



# The Eminent Technology LFT-16 Speakers

**\$950/PAIR [WWW.EMINENT-TECH.COM](http://WWW.EMINENT-TECH.COM)**

**E**veryone knows I love panel speakers, and I have always been very impressed with the goings on at Eminent Technology. Owner/designer Bruce Thigpen is a great guy and always goes the extra mile to help his customers. I have heard the larger LFT-8s at a few hifi shows with very good luck, so I was excited to hear the smaller sibling that you see here.

For the record, a pair of LFT-16s feature a 6½" woofer in a sealed box along with the Eminent Technology midrange and tweeter drivers. ET claims that this speaker, while it looks a lot like a Magneplanar driver is actually a push-pull planar speaker.

Check out their website ([www.eminent-tech.com](http://www.eminent-tech.com)) for a full explanation. Suffice to say that these drivers do their job very well.

The LFT-16s are pretty utilitarian in look, but don't let that scare you; they put all the money into the sound! With an efficiency of 85db, it's better to have a little bit more juice on tap to get all that these speakers are capable of.

After a short break-in, I moved the ETs to my main system, consisting of the C-J Act2/series 2, Premier 350 combination. *(continued)*

I know this is just a bit overkill, but these are my tools and I know exactly what they sound like. (And the Premier 350 will drive anything...) Once I had a good idea of the sound, I tried a few more “realistic” amplifiers with excellent results as well.

One thing that stayed constant in all setups was a pair of filled 24" Sound Anchors stands. Good stands (think mass here) are really essential to getting the most sound out of the LFT-16s. If you use them with flimsy stands, you will not get the bass and focus these speakers are capable of (trust me, I tried it) and that is not fair to the folks at ET.

### **WHAT THE HECK ARE THESE ANYWAY?**

Because the LFT midrange and tweeter elements are fairly small, I wouldn't say that these speakers really qualify as “panel” speakers, but a very interesting hybrid. According to the specs, they are supposed to go down to about 45hz. A few minutes with a test tone generator confirmed this and with most music, you won't even notice the missing hz. Again, using these speakers with a beefy amplifier allows them to have a bit more weight than you might expect.

There is a crossover adjustment on top of the speakers that allows you to set the level of the tweeter to one of three positions. *(continued)*



I was perfectly happy with the middle setting in my room, no matter what amplifier I used them with. If you have a fairly stuffed room with a lot of furniture, you may want to experiment with the higher setting to get a bit more treble output.

Because the tweeters possess a good amount of extension without being harsh or grainy, they will reveal cable artifacts as well as some much more expensive speakers I have heard. For most of the test I used Cardas Neutral Reference interconnects and Tara Labs RSC The One Speaker cables. Along with my more affordable setup, I used interconnects and speaker cables from ED.

While I never got close to the 103 db maximum output of these speakers, I did play them fairly loud a few times and was very impressed on how cleanly they would play. However, if you do have a pretty powerful amplifier, you will notice a spot where the speakers just won't go any louder and you hit a wall of compression. Stay back from this point and it's all good. For the prudent ones in the audience, this should be no problem.

### **APPLES AND ORANGES**

As I just happened to have a pair of Magnefans and my trusty Apogee Calipers hanging around, it was interesting to listen to all three and arrive at a loose comparison.

I really felt that while the LFTs wouldn't go quite as low or play quite as loud as the giant panels I had here, they were very accurate tonally. Listening to all of my remastered Miles Davis and John Coltrane albums was a treat; instruments sounded correct and as long as I wasn't trying to blow the windows out of the studio, the LFTs behaved very well.

Playing brain drain music was another story. Getting wacky with the volume control brought back the old devil compression, but again I was listening way louder than was reasonable and prudent. I felt these speakers did their best in the middle of the power range. They sound a bit reserved at low volume, but once you are pumping a few watts through them, they really open up right away. In a way they reminded me a lot of my Martin Logan Aerius speakers, having a sweet spot that was very sweet indeed as long as one didn't push too far.

Remember, even with a good pair of stands, these babies come in under \$1500 and that's what is so amazing about the LFTs. One other tweak I would highly suggest is some kind of absorptive material directly behind the speakers. *(continued)*



I ended up with the speakers about 40" from the back wall, with about a seven foot gap between the speakers, about eight feet back. Until I put a piece of Sonex behind each one of the speakers on the back wall, I couldn't eliminate the last bit of lower midrange tubbiness. Once I put the Sonex in place, it all disappeared and I felt the soundstage got a touch wider as well.

This is something that the LFTs do very well; they throw a very wide (but not super deep) sound field into your listening area. I had to keep reminding myself that I was listening to a \$950 pair of speakers!

## GETTING REAL

Ok, these things sound great hooked up to almost 30k worth of amplification, but how do they do on a budget more in keeping with their cost? Quite well, actually. For a more real world test, I used the LFTs with a Naim Nait 5i (\$1425, 50w/ch.) and the Valve Audio Predator (\$3000, 200w/ch.) I felt the Nait was a little bit underpowered for these speakers, but the Predator was outstanding. With 200 watts per channel on tap and a tube driver stage, the LFTs really came alive quite nicely. I tried a couple of tube amplifiers, (Prima Luna Prologue 1 and the new monoblocks from VAS) and also had a great experience, but again these amplifiers wouldn't play quite as loud, though there was a touch more midrange magic. Should you have a fairly small room, 50wpc should be just fine and you will get the benefit of a bit more bass reinforcement a small room usually provides.

The key for me with these speakers was having a fair amount of power on tap. They sounded very polite with the Naim amplifier, but they really opened up with the Predator and were fabulous with the Premier 350. Sometimes hooking up budget speakers to ultra high performance gear ends in big disappointment and really makes the speakers look bad, but not this time. The LFTs held their poise on all counts. My only sleight complaint was that these speakers were just a touch less dynamic than I would like, but again, remember the price.

## CONCLUSION

If your taste in music doesn't involve listening too loud or way too deep in the lower part of the frequency range, the LFT-16 is definitely worth an audition. If you value tonal accuracy and transparency, these are a home run and I feel that you will have to spend a lot more dough for a substantial improvement.

If you have the ability to get these out in the room a bit and put a little bit of sound deadening on the rear walls, you will be treated to a serious peek into high end sound for a very minimal price indeed.

## ASSOCIATED COMPONENTS

**Preamplifier:** Conrad-Johnson ACT2/Series 2

**Power Amplifier:** Conrad-Johnson Premier 350

**Integrated Amplifiers:** Naim Nait 5i, Valve Audio Predator

**Digital Sources:** Wadia 581, Naim CD-5i

**Analog Source:** SME 10, SME V arm/Shelter 90x cartridge, Aesthetics Rhea phono stage (with Great Northern Sound Mods)

**Interconnects:** ED 422, Cardas Golden Reference

**Speaker Cable:** Cardas Golden Reference, TARA RSC The One, ED 432

**Accessories:** Finite Elemente Pagode Signature rack, Sound Anchors 24" stands, Sonex Classic

**Power management:** Running Springs Audio Jaco and Duke power conditioners, Running Springs Mongoose power cords.