

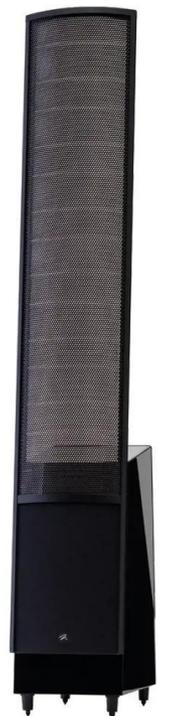
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Totem Acoustic Bison Tower floorstanding loudspeaker

Buzz Hughes

I have spent quite a bit of time with Totem Acoustic speakers. I have now reviewed the Sky Towers, and the Element Fire V.2, and to my delight was able to review Totem's flagship Metal V.2s last year. Each of these speakers was well worth their respective prices (and then some), and full disclosure, I gladly bought each one of the review pairs when given the opportunity. The common theme between the Totem speakers I have reviewed – which span from two-grand to almost twenty – is that Totem has a knack for making speakers that sound bigger and more holographic than I thought was possible at their respective price points. Totem has never needed a giant box to produce a giant sound. The new Bison Tower speaker I will describe in this review will test this generalisation.

Standing at a mere 85cm high, the Totem Acoustic Bison Tower is one of the smallest floorstanding speakers I have reviewed. It's diminutive even by Totem's standards and is at the lower end of the price range from this innovative speaker manufacturer.

Very Metal

Standing next to my Totem Metal V.2s the Bison Towers look a lot like the offspring of the Metals. The Bison are not entirely developed into the impressive stature and good looks of the full-grown flagship Metals but indeed bear a strong family resemblance. As someone who has seen quite a few of these Totems, it was readily apparent that the Bison Tower is going to provide you with many critical elements common to other stand-out Totem offerings.

Among these highlights, you will see a custom-engineered 33mm laser etched neodymium soft textile dome tweeter, and one custom-engineered 145mm copper dome-clad voice coil woofer (as opposed to two woofers on the Twin Tower models). The Bison Towers also sport a handmade first-order network with 2.5kHz crossover point, high-density CNC machined Delrin isolation feet intended to break up standing waves, and gold-plated four-way biwireable speaker terminals. I'm a bi-wire man; always have been always will be. For me, this capability always adds an extra bit of juice. Even if you prefer traditional speaker connections or don't give much thought to materials used in isolation feet, please do remember this one thought: for





The bass and the detail were there, the layered textures were separated and glowing, and the sound rocked. I mean, it 'rawked,' people!

» the price, you are getting custom-engineered drivers, not a 'plug-and-play' factory assembly as you would likely find in the competition at this price.

Aside from this solid hardware package, the real value I see in the Bison series is the artisanal speaker cabinets. I don't know how it would be reasonable to think you will do better than the Totem Bison series' attention to detail in this respect. At this price, show me another speaker with a fully-braced, lock-mitered monocoque cabinet that is four times as rigid as a typical V-groove assembly. Show me another speaker with this impeccable level of layered lacquered finish. Go on, I'll wait a moment for you to look around!

I can say definitively (because they are sitting here together in the flesh side by side) that the Totem Acoustic Bison Tower's finish looks every bit as good as what you are finding on the significantly more up-market Metals. There is no sense whatsoever when looking from the Metals to the Bisons that you are seeing a quality drop-off. The apple doesn't fall far from the tree, right?

So, if you are considering investing in the Bison Towers, then plan on owning and enjoying these speakers for a long time because [spoiler alert] you will be able to build an entire system around them as your kingpin component.

The conquest of space

Whether you have ample space to experiment with or need to make a tight assembly work close to a wall, these Totem Acoustic Bison Towers will look and sound great. My room is relatively large, and I got an excellent bass response when I gave the Bison Tower's room to breathe. However, anticipating that the Bison Towers are an excellent choice for those dealing with smaller listening environments, I am also vouching for their ability to sound open and appropriately balance close against a wall, I tried this set-up too.

In fact, this flexibility was one of the most impressive takeaways, every location change for the speakers seemed natural and accommodating. The Bisons seem to be an ideal choice for someone starting or

developing a system without a professional style listening area. I have reviewed and/or owned many different brands of speakers at this price point before and trust me, none of them could be as flexible in a variety of spaces as the Totem Bison.

I will return to the Metal Parent/Bison Child illustration one last time as I start talking about the sound of the Bison

Towers. I completely understand it is unfair to compare the two, as they live in different leagues regarding parts or performance, and that is just fine. What is so impressive about the Bisons, however, is it made me noodle this unjust comparison for a couple more minutes than was rightfully deserved. My Luxman Lx-380 integrated handles two sets of speakers so flipping back and forth for comparisons in real time is an absolute breeze.

The presence and the imaging of the Totem Acoustic Bison Towers more than held its own against the Metals. How were these comparatively small Bisons making such a large and holographic sound? I think the answer is Totem is experienced and knows where to spend the money in production. These custom drivers are fantastic examples of what an extra love and care can accomplish in an affordable speaker.

Shoegazy

The crisp songwriting and borderline shoegazy presentation for the *Love Language 2010 Libraries* [Merge Records] is an ideal record to win friends and influence people via your hi-fi rig, and please reference the 'Blue Angel' track when you throw it on. The Bison Towers did an absurdly excellent job laying out the space and depth of the ambient intros intended to lull you to sleep and then shock you to life when the song takes flight. The Bisons really had a knack for capturing these gripping dynamics. When the track hit its crescendo, I was utterly lost in the power of the Bisons to transport me and bury me under the waves of the music. The bass and the detail were there, the layered textures were separated and glowing, and the sound rocked. I mean, it 'rawked,' people!



EQUIPMENT REVIEW
Totem Acoustic Bison Tower



» Slowing the roll just a bit, I should mention I heard limits to what Bison Towers could do. Holographic deep soundstage and imaging were the most apparent strengths, but I could hear a bit of muddiness in the mid-range around specific instrumentation, too. The Elvin Jones Tone Poet edition of *Poly-Currents* [Blue Note] is coming to mind as an example. The extended chill out drum and percussion solo on the back half of the first track 'Agenda' is a soothing and hypnotic experience I like to reference because the recording is so clear and separated that it doesn't take much to hear the performance as in the room with you. The Bisons delivered on the space and black backgrounds provided by the Tone Poet LP mastering, but on some of these percussion polyrhythms, I found a slight bit of sonic mushiness around the congas and the drum strikes. However, this criticism comes from a spoiled man making his observations in real-time, flipping back and forth between the five times more expensive Metals, which have the flawless ability to organise high-energy transients, so consider this. I never had a problem with the Bison Towers' bass, either. You can expect to listen to these speakers happily and feel you will get the proper bottom end for your money. A subwoofer always helps, but if you were considering Bison Towers due to space concerns in your set up, you will be just fine without one. You can get an extra bit of 'oomph' to cover the absence of a subwoofer by getting these Bisons close to the wall without any fear of making your sound turn 'plodding.'

No time like the past

My biggest regret about the Totem Acoustic Bison Towers is that I don't have a time machine. I imagine the fun I would have while building my first system from scratch with these

in the mix. I worked long and hard to fork over a lot more money than the \$3,000 you will need to secure your pair of Bison Towers, and I didn't get anything close to the Bison Tower's sound quality. At 88db sensitivity, I found that these were powered to my liking with a lower-powered tube amp, so if tubes are your thing, fear not.

If I had the Totem Acoustic Bison Towers when starting my system journey, I would have improved so many other parts of my set-up before I felt like I had to come back and upgrade speakers. So, take heed: if you know you will be happy (or must be satisfied) with a modest system, be kind to yourself. Get these Bison Towers into your life and enjoy a performance threshold much more significant than you should reasonably be able to expect at this price point. +

Technical specifications

Type: ported two-way floorstanding loudspeaker
Drive Units: 33mm neodymium soft textile dome tweeter, 145mm copper dome-clad voice coil woofer
Frequency Response: 33Hz to 30kHz +/- 3dB
Impedance: 8 Ohms
Sensitivity: 88dB
Speaker Terminals: 4-Way Bi-Wire-able
Dimensions (WxHxD): 18x85x23cm
Weight: 14.5kg
Price: £3,295, \$3,000, €3,399

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