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Review by Inearspace.com

AudioPlan Kontrast V Loudspeakers

The All Round Surprise

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Review by Josh Coleby

After Sonny reviewed the power supply gear from the German innovators and problem solvers at Audioplan we thought it time to check out one of their speakers. Looking at their history it is clear that they only pursue avenues worthy of their time.

Audioplan were an unknown to us this time a year ago, not because they are new (they were founded in 1980) but because they are a smaller company who focus on quality over quantity. After a chance referral to a distributor we were forwarded to Ikon Audio Consultants which is run by Ion Kroussaniotakis about 2 minutes from where I live in Ipswich.



This just so happened to be our first exposure to Audioplan.

“It is quite unknown that Audioplan where a pioneer of the industry as one of the first to take cabling, power and other tweaks a little more seriously as well. This all comes from a desire to create great sound in



their own reference listening room back in the early 80s, which was obviously where they fine tune their speaker designs. They did infact start off making loudspeakers, which they continue to do to this day but in 1982 they were finding strange sound fluctuations due to power supplies in their speaker research lab, thus creating the original PowerPlant. Now in my mind that is the best way a product can come about, if a company sees a gap in the market for something and decide to fill it, then there is a chance it won't be great. But when something is designed to solve a problem and enhance their ability to create great sound for their own benefit, there is a good chance it does what it says. That is the case here, its creation wasn't Audioplans way of branching out their portfolio, it was them creating a better more stable environment for them to design their speakers, and they just realised that others may also be need of better power too."

While this extract from Sonny's review of the PowerPlant gear isn't strictly relevant to the Kontrast I think its well worth knowing to give you an understanding of the kind of company Audioplan is.

Something else is that is quite interesting about AudioPlan is that they release a new speaker model approximately every 10 years! They continue to develop and improve existing models releasing multiple iterations of current models. And that is exactly what we have here with the £4600-£5600 Kontrast V. This particular iteration is the latest of the Kontrast and was released in 2007.

You may also notice that they aren't interested in these huge multiple driver speakers, they stick to a two way system (or a variation). I respect this; they work with what they know and continue to develop and push boundaries of what is possible from a traditional two way design.



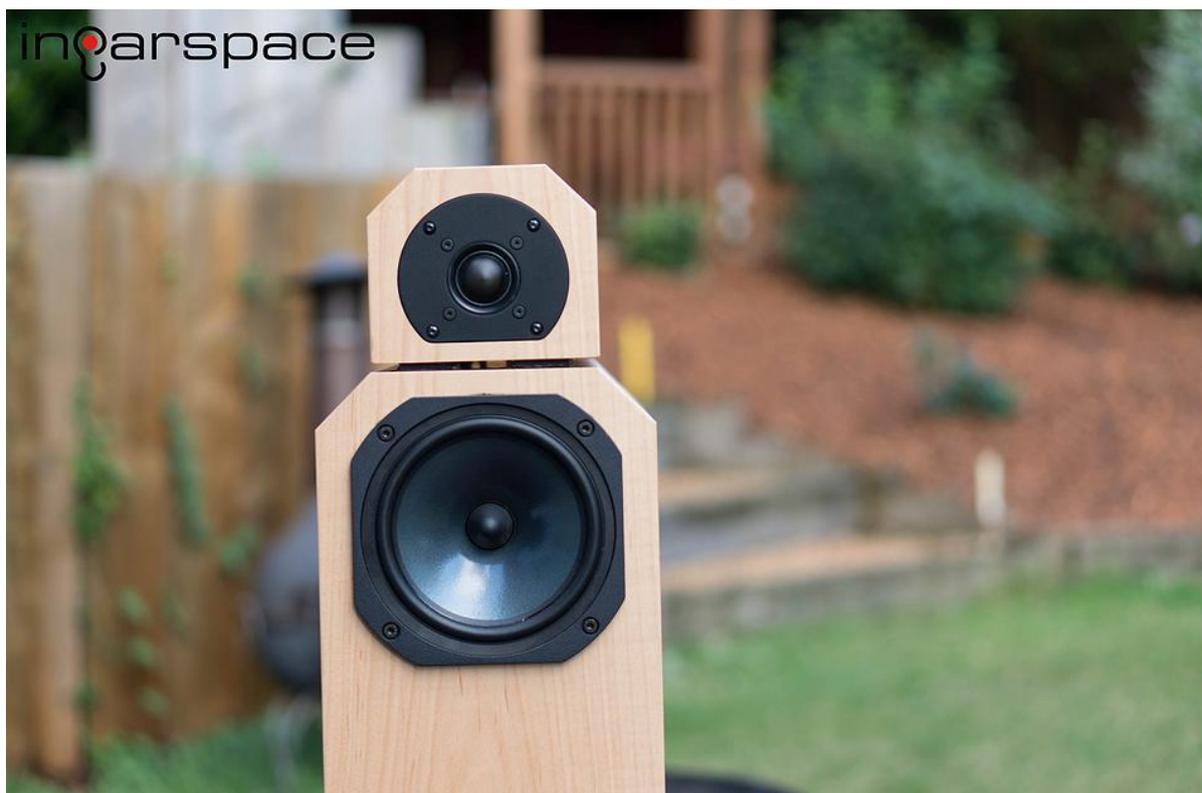
The Facts

It is a 2-way bass reflex system which sounds pretty normal right? Well Audioplan are aware that the importance of a quality enclosure is paramount. Each wall is 21mm thick and there is very clever bracing which has a profound effect of bass control and depth. An internal chamber helps to create the desired response and by having that port low down at the bottom forward facing, it means energy transfer is better and there is less effect of surrounding walls than if it was rear ported. As you can see, there are two enclosures that are mechanically decoupled for optimal performance from the two drivers. They feel bloody solid too! But I guess that's good old fashioned German engineering! From a speaker this size, the 33kg per unit figure is not something to be laughed at, it's heavy for a reason, for the pursuit of sonic brilliance.

Each driver has a separate crossover which is cast to prevent microphonics. The high frequency crossover is placed in the tweeter enclosure and therefore completely separate and optimally isolated from vibrations from the woofer. The enclosure is insulated with form-stamped wool felt plates that form an acoustic labyrinth in the enclosure which results in optimal damping of the midrange with the least amount of damping material and practically un-dampened transfer of the bottom end energy to the aperture.

The Kontrast connectivity options are fairly standard, we have normal passive with bridges, passive bi-wiring and bi-amping, nothing ground breaking there. We are equipped with something else developed by Audioplan though, which comes as standard for the Kontrast, the sarcomin AntiSpike feet. The feet are used instead of spikes for the simple reason that they sound better like this. It's as simple as that! If spikes were a better option for their speakers then Audioplan would use them but in this case, the Antispikes give the best results. I will talk a little more about the feet later.

The Kontrast V is available in a selection of finishes with black or white structured enamel, black or white high-gloss as well as real wood veneers, Black Ash, Cherry, Beech, Maple and Apricot. There is also the option to get a driver protection front panel from Audioplan which follows the design of the unit but also hides the disconnection of the tweeter unit at the same time as offering a little protection.



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Specifications for the speaker give a off frequency range of -3 dB at 36 Hz and 28 kHz, based on 1 kHz with an efficiency of 88 dB. We have a rated load of 100 W but it sounds a lot more believe me! Maybe that's where the peak load comes in though which is specified at over 300 W, depending on the stability of the amplifier. These speakers are 8 Ohms so if matching with tube amps that is something to be aware of. The dimensions of this speaker are fairly typical for a floor standing loudspeaker 210 x 990 x 310 mm (WxHxD).

Build and Aesthetics

I can't lie to you, I think the design of this speaker is fairly unimaginative they are very boxy and I guess the best way to put it is that they are very



'functional' in their design. I think IF someone was torn between two speakers sonically I can't see the appearance of the Kontrast clinching the deal. Having said that, my dad thinks these speakers look great, maybe it's an age thing, I don't know, I will let you make your mind up! One thing I can



tell you is that pictures of the Kontrast in black look far more appealing, well to me anyway.

The build quality is fantastic, it's absolutely solid. I mean, they actually advise the best way to move them or lift them is to hold under the lip of the bass driver

and the other hand in the speaker terminal housing, so they are telling you to put 33kg on a 5mm lip of the bass driver. That's how solidly these things are made.

The 21mm walls contribute to the solidity too and the very rectangular design means it is stable too, there is one concern though, and that is with the separate tweeter housing. Its only held down with



some adhesive and I do wonder that if someone were to walk past it and knock it with their elbow or something that it might come off and damage the crossover or the cabling that runs into the housing itself. In all fairness though, they have done a great job of building these speakers, you would be hard pushed to find a more robust, durable floor stander around this price, even if the design isn't to your liking!

Sound

I will begin by talking a little bit about matching the Kontrasts with other equipment, specifically amplifiers. Now, we were advised that the Kontrasts perform best with low powered amps and tubes. While they can sound great with low powered and tubes, they can equally sound 'not their best', they can also sound great with high powered amps they and likewise can also sound bad. The Kontrasts don't seem to be fussy on the kind of amplification just that it is, in essence, very good amplification. It has to synergise too, which I will grant you is much harder to do with high powered amps, but it is possible. The NAD M22 (250wpc) proved to be lovely pairing, the best I heard them actually! This is something to be aware of if you are going to be using a powerful bruiser with these speakers. If you were to use them with a tube amp, as long as it's a good quality one, it will be easier to get good results.

The first time you plug these guys in it isn't immediately apparent what they are capable of. My first thought was that they were a bit soft for my liking, a little rolled off at the top too. Boy have I grown to love them though, they are so subtly brilliant that it's so easy to just start exploring your music library and forget you are supposed to be reviewing these speakers, well that's what happened to me anyhow! Seriously though, these are a musical, dynamic speaker with the ability to offer bags of information and musical enjoyment. They have an absolutely fantastic timbre giving a very natural interpretation of your music. They are transparent too; every component change was easily noticeable. This is a great characteristic to have and you seldom find the musical natural sound accompanied by transparency of this level.

Bass

Arguably the biggest surprise of these 2 way speakers is the bass reproduction. They extend so well that I sometimes wonder if there is a separate woofer in the cabinet! It's not just the extension though; there is such great texture and agility that quick rhythmical passages are handled wonderfully and genuinely get your toes tapping. The control is great in the bass nothing ever runs away from them, no bloom, no uncomfortable monotone characteristics; it's very, very natural.

They have an ability to hit hard too and when you couple this with great dynamism it means they are able to convey power and energy convincingly enough to satisfy most. Right at the top of the mid bass there is a quicker decay than on frequencies below it which has the knock on effect of leaving the mid band completely uncoloured giving vocals room to sing.

This kind of bass isn't for everyone; some will prefer shorter decay, less warmth and even quicker agility. Normally I am that person, with earphones and headphones I prefer a more analytical sound and that preference normally continues with speakers. For example, I find Kef's new reference range to be too bass heavy and I think the control and texture on the Kontrasts is far superior. There is just

something so engaging about this particular warmer, more musical speaker that I have such a soft spot for.



Mids

You know I mentioned the great timbre earlier? Well that absolutely shines on both male and female vocals with plenty of detail and texture being conveyed with such a sense of ease, no strain at all. Female voices never come across as harsh sounding like certain Focal speakers can occasionally. This and the lack of any sibilance or unwanted peaks means the Audioplans can be listened to for hours on end without becoming fatiguing. Tonally female voices are right where you want them with a little warmth and softness to feed the emotion but with subtle detail making the package super easy on the ear. It is noticeable how free female voices are too, they are allowed to open up and really 'sing' unlike the PSB Imagine T where everything feels too closed in and restricted. Male vocals follow the same characteristics with a touch of warmth and plenty of detail. Gravelly singers are portrayed with such conviction and an almost surreal level of realism, it's truly impressive speaker in this area!

Positioning of vocals, well positioning in general actually, is really good, very spacious and vocals are positioned right in the middle of the performance. Everything is absolutely distinguishable no doubt about it, but edges of instruments do overlap and it's not as airy as the likes of MBL or Focal. Some people will think this makes the sound more of a realistic performance while others will say it isn't as huge and airy as it could be. Honestly it's absolutely not a flaw, but people prefer different presentations and it's up to me to inform you.

Treble

It isn't sparkly or massively well extended either. If you are a bit of a 'treble head' this speaker won't be for you. It is a little softer in the top end which some people will enjoy while some will want a little more undoubtedly. What is very good though is treble detail and definition. For example, a ringing bell has absolute control and such definitive speed but without any harshness. That is a skill, believe me. I actually played a piece of music I listen to quite a lot at home while I was in the MBL listening room on their smaller 116F and on this particular track, I found the rendition of the bell and of the bass, more to my preference on the Audioplans. The 116F sounded a little glassy at the top and it didn't have the depth either.



Fundamentally the treble does fit in well with the rest of the signature, it keeps the musicality and really solidifies that these speakers know what they are, they are a musical, dynamic, natural sounding speaker, NOT an analytical bright one.

Tuning

I told you that Audioplan love their tweaks back at the start of this review, and this Kontrast has some itself. It is possible to tune the sonic performance of the loudspeakers by connecting the



loudspeaker cables to the speaker's terminals as follows:

- 'Mildly forward' sound: connect the loudspeaker cables to A & B 2.
- 'Full bodied' sound: connect the loudspeaker cables to C & D 3.
- 'Neutral' response: connect the loudspeaker cables to B & C

I was expecting a small difference between each option but it's actually quite a large change in the sound. Personally I cannot listen to the 'full bodied' option; it's too bassy for our tastes at Inerspace. The mildly forward sound is one that I really quite like; it brings the treble forward a little and gives the upper mids a little boost too. I have to say though, the neutral setting, whilst not exactly neutral in my mind, is my favourite of the three. I find it very engaging and very realistic on the most part. It's pretty cool that you have these options though!

Audioplan are even picky on how tight the screws and the carbon fibre composite Sicomin feet are. They advise to never tighten beyond a comfortable level; it should not be over tightened at all and the same goes for the feet, although it is advised that every couple of years just to give the screws on the bass driver a little tighten to optimise sound again. Obviously I have no way of telling you how the speaker will be different after a couple of years but I can say that when all the feet are very tight the sound is 'different', I'm not going to say better or worse, but it is definitely different.

The single best thing about this speaker has been left to last though. Something that is massively overlooked by audiophiles and brands alike I think. It is versatility. Any genre, any texture, speed, instrument, you name it, the Kontrast can do it. Obviously some genres are notoriously badly recorded in general and yes the Kontrast will show you that but it's not an inability of the Kontrasts and sometimes that is what you are hearing with other speakers (why do some brands stick to a small variety of genres while demoing at shows for example?). This gives you the ability to sit back, relax and just put your whole library on shuffle and enjoy your music on this high quality speaker.

Conclusion

The Kontrast V is such a loveable speaker and I've been lucky enough to have it for quite a while now. Do I want it to leave? Absolutely not, both technically and musically I have found it to exceed



my expectations, not just for a two way design, but as a speaker at this price. They offer great dynamics, detail, imaging and fantastic timbre among other things. Not only this, but they are built like tanks and have tuning options to perfect the sound for you.

Yes, they are a little soft right at the top and with a sound slightly on the warm side of neutral they aren't for everyone, but they are without doubt one of my favourite speakers to listen to at this price. Great work Audioplan!

Manufactured by: www.Audioplan.de

Available in the United Kingdom & Ireland form

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