

FINK TEAM KIM

FinkTeam KIM is the German company's smallest loudspeaker. It is a two-way standmount loudspeaker with its own stand and sports an AMT tweeter. Stuart take a listen and Linette Smith gives her verdict too.



Stuart Smith

I reviewed the FinkTeam BORG loudspeakers (£22 000) around this time last year and I absolutely loved them and awarded them our highest accolade. When the opportunity to have the little KIMs around to play I really couldn't resist.

KIM is the third loudspeaker in the German company's output and is, according to their website, a response to dealers and distributors looking for a less expensive model for their clientele.

Whilst BORG is undoubtedly a statement product that says "this is what we can achieve!", KIM is a little different but still feels like something of a statement of what can be achieved at a price. Like BORG, KIM is still a two-way design, still uses a paper coned woofer with an oversized magnet, and still uses an AMT tweeter based

on a Mundorf-designed model. Like the BORG, KIM's body and cabinet have been designed to avoid colouration.

A CUT DOWN BORG?

To me, KIM looks like a BORG that has been cut down to size so as to be easily accommodated in modern living spaces. And whilst KIM is pretty chunky, it is very unobtrusive and looks rather elegant on its built-on and open-framed stand. In fact, I'd possibly go as far as to say I think that KIM is one of the best-looking loudspeakers ever to have graced our listening space. The design shouldn't look good – it's short, wide and squat - but I think it's a loudspeaker of real charm from a looks perspective.

For those interested in the numbers, KIM stands 854mm tall (actually a smidge more when the included spikes

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are taken into the equation), is 300mm wide (around the same as a record), and 310mm deep, though adding the stand takes this depth to 412mm as it's angled ever so slightly upwards.

Construction-wise the cabinet is made up of double-layer sandwich panels with bracing and is pretty heavily damped. Tapping the cabinet results in nothing but a dull thud. The weight of each KIM is a chonky 25.1Kg. A number of real wood finishes are available and fit and finish are impeccable. Really without fault as far as I can see. All fittings round the back are really nicely done and the speaker posts are very good indeed, though it's a bit cramped round there with thicker cables. Our finish was Amara/Black but they are available in a good few finishes.

ADJUSTABILITY AT THE TURN OF A KNOB

Also around the back and next to the speaker posts are two knobs labeled Damping and High. The damping knob is to change the damping of the 8" woofer (with a 38mm voice coil) whilst the HIGH knob changes the way the 110mm AMT

tweeter behaves – effectively it makes it more or less prominent. The high setting has three positions labeled +, 0 and -. Karl-Heinz Fink explains "This time, we only added two controls. The left one can adapt the speaker to different amplifiers. Modern amps have very high damping factors and that is the 1st position. The second one is for amplifiers with a lower damping factor (like a typical NAIM for example.) The last one is for tube amplifiers.....not for the 7W class A single end, but for a typical PP EI34 or KT88 construction. It compensates 0.5 Ohm transformer resistance. The other switch does change the level of the tweeter....but only a little to compensate the setup if necessary."

I actually found this a really innovative and useful feature of the KIMs and it allows you to tweak the sound of the speakers to your ancillary kit (amp/s) and your personal taste. I particularly enjoyed the effect of turning the 'High' knob on the back of the speakers to the +ve position. I felt this added even more air to the presentation, though that's not really something you could accuse these loudspeakers of lacking in any way anyway. This effect was, I thought, most beneficial when listening at relatively low

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volumes with the sounds having an ethereal feel to them – in a good way.

SOUND

That HIGH knob I mentioned is particularly useful for low-level listening, I found. I often have speakers and other kit running-in in the background whilst I'm writing or setting kit up etc, and I tend to listen at low volume in these situations – I'm taking around 60dB (normal conversation level apparently). Most often the music is simply there but without me taking notice of it and it just becomes background noise. However, these speakers are a little different (particularly with that High knob in the +ve position) and I found that I simply had to listen to what was playing and got really drawn into the music – and whatever was playing! Often you will find that a speaker loses a great deal of detail at low volumes but that's just not the case here. Obviously, you don't have the bass clout you would get when the speakers are being pushed a bit more towards realistic listening levels but it's perfectly listenable and very enjoyable.

Positioning was simple and I ended up with them about 2.5m apart with the sitting position equidistant. I found that there was a definite sweet spot to the speakers but the stereo image was still very reasonable both left and right of absolute centre.

SLAM AND AUTHORITY

Bass heft is another great feature of the KIMs – they go low and they have real slam and authority. Yep, it's tight and whatnot, but also very tuneful. As I mentioned, it's a year since I had the BORGs here to listen to but there is a clear family sound going on here. No, that's perhaps not fair as it suggests the speakers are colouring the sound in some way, but I found colouration to be really low. Perhaps I'm better off saying that you get a lot of the BORG's positive characteristics with KIM, with the possible exception of them not going quite so low. I loved the BORGs but I actually think I prefer these, which I know makes no sense at all given my proclivity for big floorstanding loudspeakers.

So what were FinkTeam thinking of when they designed KIM? Again, I'll let Karl-Heinz answer

that one for us - "BORG is a sort of design statement and always visible in a room. KIM was planned to be more of a stealth design, blending into the room without being too prominent. In the past, many speakers have been in that height and as long as they are around the height of a table or sideboard or window sill, they are hidden in a way. Of course, the image should still be as high as the Borg, so we worked a lot with the tilting angle and the AMT length to get it right. And we also wanted to make a more affordable speaker from FinkTeam, using as many features as possible we did for BORG."

Indeed, you are getting a lot of what the BORGs bring to the party with KIM and so why would you spend a considerable chunk more on the BORG over and above what these cost? I find that question very difficult to answer and in this space I'd personally probably opt for the KIMs, particularly as Karl-Heinz tells me that FinkTeam has no intention of making a smaller speaker than this, but then, and reading between the lines, they have the EPOS brand to fulfil that role. Karl-Heinz did mention that they do have plans to upgrade their flagship WM-5 to the next generation with new midrange and bass drivers...watch this space.

I had thought that the KIMs would sound a lot smaller scale-wise than they do, but then the speakers tilt backward a little on their stands which makes them feel a lot taller from an aural perspective than they actually are. Does this bring about phase issues? Nope, not at all, and the KIMs sound as integrated from top to bottom as the BORGs did.

IMPRESSIVE SOUNDSTAGE

Soundstage is impressively expansive with the effect being a little like being in a bubble of sound that expands slightly beyond the speakers left and right, behind the speakers a little, and then out into the room. It's a wonderfully enveloping experience that has me reaching for the next album over and over again. Certainly no fatiguing or harsh sound here! Ambient electronica just washes over and around you whilst the image presented in front of you remains stable and pinpoint accurate in a monitor style! Yotam Avni's Was Here record sounds

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absolutely sublime on these speakers! The resonance of the vocal on the Beyond the Dance track is wonderful.

Lee Perry's Party Time taken from the From The Secret Laboratory album is a tour de force of effects and sounds flying around and on these speakers, you get that full effect...and whilst the next track plays (Seven Devils Dead) there's a sound that sounds like chirruping birds that I've not really taken much notice of before. I like that the speakers allow me to listen to a tune I must have played hundreds of times with wholly fresh ears and hear things I've not experienced before. The spatial quality of these speakers really is very impressive - holographic is a term bandied around a fair old bit in Hifi reviews, but these really are reach-out-and-touch holographic to my ears.

have an album called 313 Detroit that has a tune on it by K.E.L.S.E.Y called Baby Can (M.K. Dub), and whilst the tune is fantastic there is a rawness and dirtiness to the recording. KIM hides nothing of this and this tune sounds not unlike it's been recorded in a tin can – no doubt this is all down to the very basic samplers available at the time. Anyway, don't expect KIM to make poor recordings sound any better than they are...personally I love the rawness of this tune and its flaws which KIM doesn't gloss over!

These speakers REALLY suit electronic music which is probably 75% of what I play for my own enjoyment - they are fast, accurate, and tight. However, I'm well aware that in the respect of my personal music choices I'm in a bit of a minority – but I am finding it difficult to tear myself away from this kind of music to give a more balanced review of KIM's charms.

Bad Brains' Sacred Love turned up loud is majestic. That live but tight drum sound on the track is really well presented. The guitar riffs have power and speed and the vocal, heavily processed to sound as if it's over an intercom, projects into the room and sounds as it should. Guitar lines are easy to follow and so is the bass guitar. In a similar vein Body Count's self-titled album is an assault on the senses as it should be. With that said there is a load of detail in the record that is easily missed, and these speakers let you hear that. Crank the volume up

and it's as hard-hitting as I've heard, but without losing any of the definition and detail – just MUCH louder. And you can really push these speakers very hard without them getting anything like over-wrought or flustered. Stunningly dynamic!

Moving on to more subtle tunes and José James' version of Strange Fruit from the album Yesterday I Had The Blues sounds really beautiful at low volume, with the slightly nasal quality of his voice at the start of the tune coming through really well. His voice is clearly projected into the room whilst the very simple backing and clap adds eeriness to the song. Again, the soundstage feels really expansive and there is a feeling of 'liveness' to the song presented. The line "...for the sun to rot" has an inflection on the final consonant and this comes through brilliantly with KIM. Really, what's not to like here?

CONCLUSION

I like these speakers a lot! They are perhaps one of the best loudspeakers we have had in the house in the sub ten grand price-point and had I not just bought another turntable I'd have been having a pair of these in a heartbeat. Yes, they are that good!

Key takeaways are speed, clarity, and an open airiness.

At low volumes, they are a delight but put some power up them and they just come alive in a wonderfully dynamic and engaging way.

The soundstage is vast with KIM - and I mean in every dimension.

There is a certain quality to these speakers that just drags you in, tells you to shut up, and to take notice of the music that is playing. I listened and listened to album after album. They feel unforced and they are natural-sounding uncoloured and true to the recording.

I need to sleep on the gong these get as I've not given the award I'm considering previously. I'll make the decision tomorrow....

So, I have slept on it and I don't think I can

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do anything but give these speakers the new Editor's Award, but that will only be confirmed after Linette has given her verdict - which will be done without having read my comments. We plan on giving these awards out very infrequently, but to give these anything less just wouldn't be fair to them or to FinkTeam. Yes, they are the best part of nine grand in the UK but I wholly believe that they are worth every penny, particularly when you compare them to the BORGs at £23K, give or take.

It's impossible to put a percentage of what KIM gives with regards (and compared) to the BORGs, but I'd suggest it's in the 90s...

OVER TO LINETTE

As Fink's KIM rated so highly with Stuart, I get to give my opinion too. Although we have been listening to them together, I have written my thoughts independently and without us discussing our findings, except to say to each other 'wow, these are great!'

I have been listening to these speakers whilst going about my business, not just sat in front of them, and the first thing I noticed was that the sound from them is excellent, even not in the designated sweet spot, you really can walk around our large listening and living room, even sit out of the listening room part, and still enjoy what is playing. However, moving to the sweet spot the experience becomes more intense, so I sat right there for some critical listening.

It's like KIM is giving you a big, warm pre-covid hug (remember those?). She draws you in and wraps her music right around you. The soundstage is literally 'wrap-around' giving that wonderful total music immersion that I really enjoy.

Even at low volume music sounds expansive and detailed but not clinical, you can hear the breathiness or the rasp in the singer's voice, very noticeable on Elton John's 'Tiny Dancer'. Piano and guitar 'feel' as they should, the country twang of guitar in the Stones 'Dead Flowers' sounded incredibly real.

Giving it a bit more welly, Todd Terry's Time To Blackout had the threatening feel it should, the creeping menace of dark Drum & Bass, with

that bass being fast, taut, and dry...thumping you into the middle of the chest. This was carried on with the bass-driven Da Funk from Daft Punk, the building crescendo of electronica brilliantly defined and all-encompassing. Sister Sledge's Greatest dancer' showed that KIM likes to D.I.S.C.O. too, showing off the funky Nile Rogers sound.

People often say that speakers disappear, a term that can be overused but should rightly be used for FinkTeam's KIM. The sound stage expands well beyond the speaker and, walking into the room, you would expect a much bigger speaker to be playing.

Looks-wise I think they are lovely loudspeakers. Fink was never going to design a boring box standmount. These have similar quirks as their big brother Borg. I love the way the design plays with the standard speaker form, the angle of the cabinet planes and the elegant tilt are pleasing as well as functional. Finished in the 'velvet' black and luxurious dark wood of the review pair we had, they would suit modern or classic interiors.

Overall, I would class the FinkTeam KIM as 'goosebump' speakers, they connect you with music in a way that you really FEEL, totally tactile sound. They are speakers for living with, not just critical listening. They are in a busy market for this price point but stand out from the crowd for their looks and their enjoyable and immersive way of delivering music.

Definitely, one of the best pairs of speakers to grace our listening room and certainly worthy of our first ever Editor's Award!

AT A GLANCE

Build Quality: Really beautifully finished and whilst they are a squat and wide loudspeaker they look great. Their open frames allow them to appear to be less than they actually are. The wooden boxes they arrive in is very well finished too. Speaker terminals are very high quality and the tap test has them pretty much dead.

Sound Quality: Space and air in the tops and mids is underpinned by a solid, tight and ac-

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curate bass performance. There is a clarity to their sound and whilst they can do subtlety with aplomb they can also rock out brilliantly. The soundstage is big and enveloping but feels natural and not overblown.

Value For Money: They are not a cheap loud-speaker! Compare them to the BORGS from FinkTeam and they suddenly seem to become a bit of a bargain.

We Loved:

The open presentation

Deep and tuneful bass performance

Fit and finish are great, as are the binding posts (*with a but on the latter point)

Tuneable tweeter is a very useful feature, as is the damping of the woofer

Allow a really good insight into small details and inflections in music and vocals

Work with all kinds of music from rock to vocal jazz and through techno

Easy to position and unfussy

Easy to listen to for very long periods

Worked with both the solid-state and valve amps we played them with

We Didn't Love So Much:

They aren't cheap

*The back panel was a bit tight space-wise with thicker cables

Won't make poor records sound any better – that's a good and a bad point depending on your viewpoint/record collection

Relative inefficient at 86dB

Price: £8 900 (UK) €9 450 (EU)

Elevator Pitch Review: A relatively compact, well-made and good looking loudspeaker that manages to be able to pull off the trick of being subtle and refined with an ability to really rock out too. That AMT tweeter is a treat and adds so much to the character of the speakers but never feels like it is the dominant force, and leaves you with a beautifully balanced loudspeaker from top to bottom. If you have ten grand to spend on a pair of speakers, get these on your short short-list!

