

# Westminster

Noel Keywood visits Heatherdale to listen to one of the largest domestic loudspeakers available, Tannoy's magnificent Westminster Royal HE Dual Concentric...



**Heatherdale's Westminster Royal HE, with AudioNote Kegon valve mono-blocks nestling behind.**

One of the world's biggest bangers, intended for domestic use, is Tannoy's Westminster Royal HE. We're not talking broom cupboard here, so much as barn. This loudspeaker is improbably large, so much so that it causes hi-fi dealers to break out into a sweat. Not all of them though. One dealer - Heatherdale Audio - not only sells Tannoy's Prestige loudspeakers, they even have a Westminster Royal HE on demo. Although I have heard the Westminster at Tannoy's Glasgow

factory, that was some time ago. For this issue's look at big bangers I decided it would be interesting to try out The Highway Agency's latest bit of handiwork, six newly tarmaced

lanes of M25, and thereafter the A24 to sunny Hove, to reacquaint myself with Tannoy's finest.

The Westminster isn't in their shop, located on the outskirts of Worthing, Sussex, but in a special room built to spec. Yes, this monster needs a special home, unless you already own a castle that is. At nearly 1m wide and 1.4m high the Westminster would suit a banqueting hall perhaps, but little smaller. It weighs 130kgs and needs at least three men to lift it. That could be why most dealers would rather sell Matsui than a true Brit of outstanding pedigree; the Westminster doesn't just overwhelm competitors, it jostles them out like a cuckoo taking over their nest. The sheer immovability of this loudspeaker makes it difficult to be seen as anything less than in architectural terms - like a roof for example.

Whilst the Yorkminster is a fairly simple bass reflex design, the Westminster is an altogether more complex device, as the cutaway diagram shows. It uses a 15in Dual Concentric drive unit loaded by a compound horn. This means the driver is loaded by a horn at both front and rear. The front horn has a short flare and serves to direct upper bass/ lower midrange frequencies into the room. It's clearly visible in the pictures. By narrowing the dispersion it channels forward energy and in so doing improves efficiency. A horn directs sound at you and couples the drive unit into the room better.

At rear a huge folded horn provides low frequency loading. Its

"if Yorkminster reproduces music with the relaxed ease of a V8, then Westminster adds to it the extra power of a V12..".

# Live!

complex structure explains why the cabinet is so large and heavy, for this is a full size horn, not a truncated one. Inside the Westminster lies a labyrinth of passageways that couple the rear of the drive unit cone to the outside air via vents that lie behind those, tall slim Tygan panels, angled at 45 degrees, that sit at either side of the main baffle.

Horn loudspeakers are very efficient, the Westminster astonishingly so. It produces 99dB SPL from one watt - enough to blow you across the room. Dave at Heatherdale was driving the Tannoy's with an AudioNote Kegon, an ideal choice in my view. These loudspeakers, like the Yorkminsters, need a super smooth amplifier and will not suit much solid-state, except a few of the best. The Kegon was an impressive match.

Part of the stunning dynamic range of Westminsters comes from the seemingly dark silence from which huge events suddenly emerge; this is the inter-transient silence that's important in delineating notes and establishing a well defined sense of pace and rhythm. The Kegon was a delightful partner for the Westminster, because Tannoy's big Duals listen right into an amplifier - and the Kegon showed it could withstand such close inspection, establishing deep silences free from the subliminal mush and ringing so much solid-state suffers. AudioNote told me that Kegon uses special nickel-iron transformer laminations free from memory effects, and top quality components in order to achieve this, by the way. It is a parallel single-ended amplifier, meaning pure Class A, with twin 300Bs per monoblock to produce 18W per channel.

The Westminster offers an even stronger sense of dynamic than the Yorkminster due, I suspect, to that lower midrange front horn. This brought to vocalists an unusually strong sense of living embodiment, images being not only bolted into position on the sound stage, but also able to impose their vocal efforts on me in a way that was all but physical. Yorkminster offers extraordinary bass and great imaging, whilst Westminster fleshes out singers into live form with almost



**Internal view of the Westminster, showing its folded horn, which vents out of the front, at either side. This is one of the biggest bangers available today, yours for £15,000.**

implausible solidity. As a psycho-acoustic contrivance, it's supreme. And if Yorkminster reproduces music with the relaxed ease a V8 brings to motoring, then Westminster adds to it the extra power of a V12.

Tannoy claim Westminster reaches down to 18Hz (-6dB) and, knowing their serious approach to engineering, I believe them; my own measurements on Yorkminster correlated almost perfectly with theirs after all. This suggests a 30ft long room would be ideal, whereas Yorkminsters 24Hz limit suggests a 22ft room is optimal. I deliberately moved Yorkminster from a 28ft room to my 16ft lounge to subjectively assess the affect upon bass quality and it was fascinating. The speaker still went low, but it lost its sledgehammer punch. Heatherdale's room,

although acoustically treated to give great results, wasn't large enough to allow the Westminster to realise its full potential in terms of bass depth. You can see why demo'ing a loudspeaker like this is no easy task. It gave wonderfully tight bass all the same, with extraordinary control and definition, displaying a quality quite beyond everyday expectations.

Photographically, there's no angle that flatters Westminster. In real life it's much the same: this loudspeaker is a cumbersome looking monster. But listening to it partnered with an Audionote valve amplifier is to fall in love. Supremely relaxed, improbably dynamic and totally in control, this is a loudspeaker to rearrange your perceptions about what is possible. It's one of the very best of the big guns, and gets my vote for sure!

**TANNOY WESTMINSTER**  
**ROYAL HE** £15,000  
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