

# Acoustic Energy Corinium floorstanding loudspeaker

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**F**or audio manufacturers, few activities are as fraught with risk as designing a product to occupy a new price point, particularly one a good bit higher than where you have built your reputation. Your existing engineering must be present in the new product but augmented so that you are seen as competing against the established order. If you change the basics beyond recognition, however good the product might be, there will be little to no association with the existing models lower down. These hazards all apply to the Corinium floorstanding loudspeaker for Acoustic Energy.

Corinium is the Roman name for the town of Cirencester, which is close to 'home' for Acoustic Energy. Since its early days of designing and building sophisticated AE1s, the company has long been perceived as making smaller rather than bigger speakers. Thus, the decision to make the Corinium a floorstander looks slightly risky, but there is a nod to the company's past in how the Corinium is laid out, which is quite a clever one.

## Audentes fortuna iuvat

Or, as the Romans said, 'fortune favours the brave'. Unlike other floorstanders in the Acoustic Energy range, including the hitherto range-topping AE520, the Corinium doesn't space its drivers evenly down the front panel. At the top, the Teton 29mm soft dome tweeter and 120mm carbon fibre midrange are in close company with one another and handle everything from the claimed +/- 3dB roll-off of 25kHz down to 260Hz. They operate as a two-way stand-mount in the vein of the classic AE1 in terms of their relative position and their crossover point at a relatively traditional 3.4kHz.

The two 140mm bass drivers at the foot of the cabinet are designed to act in the same manner as augmenting a small stand-mount with a subwoofer (although, thanks to the bass drivers being on axis with the smaller ones and working in stereo, the crossover can be high enough to risk a slight directionality to it). In addition to separating them visually, the gap also improves the mechanical aspect of this relationship. While it might look like a relatively big speaker, the Corinium is, in some ways at least, intended to behave like an augmented little one.





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» To fulfil this premise, Corinium uses several new engineering concepts. Initial prototypes used the same carbon fibre tweeter as the 500 Series, but the decision was made early on to push for something lighter. The exact nature of what this lighter material might be is not something that Acoustic Energy wants to broadcast, but it's a soft dome slightly larger than the carbon unit at 29mm across. It has a prominent surround and sits inside a shallow waveguide. The 120mm midrange is carbon fibre like the 500 Series but has been reworked to optimise it for the role. The 140mm bass drivers, while still relatively compact for something described as such, are the largest drivers that Acoustic Energy has ever employed.

### **Alea iacta est**

Acoustic Energy's 'the die is cast' moment that sets the Corinium apart from regular loudspeakers is in the crossover network. The crossover that manages the relationship between drivers is bespoke and benefits from componentry that simply isn't commercially viable at the 500 Series price point. This factors heavily in the sensitivity and impedance measurements of the Corinium. In sensitivity terms, the 92dB/w claimed figure is usefully high but is matched with an impedance firmly pegged around the four-ohm mark. What this means, in reality, is that the speaker isn't hard to drive; the 100-watt output of Ayre EX-8 that is also reviewed in this issue was entirely sufficient, but it does benefit from good current delivery (at which the Ayre excels). Unless you own something valve-based, it is unlikely that the Corinium will be beyond most commensurately priced amps, but it isn't as easy to drive as you might assume. Connection to an amp is made via a single set of speaker terminals.



The cabinet that contains all of this is relatively unusual by the standards of Acoustic Energy because it features a curved edge that helps with standing wave issues and looks rather smarter than more terrestrially priced models. This is partnered with a metal front baffle of 6mm thick aluminium. The cabinet is made from varying thicknesses of Resonance Suppression Composite depending on where it is used. Another departure is that the whole cabinet leans back at four degrees to help with time alignment, although this can be adjusted slightly by levelling the spikes.

On the rear spine are two ports, one venting the upper chamber and a larger, rectangular one helping the lower drivers. These ports have very little effect on the Corinium's usefully high tolerance of boundaries. Under test, they were roughly fifty centimetres out from the rear wall. Still, they could have gone closer if needed, and their overall behaviour has been entirely benign, with only a little attention to their toe-in to ensure they performed at their best.

Aesthetically, the Corinium is, to this set of eyes anyway, a good-looking thing. You can reasonably argue that save for pointed dust caps on the drivers, there isn't a considerable amount that ties it to Acoustic Energy designs of old, but the proportions and overall design are an attractive balance. Four finishes are available: a 'Tectona' wood, black and white sheen for £6,000 and the green of the review samples commanding an extra grand.

Described as British Racing Green, this colour scheme has grown on me considerably in the time they have been here, partly because it isn't British Racing Green, which, heritage aside, is not a terribly prepossessing colour. This one is from the Bentley paint swatch. It lends the Corinium a sense of identity »



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» that is further helped by the fit and finish, even on these very well-travelled samples. It feels entirely in keeping with a speaker at the price and arguably of a higher standard than a few key rivals.

### Sic infinit

'And so it begins'... the listening, that is! Mat Spandl, Director and head of acoustics for Acoustic Energy, showed up with the demo pair. Upon unboxing and placing them, his requested 'sighting' track was Taylor Swift's 'Exile' from her *Folklore* album [Republic Records]. With no disrespect to Miss Swift, I think this is a fine album, and I own a vinyl copy myself; but she's not necessarily the artist I associate with Acoustic Energy of old. The company also makes no secret that various rival designs were benchmarked against the prototypes and, while some of these were expected, some are a long way from what I associate with the company.

Credit where credit is due though, the Corinium does a tremendous job with this simple but heartfelt track. Bon Iver's distinctive vocal turn has the weight and sheer presence it needs to dominate the opening section, and he's underpinned by a piano with a persuasive amount of heft to it, as well as notes that decay beautifully away to nothing. When Swift begins singing, she's no less believable, anchored between the two speakers: it's delicate yet convincingly human-sized. The Corinium's extensive comparative testing has imbued it with skills that weren't necessarily in the repertoire of its ancestors.

Neither is this an aberrant one-off. Across a wide selection of musical material that requires delicacy, sweetness, and finesse, the Corinium has shown itself to possess all of them in abundance. Above all these things, there is emotional engagement that is consistently impressive. The astonishing 'In the Morning (Grandmother Song)' by Eliza Shaddad on *The Woman You Want* [Rosemundy Records] is delivered with every ounce of its sadness and anguish intact. Without ever suggesting it's anything other than a fundamentally accurate performer, the Corinium can ensure that what you listen to is a performance rather than a rendition, driven by the superb performance and integration of those upper two drivers.

Up the scale, and the Acoustic Energy loudspeakers do an excellent job of delivering the extra space and weight that comes with it. Give the Corinium the live performance of 'Hammers' on Nils Frahm's *Spaces* [Erased Tapes], and the result is profoundly and lastingly





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» impressive. Here, some of the virtues that I have come to associate with the Acoustic Energy brand begin to make themselves felt. How it ensures that every rapid note is defined, delivered, and perceived as such rather than a more slurred general flavour of piano and hints that the speed and articulation that the Corinium's ancestors that so endeared them to so many of us has not been forgotten in the bid to add new skills. It then defines the space Frahm performs in with accuracy and conviction.

### Quam bene non quantum

Something else that begins to manifest itself as these larger scale pieces unfurl is that the low end of the Corinium is going to be the element that is most likely to divide opinion. For me, a man who owns a pair of original AE1s that he's likely to be interred with, the Acoustic Energy has enough bass; indeed, it would be somewhat churlish to describe a speaker that bettered its  $\pm 3\text{dB}$  low frequency roll off of 38Hz in this room as being 'bass light.' Nevertheless, the Corinium is relatively lean in how it operates. The substantial low note that begins Dead Can Dance's Song of the Stars [4AD] is deep and beautifully defined, but it lacks the almost stygian depth that some similarly sized speakers at this price can attain with the same material. However, regarding a stentorian bottom end, I feel 'how well, not how much' reigns supreme in the Corinium's bass performance.

There is a trade-off to this that is worth the price of admission. For all the tonal richness that the Corinium possesses, when you want it to go ballistic, every metallic green inch of it is an Acoustic Energy. Give it the heavyweight electronic workout that is *Hybrid's Morning Sci-Fi* [Distinctive Records], and that bass response you queried earlier is suddenly perfectly judged. All too often, the speed and dexterity of this album are lost as the loudspeakers trip over the layered high-tempo basslines. The Corinium dances through them with dexterity and sheer urgency that has you ping an apologetic WhatsApp message to your long-suffering neighbour and nudge the volume up a little more. Pending them not demanding you receive an ASBO, the Acoustic Energy loudspeakers can take a lot of nudging, too, staying usefully uncompressed even when you lean on them.

Across the less couth side of my music collection (which, if I'm being in any way honest, is rather more than half of it), the way that the big Acoustic Energy has gone about its business has emphatically proved that

it still knows the old ways of doing things. Emotional engagement comes in a few flavours, and while sometimes it is conveyed in the sadness and reflection of a piece, sometimes it's every bit as present in something like the raucous *Youth and Young Manhood* by the Kings of Leon [Handmedown] where four young men are not going to let their big break get away from them and their determination leaks from every note. The Corinium is detailed, tonally correct and impressively forgiving. It's also about as much fun as you can have with your clothes on.

### Ad meliora

And then, when it's time to stop being a headbanger, this new face of Acoustic Energy is all primed and ready to revisit its Taylor Swift sighting track and be all the things it demonstrated there. This speaker does things I haven't always associated with Acoustic Energy, and it does it well enough to ensure that it earns its admission to the price point it contests without a shadow of a doubt. The most impressive part of all, though, is that it has done that without forgetting where it has come from, and I hope the Acoustic Energy Corinium points out the way of things to come for the company at all the levels it contests. As the Romans say, the Corinium points 'towards better things.' +

### Technical specifications

**Type:** three-way reflex-loaded floorstanding loudspeaker with curved RSC cabinet and aluminium baffle  
**Mid-Range Driver:** 29mm Teteron soft dome tweeter, 120mm Carbon Fibre cone midrange, 2 x Frequency Range: 32Hz-30kHz (-6dB), 38Hz-25kHz (-3dB)  
**Sensitivity:** 92dB/m/2.83v  
**Power Handling:** 200W  
**Crossover Frequencies:** 260Hz, 3.4kHz  
**Impedance:** 4Ω  
**Connections:** 4mm Single wired banana sockets / 9mm spade connections  
**Finish:** Matte Black, White, Tectona, British Racing Green  
**Dimensions (HxWxD, inc. spikes):** 110 x 23.5 x 38.5cm  
**Weight:** 40kg (per speaker)  
**Price:** £6,000/\$7,499 per pair, (British Racing Green finish, £7,000/\$8,499 per pair)

**Manufacturer** Acoustic Energy

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