space between instruments. This increased scale helped bring a greater sense of realism to the music.

But say, what about movies? Can the Gold Series deliver the goods when it comes to challenging movie soundtracks? Oh, yes! My wife suggested we watch a movie early during the Gold Series review, and we selected the science-fiction action thriller *Interstellar* (Paramount Pictures). After switching the surrounds to dipole mode, we sat down to enjoy the film. In the opening scene, Cooper (Matthew McConaughey) is dreaming of piloting an aircraft that is re-entering the earth's atmosphere. As soon as the scene cuts to Cooper in the aircraft, my wife asked me, "Is the room supposed to be vibrating?" My first thought was, "OMG, this sub goes really low. I mean, chest-thumping low!" We were hearing (and feeling) the most visceral bass we ever have ever experienced in this room. I just turned to my wife and said, "The room's not vibrating, we're vibrating."

While all of that gut-wrenching bass was pressuring up the room, dialogue articulation remained superb, and the more diffuse presentation of the surrounds in dipole mode helped to provide a more seamless 360-degree soundscape. While the plot got silly during the last 20 minutes of the movie, I thoroughly enjoyed the sound I was hearing through the Gold Series speakers. This movie is loaded with special sound effects, and these speakers just have a way of pulling you into the center of the action.

Another movie where the Monitor Audio Gold Series system stood out for me was the science-fiction dystopian action thriller *The Maze Runner* (20th Century Fox) starring Dylan O'Brien as the hero Thomas. As Thomas goes to check out the doors to the maze for the first time with Chuck running after him, the massiveness of the giant stone doors was realistically portrayed by the Gold Series as the doors began to close. And when the doors do close, there was a finality to the thud, brought about by the combination of both the tight sub bass and soundstage. Scene after

scene, I marveled at the clean, coherent nature of the Gold Series sound. The drivers just blended together seamlessly, presenting a wider-than-expected soundstage.

So just how did the Gold Series compare when I placed them in the family room? They were a significant improvement over my older Monitor Audio speakers. I was a bit surprised, given that the Gold 300 is rear-ported and my speakers are front-ported. But to realize the last five percent of their potential, I had to pull them a bit farther from the front wall--about two feet away.

The Downside

There's no such thing as the perfect loudspeaker, but there's very little not to like about the Gold Series. I suppose, if I had my wish and could change anything about these speakers, there would be only two changes. First, I would change the rear-port design of the Gold 300 to either a sealed or front-ported cabinet design to enable even greater placement flexibility. While inserting the provided foam plugs into the ports does significantly quiet the bass-boom effect when the speakers are placed near the front and side walls, the Gold 300s don't realize their absolute full potential unless placed farther away from the front and side wall. Monitor Audio recommends a minimum distance of 18 to 24 inches from the front wall and three feet from side walls for the Gold 300.

Second, I would add a set of XLR connections to the Gold W15 sub, in addition to the existing RCA connections. I like having options, and I know some enthusiasts prefer balanced connections. That's it. Other than these two minor quibbles, I wouldn't change a thing.

Comparison and Competition

In comparison with my more costly Aerial Acoustics and JL Audio speaker/sub

system, the Gold 300 delivered about 95 percent of the performance of my Aerial Acoustic 7T floorstanders, but the W15 sub and FX surrounds beat my reference speakers. The single Gold W15 sub delivered greater bass impact but with the same level of bass accuracy as my twin JL Audio F110 subs. There's no substitute for chest-thumping 18Hz bass. Hearing (and feeling!) made me a believer. And finally, the wider dispersion of the Gold FX surrounds in dipole mode trumped my Aerial surrounds on movie soundtracks.

Another speaker to compare against the Gold 300 is the Revel Performa3 series led by the F208 floorstander. You can read a full review of the Revel F208 [here](#). In addition to the Performa3 F208 floorstander, Revel also makes a matching center, surrounds, and subwoofer for a complete surround system that is priced very close to the Monitor Audio Gold Series system reviewed here. While I haven't had the chance to hear the entire Revel surround system, I liked what I heard at a brief audition of the F208 at CES. I would encourage anyone in the market at this price point to seek out the Revel for a comparison audition if possible.

Another possible competitor would be a surround setup from GoldenEar Technology featuring the highly regarded [Triton One](#) speakers as the mains. While such a system carries a lower retail price, that lower price comes with a lack of speaker aesthetics. The GoldenEars aren't exciting to look at, but they do perform quite well.

Conclusion

Let's just cut to the chase. The beautifully designed Monitor Audio Gold Series system is the best-sounding surround system at its price point that I've ever heard, period. The trifecta of special features I mentioned--including the ribbon transducer, 18Hz frequency-response limit of the sub, and the versatility of the monopole/dipole surrounds--all contribute to the excellent performance. As to their value, I suspect you'd have to spend significantly more to better the combination of accurate sound, design aesthetics, and sheer musical enjoyment that Monitor Audio Gold delivers.

Additional Resources

- Visit our [Floorstanding Speakers category page](#) to read similar reviews.
- [Monitor Audio Introduces the Bronze Series](#) at HomeTheaterReview.com.
- [Monitor Audio Introduces the SB Series of Passive Soundbars](#) at HomeTheaterReview.com.