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SONOROUS III

REVIEW / FINAL AUDIO DESIGN / SONOROUS III CLOSED BACK HEADPHONES

Final Audio Design

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\$549.00 RRP



“quirky, distinctive, shiny,
... yet elegant casings”

Final Audio Design is a Japanese company, founded in 2007. They were originally tasked with developing and manufacturing speakers used in flat-screen TVs for other Japanese home appliance manufacturers. Using the knowledge and research gained from this, they started producing headphones in 2009.

Their forte lies in creating bespoke products that have a distinct look and house sound. A lot of emphasis is placed on the stylish and creative look of their pieces, and the unique characteristics of the design.

The Final Audio Design fan base could be viewed like a dedicated Head-Fi cult, often dropping heavy amounts of money on the higher-end products offered by Final Audio Design, and with good reason.

Most of the Final Audio Design product line-up are In-ear Monitors (IEM), in quirky, distinctive, shiny, yet elegant casings. The range includes both multiple balanced armature as well as single dynamic driver configurations. They also have the over-ear SONOROUS line, which currently has six different models in their arsenal.

This SONOROUS line has several offerings with varying driver configurations – including VI and IV models, which uses a dual driver design (one balanced armature in conjunction with a single dynamic), rarely seen in over-ear headphones.

Today we are looking at the Sonorous III, which is a closed-back 50mm single dynamic driver headphone.

Build

True to its branding, the Sonorous III continues the tradition of unique, sleek design. Instead of traditional yolks, the cups are held in place by brushed stainless steel flat rods. The earcups slide up and down the rod for adjustment.

The earcups have an incredibly smooth rotating feature: a partially concealed and well lubricated semi-sphere holds the cup in place, and will rotate in a limited circle for adjustment. The idea is bold, but well executed. Minor adjustments are done with liquid-like fluidity, and in silence.

The entire headphone weighs 410 grams – which isn't ground-breaking, but is acceptable for a closed-back design (for reference, the Fostex TH900 weighs 400 grams, and the Sennheiser HD630VB weighs 400 grams).

The cups are made of a high-quality ABS plastic, and have a speckled matte-black finish, featuring a synthetic leather headband with minimal padding.

The connector is thin enough to fit into your smartphone, even when it is inside a case.

Packaging and materials

The Sonorous III comes in a very unassuming box, including:

- An unbalanced cable (double sided, detachable)
- A full-size to 3.5mm adapter (non threaded)

Notably absent here, is any sort of carry case or bag. Not a huge deal breaker however, as these were not really intended for travel/transport use in my opinion.



Fit and comfort

The distance between the pads and inner foam leaves a little to be desired. Despite the generously sized housing, the pads don't feel as large as they could. They touch both the outside of our ears, while also pressing against them slightly.

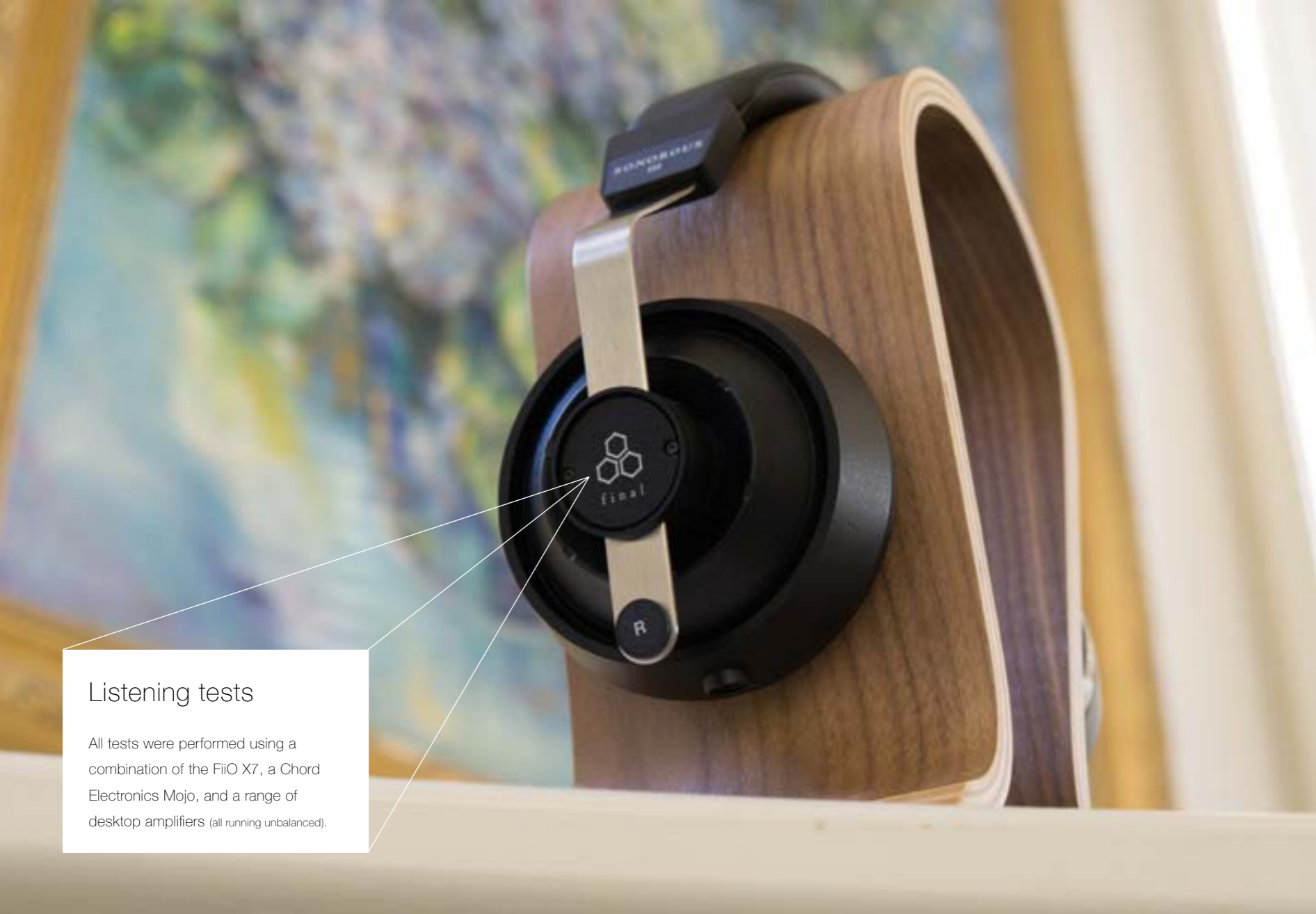
Over time, this combined with the weight suggests the possibility of a slightly uncomfortable experience, and didn't leave much room for our ears to breathe.

The clamp isn't too tight (thankfully), which allows a little forgiveness for the shallow pads.

Inside

We were excited to learn that the 50mm driver technology of the higher priced Sonorous X made its way to the Sonorous III. They were incredibly easy to be driven while pushed with our range of test devices, including a run-of-the-mill smartphone. No heavy amplification is required here.

Users should be careful when selecting a source device with these headphones however, as the 16ohm impedance is dangerously low when considering the damping factor of the drivers. To obtain the sound signature that the manufacturer intended, select a device that has a measurably low output impedance.



Listening tests

All tests were performed using a combination of the FiiO X7, a Chord Electronics Mojo, and a range of desktop amplifiers (all running unbalanced).

Bass

A closed-back 50mm headphone had us strapping in our seatbelts for a wild ride on a rollercoaster of bass. However, to our surprise, none of the buckling was required. The bass on these is lean and light. Kick drums and deep bass lines remain very tight, perhaps even a little on the soft side. Even with a range of low output impedance amplification sources, the story was much the same.

They aren't as light on the bass as say, a pair of Grado cans. But, it's been awhile since we have heard closed-back devices this lean. Midbass has more audible presence than the sub frequencies do, which by comparison seems a little rolled-off.

Whilst taking a backseat, the bass that is present is solid and warm. Bass is kept realistic and in-check. It's controlled, tight, and allows for the rest of the frequency spectrum to shine through without stealing the show. Impact will be present when called for, but won't be overpowering.

The mids are the real star of the show here though. They are well and truly forward in the mix. Vocals shine through in well produced recordings with ease. Imaging and soundstage are fairly good for a closed can, especially for one in this price bracket – but don't expect these to rival any of your mid-heavy open-back headphones.

The realism, detail and natural tonality obtained from excellent recordings will definitely treat the listener to a smooth signature.

The highs are just strong enough to offer a little bite, but not enough to cause nasty ringing or sibilance. They provide just enough peak to give that extra amount of detail to vocal recordings, but don't offer quite the amount of extension that one would expect from a mid-focused headphone in this price bracket.

Even at louder volumes, the headphones warm presentation and lack of sibilance won't rip listener's ears off – but we do recommend listening at moderate volume, regardless.

Specifications

/ Housing: ABS
/ Driver Unit: Dynamic Driver
/ SPL: 105dB
/ Impedance: 16 ohm
/ Cable Length: 4 ft (1.5 meters)

Isolation and sound leak

These headphones form a moderate seal, and will do equally well at blocking outside noise. While they're certainly not the masters of passive noise cancelling, they will only leak when pushed to louder volumes,

If you're using these in an office environment, they will be acceptable. But, as they don't fold or have a pouch, they might be a tricky companion for travel or public transport.

Conclusion

A well-priced mid-fi offering for those looking for a unique pair of easy to drive headphones. They present a mid-heavy sound signature with no offensive treble spikes.

They're not ideal for use out and about, but if that's not one of your requirements then for those of you who are keen to discover the Final Audio Design brand, the Sonorous III is a great place to start.

