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JBL Arena 170 review

The Arenas are talented floorstanders, but are they good enough to trouble the class-leaders?

Tested at **£400**

Our Rating ★★★★☆ **User Rating** (0) 0%
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Our Verdict



Not all-rounders, but their myriad of talents are clear

For

- Lithe and lively
- Clear, crisp and clean
- Suit small, inflexible rooms
- Well-finished

Against

- Lack bass punch and solidity
- Tough competition

JUMP TO

Reviewed on **1st May 2015**

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The smallest floorstander in JBL's entry-level series, the Arena 170 loudspeakers are our first taste of the range and, at just £400, they are excellent value.

Until recently, JBL's most affordable floorstanders populated midrange territory in the [Studio \(http://www.whathifi.com/jbl/studio-580/review\)](http://www.whathifi.com/jbl/studio-580/review) or ES Series. Not any more.

Having introduced [its new budget speaker range Arena \(http://www.whathifi.com/news/ces-2015-jbl-unveils-new-arena-series-budget-loudspeakers\)](http://www.whathifi.com/news/ces-2015-jbl-unveils-new-arena-series-budget-loudspeakers) – made up of two floorstander models, two pairs of standmounters, a centre speaker and a subwoofer – JBL now has a complete 5.1 speaker package available for less than £1000.

Positioning



If you're after floorstanders for a small to medium-sized room, these should be high on your wish list: they're compact, perform best close to a wall (they're rear-ported) and won't overpower a small space.

Those with larger rooms certainly shouldn't be put off, but the JBLs simply won't generate the same powerful, room-shaking sound of the [Wharfedale Diamond 230](http://www.whathifi.com/wharfedale/diamond-230/review) (<http://www.whathifi.com/wharfedale/diamond-230/review>) for example.

Performance



Fast, agile and precise, these JBLs are lots of fun

That lack of great room-shaking ability is partly down to the JBL Arena 170s' bass performance: what's there is fairly detailed and agile, but the fact it lacks power and punch makes the presentation feel just a little lacking in heft. Big crescendos aren't as imposing or as impressive as they should be.

Yet we find ourselves taken with the Arena 170s' sound. Equal parts crisp and clean, supple and lively, the JBLs breeze through our diverse playlist (from Van Morrison's bluesy rock to Eminem's edgy raps) with decent precision and timing.

There's a sense of fun and immediacy to the galloping rhythms in The Smith's [Frankly, Mr. Shankly](https://open.spotify.com/track/1qlagqll7ZcgmILTrtSvKc) (<https://open.spotify.com/track/1qlagqll7ZcgmILTrtSvKc>) the delivery fast and forward, but not in-your-face. Morrissey's vocals are clear and candid thanks to a convincing midrange. Up top, treble could do with more refinement – the song's ever-present cymbals are perhaps a little too cutting and intense.

Despite not being big and bold, the soundstage is relatively spacious, and never overcrowded when the chorus's dense synthesized strings come into play.

You'll get the best results (and more solidity) by positioning them close to a back wall and screwing the supplied spikes

into the rubber feet. System matching is key – an agile, rhythmically adept amp such as the [Marantz PM6005](http://www.whathifi.com/marantz/pm6005/review) (£300) will make the perfect ally. We'd avoid overly lean or bright-sounding kit.

More after the break

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Design and features



We rather like the JBL Arena 170s' quirky, contemporary design, where only the side panels are dressed in a wood veneer. The baffle and interestingly sloped top panel are finished in a grainy-effect plastic instead; it's possibly a cost-cutting measure, but looks smart enough.

With the top-half grille attached, the façade is clean and unspoiled. Remove it and the drivers look a little as if they've been targets at a shooting range, the smattering of screws around them anything but discreet.

Exposing it allows you to see the 25mm soft-dome tweeter's unusual waveguide design, which borrows from the company's high-ranging 'professional' models.

According to JBL, this is for wider dispersion and more detail in the higher frequencies (though the latter is questionable). Below it is a more typical 18cm fibre composite driver.

Verdict

The JBL Arena 170 floorstanders might not quite have what it takes to trouble the more versatile sub-£500 class leaders, but they are fun, entertaining speakers.

And if these are anything to go by, we can't wait to see what the rest of the range has to offer on hi-fi and home cinema turf. Watch this space!

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JBL Arena 170 specifications

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General Information

Manufacturer Website Address	http://www.harman.com (http://www.harman.com)
Brand Name	JBL
Product Type	Speaker
Manufacturer	Harman International Industries, Inc
Product Line	Arena
Manufacturer Part Number	ARENA170BK
Packaged Quantity	1
Product Name	JBL Arena 170
Product Model	170

Miscellaneous

Package Contents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Floorstanding Loudspeaker 1 x Owner's Manual 4 x Carpet Spikes
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Technical Information

Minimum Frequency Response	44 Hz
Crossover Type	2-way
Sensitivity	87 dB
RMS Output Power	20 W
Impedance	8 Ohm
Maximum Frequency Response	40 kHz
Driver Type	177.80 mm Polycellulose Woofer, 25.40 mm Soft Dome Tweeter

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Form Factor	Floor Standing
Width	217 mm
Depth	283 mm
Weight Approximate	12.50 kg
Height	959 mm
Colour	Black
Woofer Diameter	177.80 mm
Dimensions	959 mm (H): 217 mm (W): 283 mm (D)

What Hi-Fi? additional specs

Sensitivity (dB)	87
Impedence (ohms)	8
Max power handling (W)	200
Biwireable	No
Finishes	2
Dimensions (cm)	98 [H] x 24 [W] x 34 [D]

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