

## VANDERSTEEN AUDIO TREO CT FLOORSTANDING LOUDSPEAKER

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by [Mr Eric Neff \(/articles/?authors=99\)](#) | Jan 02, 2017

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Back in the early 1980's I had a chance to listen to a pair of Vandersteen Model 2's. What attracted me to them was great sound and a price tag that was actually reachable for a just-out-of-college person. My friends all had Altec Lansing models with huge woofers. Strap them to a Pioneer or Technics receiver with 150 watts per channel and you could threaten the neighbourhood. But I was more interested in better sound. The Model 2's with their time and phase correct posture brought the linearity and coherence I valued. They were not flashy, but when everyone had gone home I was thrilled with their performance.

Fast forward to a couple of years ago and I had been enjoying my current Vandersteen Model 2 CE Signature II's for a while when I walked into my favourite local dealer to find a pair of the Treo's hooked up to Audio Research gear. He had an LP on and as I sat to listen I was struck by the extraordinary top end. It was like someone had opened a skylight and extended the room upwards. Something I had not experienced as viscerally when I had listened to the Treo's previously. "What gives?" I asked? The dealer pointed to the new carbon tweeter, the same one found in the vaunted Model 5A Carbon's – a wonderful trickle down benefit of ten years of Vandersteen R&D that had first appeared on their flagship Model Seven's. So much for my Model 2s! Fortunately, by high end standards, the Treo CT's are not nearly the stretch financially though I did have to make some budget changes to get them home.

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Vandersteen Audio is a firm rooted in R&D and it has the patents to prove it. All aspects of their speakers are developed in house with extensive listening guiding the progress of their evolutionary and sometimes revolutionary design decisions. A decade ago Richard Vandersteen began the development of his Piston-Perfect carbon drivers that became one of the hall marks of his top of the line Model Seven speakers. The carbon tweeters in the Model 5A Carbon, Quatro Wood CT, and Treo CT are not the full version found in the Model Seven's, but are still using many of the advances offered by the Vandersteen developed Carbon technology as well as all being hand made in the factory in Hanford, California. Speaking with Richard Vandersteen, he explained the process for creating the carbon tweeters takes a full eight hours. The Treo CT speaker itself is basically a passive version of the nearly twice the price Quatro Wood CT's which feature an active subwoofer in a similar sized cabinet. The two speakers occupy the middle range of the Vandersteen Audio line.

One of the salient features of the Treo CT is its 'cabinet in a cabinet' construction. The inner cabinet is separated from the outer shell with a viscous membrane designed to dampen vibration and resonance to a significant degree. The resulting wave dampening trapezoid shape of the speaker creates a striking and attractive cabinet available in a variety of wood veneer choices. Located inside are the Carbon tweeter covering 5kHz to 30kHz, a 115mm midrange from 600Hz to 5kHz, a 165mm woofer at 35Hz to 600Hz, and a passive radiating 200mm woofer covering 35Hz to 55Hz. The enclosure is ported on the bottom and uses phase coherent, first order (6dB/octave) crossover slopes throughout. There are bi-wireable spade connections along the barrier strip. Three spikes act as feet with the rear spike being height adjustable via a supplied set of washers to provide the appropriate tilt to match the tweeter to the listening distance and ear level. The spikes also provide enough ground clearance for the downward firing woofer port.

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The last few years have seen many speakers being made from exotic inert materials that offer terrific anti-resonance properties at extraordinary pricing. Vandersteen's anti-resonance approach with the Treo CT reduces the expense of exotic materials to a large degree while still offering the vibration damping properties necessary for a sonically excellent speaker. In my experience I have heard no other speaker under £10,000 that can match them.

The Treo CT is actually a very honest iterative result of Vandersteen's near 40-year journey in speaker design. When you conduct a historical forensic review from the original Model Two's you find the time and phase correct speaker positioning, open baffle via an acoustically transparent speaker grille (which must remain on during listening, as it is a component in the speaker's sound signature), aerodynamically designed drivers, and highly inert cabinetry. Add to the mix the carbon tech and you have a speaker capable of musical splendour which approaches top of the line performance at a fraction of high end pricing.

Once I got the Treo CT's home I turned to the detailed set-up instructions in the Vandersteen owner's manual. Cabling was easy as I simply disconnected my AudioQuest Rocket 88 bi-wire spade ended cables from

the Model 2's and transferred them to the Treo CT's. The manual offers four pages of placement instructions depending on room size, dimensions and listening distance. It also describes how to determine the number of washers on the rear spike to correctly adjust the elevation angle so the tweeter is positioned optimally for best results. As with any quality speaker, spending some time to determine best placement makes a world of difference in achieving optimum sound quality.



I connected the Treo CT's to my PS Audio BHK 250 amplifier isolated with a trio of Stillpoints Ultra Six's and let them burn in for around 150 hours before settling in for some critical listening. Burn-in complete, I set up a copy of Roger Wagner Chorale 's Encore, a 1978 M&K Real Time direct-to-disc recording of a live performance of a Porgy and Bess medley album, onto my VPI Scout 1.1 with Dynavector 10X5 cartridge, the LP stabilised

with a Stillpoints LPI Long Spindle vibration dampening device, all via an ALO Audio Phono Stage. The sense of space captured by the Treo CT's was extraordinary in its dimensionality. The song 'Dry Bones' features a number of percussion instruments such as triangles and chimes that are played across the stage and at different heights. The clarity of the strike on the triangle was exquisite. Positioning was clear laterally and in terms front-to-back location on the stage. The ceiling seemed to expand upward as the carbon tweeters delivered each peel with no sense of veiling. The Chorale had power and style as the soundstage replicated the experience of the live performance. These were the speakers I had heard at my dealers. What a great start!

Keeping with the vinyl theme, I went to a favourite jazz recording also from 1978, and from M&K RealTime Records direct-to-disc collection: Earl Hines' Fatha. I love small jazz trios as my father was a professional piano player and I grew up listening to talented musicians in small groups. This recording brings me back to those early days. The first cut, 'Birdland', was Earl Hines' take on the Joe Zawinul and Weather Report classic. The intro on baritone filled the room. The snare drum rimshots had that correctly defined 'click'. The high hat shimmered up and away. The piano came in with the tone of a live performance. Earl' Hines' touch artistry on the keyboards is unique and exceptional. Audiophiles spend a lot of time discussing what is the goal of a great speaker. What is that elusive absolute sound? Is it the live performance? For me it is an accurate musical reproduction that emotionally replicates the thrill of that live performance. If I was "there" how would I feel? With this album and these speakers, I had that feeling. Truly wonderful and a sadly all too rare experience when played through many devices, even ones that cost a lot more than the Treo CT speakers.

My final vinyl session jumped forward a decade with Joe Jackson's 'Steppin' Out' from his 1982 album Night and Day. This 2016 disc was remastered by Intervention Records on 180-gram vinyl and it is a superb reissue. 'Steppin' Out' was released during my junior year of college and was everywhere around campus. This track really can put stress on low

quality tweeters as you have the piano and chimes harmonizing in the upper registers. This duality can quickly become harsh and strident unless the tweeters are up to the challenge of reproducing the pair properly. The carbon tweeters from the Treo CT's allowed each instrument to be heard in its individual nature while pairing them in beautiful combination. The incessant bass line was clear, providing the drive and momentum alongside the synthesizers. The song was as clear as it was catchy moving along at its brisk and upbeat pace.

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Switching to SACD I queued up Stevie Ray Vaughn's In Step [Sony Music Entertainment 1989/Mobile Fidelity Labs 2011] in my Denon DVD-5900. 'Riviera Paradise' is a true classic in textured guitar work. The nuanced finger work creates tone of exceptional purity. Bass guitar is strong into the mid 30Hz range. The Treo CTs created a highly three-dimensional sense of space with plenty of depth to suggest the size of the recording venue. The musical maturity of this performance is brought to life in vivid detail by the Treo CT's. As the final song on Stevie's last studio album 'Riviera Paradise' provides a summation of his abilities in a poignant and engaging way. Bravo to the Treo CTs for conveying this performance so completely.

For a final listen it was time for some digital audio. My PS Audio DirectStream DSD DAC was streaming from my NAS via the Bridge II Roon ready Ethernet connection. The DAC was playing through the PS Audio BHK Pre with AudioQuest MacKenzie interconnects, with the stack sitting on Stillpoints Ultra SS isolation pods. Time for a personal all-time favourite. Sting's Ten Summoner's Tales [Lossless CD rip at 16/44 AIFF, 1993 A&M Records] has been played countless times in the Neff man cave. 'Shape of My Heart' has an intimacy and sense of space and resonance that almost begs you to turn the lights down and close your eyes. The pluck of

the nylon strings on the acoustic guitar, the firm bass line, and Sting's soulful voice propel the introspective thoughts of the man considering the parallels of life and the metaphorical cards he is dealt. The Treo CT's provide the form and body for the sound staging of this exceedingly clear presentation. The firm pluck of the guitar strings has you sensing exactly when the fingers first touch and then move away from the strings. They convey this sensation in an almost holographic perspective. Depth and height become palpable to the listener. The clarity and musicality left me almost breathless. I could not wait to listen to another song.



Long time audiophiles generally agree that their speakers are the most personal component in their systems. Once you find the right pair it is usually the last thing that gets upgraded again if at all. The Model 2's filled that role for me for many years. However, in my home there is a new speaker in town. The Treo CT's ticked all the boxes and did so at an attainable price point. A sensible price and performance without compromise is the key, here, because once you have shown the new gear to your friends and they have gone home, we all want to be thrilled with what we are hearing when we listen by ourselves. The Treo CT's will do that for

you for many years to come.

## **TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS**

**Type:** Four way floorstanding loudspeaker with bass reflex enclosure

**Drive Units:** 25.4mm Carbon tweeter, 115mm Midrange curvilinear woven composite cone, 165mm Woofer curvilinear woven composite cone, 200mm acoustic coupler long fibre cone. Drivers all custom developed and manufactured by Vandersteen Audio

**Crossover Points:** 5kHz to 30kHz, 600Hz to 5kHz, 35Hz to 600Hz, 35Hz to 55Hz

**Frequency Response:**

32Hz to 29kHz +/- 3db

35Hz to 21Hz +/- 1.5db

**Sensitivity:** 86db with 2.83 volts of pink noise input at 1 meter on axis

**Nominal Impedance:** 7 ohms nominal. 4 ohms minimum.

**Suggested Amplifier Output:** 40-200 watts per channel into 8 ohms

**Finish:** Several options of wood choices. Cost may be higher for certain woods

**Dimensions (WxHxD):** 25x107x38cm

**Weight:** 27.2kg each

**Price per pair:** £9,000 per pair, exotic wood options extra

**Manufactured by:** Vandersteen Audio, Inc.

**URL:** [www.vandersteen.com](http://www.vandersteen.com)

**Distributed by:** Signature Systems

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