



**The Tannoy Revolution DC4s are small and perfectly formed bookshelf speakers. Paul Rigby puts a pair to the test...**

# Size Matters

**W**hen editor DP announced that my new mission in life was to review the Tannoy Revolution DC4 loudspeakers, I looked around and pondered the lack of space in my house, reflected on the vast amounts of kit already present, and wondered where the box might go when the couriers delivered them. But when the lorry turned up and a wee little package was handed over, I realised just how dinky these mini-monitors really are. They're so small that when I placed them upon my speaker stands, the little Tannoys were hardly able to span the four decoupling supports on the top!

Ranging over a restricted 270x152x162mm and weighing just 3.7kg, my first thoughts were to wave a tearful hanky at the retreating bass. I couldn't see much air being moved by these cuties. Driver-wise,

the speaker looks very simple indeed, until you look a little closer then you realise that Tannoy has utilised a Dual Concentric design. In fact, a compact, wide bandwidth version of the more recognisable units that you may have seen Noel waxing lyrical about a few issues back. Part of the driver mix is a paper cone, a titanium domed tweeter with a Tulip waveguide backed by a neodymium magnet accompanied by a simplified internal construction. The rear of the chassis provides enough terminals for bi-amping, if required.

Rather than being honed to perfection in some remote Caledonian anechoic chamber, the trapezoidal chassis looks like designer Dr Paul Mills arrived at the shape while whittling a piece of wood on a porch during a balmy summer in Alabama, in the company of a bunch of 'good ol' boys', while slurping hooch and chewing straw!

It looks positively anorexic, but then interestingly with loudspeakers, less can often be more. Smaller cabinets mean less wood to resonate, and less air inside to chuff around, messing up timing.

Why do the Revolution DC4 at all? Well, partly because he *could*. Mills' self-imposed challenge was to get a dual concentric design into as small a space as possible and, with speaker materials evolving and improving all the time, Mills decided to do just that.

The second reason? Using the dual concentric design meant that only one driver had to be fitted which allowed the speaker to shrink further. Tannoy is looking seriously at this 'small' market. According to its own research, newbuild houses are shrinking. Apparently, each year they reduce in size by nine square foot! Who can live in a matchbox with a pair of B&W 802Ds? Soon, people

will live in a pair B&W 802Ds!

So Tannoy sees the tiny speaker market as growing [yes, very good, Paul! Ed.]. Of course, those of us living in flats or bedsits will also be ideal potential customers too. Mills also wanted to juggle with materials and technology and to provide more value for money, which is why the DC4s have basically the same guts as a pair of Tannoy Autograph Minis, retailing at around £1,500, with a cheaper chassis.

Setting up the DC4s is a bit of a trial. The stereo image wavers around a bit so you will find yourself moving the speakers an inch to the left here, back a bit there. The best bass balance is not right up against the wall, somewhat surprisingly, but a little way from it - half a metre? I would recommend that you point the tweeters directly at your head too. Listening tests were undertaken with grilles removed.

## SOUND QUALITY

I began by spinning vinyl and Kate Bush's 'Bertie' from the 'Aerial' (EMI) album. Surprisingly, I found the playback lacking in engagement. Not surprisingly, bass was largely absent but did resemble a hollow sculpture. That is, the bass was shaped and framed but without any low frequency substance while the vocals, normally rich and warm on wax, sounded rather cold and icy which removed much of the emotion of the performance. General midrange performance was excellent, though, with real organic clarity impressing over all instruments.

Moving to the jazz-infused krautrock of Embryo and various excerpts from the album 'Opal' (Wah Wah), there was less time for the music to become introspective because the presentation was more uptempo. I found myself carried away by the musicality and energy of the Tannoys. This music didn't dwell on the cool nature of the DC4s, I was able to enjoy the crisp projection of the guitar solos and the sax bursts.

What was going on? It's partly a problem of perception - at least from myself. I expected more warmth and depth from vinyl playback. Not getting it, I felt robbed. Perhaps the DC4s were getting a little overwhelmed by my bass-heavy, valve phono stage enriched turntable, and just ran out of puff?

Moving to more balanced CD sources was a pleasurable experience; the Tannoys simply adored the little silver disc. Suddenly the DC4s felt thoroughly at ease; this was synchronicity! Listening via the Icon CD player, I found myself relaxing

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for the first time and genuinely enjoying the listening experience. Okay, bass was still absent without leave, but even here there was fun to be had. Imagine sitting at a dinner, after a good meal and lots of wine and up stands an after-dinner speaker who tells you the most splendid stories about Groucho Marx. Now, of course, you'd rather have Groucho there, in front of you, giving you the stories first hand but the second-hand stories make you laugh, you have a really good time nevertheless. That's what bass is like via digital sources through the DC4s. It describes what bass *should* be like without actually giving it to you...

I've saved the best till, last, though. Playing Carol Kidd's 'It's Alright With Me' from 'Dreamsville' (Linn), the DC4s underwent an immediate transformation because, oddly, the authority of this speaker lies in the midrange. The mids are almost visceral. Power, beautifully sculptured - but from ice - emanates from the midrange. It's so clean, so crafted and precise that an acoustic

guitar solo is almost shocking in its presentation. Each string is plucked with an almost devastating clarity. Each plucked string is delivered like a punch that, even when it's over, your ears dwell upon what you have heard. For that reason, you need to take care on system matching. A forward front-end will produce brightness from the DC4s, stabbing your ears with midrange icicles!

Attach a warming CD player, like the Icon, and you have an almost clinically transparent transducer but without a single element of harshness that you might normally associate with that epithet. Spinning a reissue of Phil Manzanera's debut solo work, 'Diamond Head' (Expression), the word that springs to mind is 'fresh'. Mids and treble had bags of space to

roam while the music fizzed with energy.

## CONCLUSION

The Tannoy DC4s are a bit of a Curate's Egg. Bass had to be drawn on a page and described to my ears, yet still when the DC4s became involved with the music the recording became captivating. I was surprised by these speakers' apparent dislike of vinyl - or certainly my particular vinyl front end. It felt like the turntable was throwing too much bass into the speakers, which they then struggled with, and muddled the upper frequencies.

In my system, the Tannoys certainly gave of their best in the digital domain. Exhibiting super instrumental separation, they revelled in the sheer joy of the CD-based music. The musicality of the entire presentation just picked me up and carried me away. The exuberance of the midrange frequencies couldn't fail to put a smile all over my face. So do carefully audition these loudspeakers; they have a distinct and unmissable character of their very own.

## VERDICT

Striking midrange performance makes these brilliant in small spaces, but lack of bass is not for all.

## TANNOY REVOLUTION

DC4 £349.90

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## FOR

- spacious midband
- detail resolution
- diminutive size

## AGAINST

- light low bass
- transistor amps only!
- tricky set-up

## MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Unlike most Tannoys the DC4 has raised output from its concentric horn tweeter, giving a lift in frequency response of +4dB above 5kHz, a property that will be clearly audible as prominent or 'bright' treble. A small amount of droop in the crossover region around 2.5kHz will soften the upper midband a trifle, ensuring there's no bite there, and below this frequency output is reasonably even all the way down to bass frequencies. Forward output from the bass unit reached no lower than 100Hz, a high value, but the port is tuned to 85Hz and will provide some bouncy sounding upper bass, down to 70Hz but no lower. So this little loudspeaker does not have deep bass.

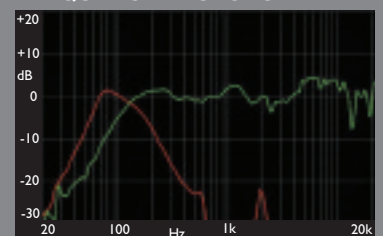
For such a small loudspeaker sensitivity was fair, measuring 86dB Sound Pressure Level from one nominal watt of input (2.8V). With a highish measured overall impedance of 7.1 Ohms amplifiers of 50 Watts or more will be needed to go loud. Our graph of impedance shows the DC4 is very reactive and will induce a broader difference in sound quality from amplifiers than flatter impedance loudspeakers. It isn't ideal for valve amps as such large impedance changes produce small frequency response undulations.

The 200mS decay spectrum was

very clean, except for a bass overhang at 70Hz and some small output at 180Hz. Otherwise, the DC4 looks remarkably uncoloured.

The Revolution DC4 will have light bass and accentuated treble; wall positioning will help lift bass. Colouration was very low and sensitivity fair, so it should sound clean and well balanced tonally. NK

## FREQUENCY RESPONSE



Green - driver output  
Red - port output

## IMPEDANCE

