

Triangle AIO 3 Bluetooth loudspeaker system

by Alan Sircom

Like many audio brands – especially, it seems, audio loudspeaker brands – French loudspeaker manufacturer Triangle is up for a spot of diversifying. The new AIO system is the result. There are two AIO products in the line-up. The AIO C, a small Bluetooth streaming portal to open the 21st Century to an existing system, and the AIO 3, which takes that core technology and builds a small loudspeaker system around it. We went for the AIO 3.

The AIO 3 competes almost head on with devices from Bose and Sonos, which are priced above and below the AIO 3. These two brands dominate this market to the extent where there are only two ways to compete; go for a different approach, or go out of business. Triangle went for the different approach, and it's one I think will work well.

The way Triangle has tried to compete is to push the 'elegant' angle, and push it hard. This is a product designed to be sold both in audio stores where people appreciate the finer things in sound, or in elegant department stores where people appreciate the finer things in life. Basically it sells to people because it looks good or sounds good, and occasionally because it both looks good *and* sounds good.

The AIO 3 itself is elegant and understated. It has a range of four different colour grilles surrounding the loudspeaker system itself, and contrasting metal finish along the top and base of the AIO 3. Two grilles – black and grey – come with brushed aluminium contrasts, while lime green and 'Arctic blue' are finished with a nice shade of champagne gold aluminium.



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Operationally, the AIO 3 tells the world its status through the medium of a range of little LEDs. There are seven hidden behind the left-hand front of the grille; five denoting volume level, remote activity, and power/standby status. The light next to the bank of four little buttons denotes source selected by colour, although because it sits next to the power button, it is almost universally mistaken for some kind of power status indicator. The other three buttons control source selection and volume up and down. These controls are replicated and extended by the remote control (it also controls tracks and can adjust bass level), which has something of the Apple remote about it.

Under the grilles are two 25.4mm tweeters and a two 9.9cm mid-woofers, and the cabinet itself is rear ported, although the racetrack-shaped port is very small. The AIO 3 is powered by 2x 45W Class D amplifiers.

While the AIO 3 can work through Wi-Fi, the best and easiest way to set it up is to connect it to a wireless router through Ethernet, making sure your phone or tablet is running on the same network, and can access the Triangle AIO app (Android or iDevice). The app works by taking over control of your Spotify Connect, Tidal, Qobuz, or Deezer accounts. You can also access internet radio through TuneIn. The app is vital to the AIO 3 but fortunately it is extremely flexible. The AIO 3 defaults to L-R stereo mode as standard, but two AIO 3s can be allocated as left and right channel loudspeakers in their own right in a stereo setting. Or, they can be used in multiroom mode, grouped together in party mode (five AIO units per Wi-Fi network, or as many as ten if used with wired Ethernet), and you can rename the individual AIO 3 models to suit purpose, colour, sense of humour, and so on. Add in UPnP network streaming capabilities, a USB input for flash drives or charging smartphones, a 3.5mm stereo mini-jack, optical, and automated NFC Bluetooth pairing, and the AIO 3 ticks all of today's music boxes.

The app works extremely well, although there is some latency in operation. If you try to turn the volume up, you can end up accidentally turning up too far while waiting. But, in all other aspects the app is stable and easy to follow. There is a slight touch of ‘Franglais’ in the online manual, but more in a quaint mistranslation rather than the kind of mistakes that end with a broken AIO 3. What's more, given I once walked into a restaurant in Paris and proudly ordered a fried orange, who am I to talk?

Triangle loudspeakers have two things in common; they are fast and exciting sounding... and they need to be run in to get to that point. The AIO is no different, and fresh out of the box the sound might not be ‘disappointing’, but neither is it truly ‘appointing’. While it has good clarity in spoken word, it's also thin and reedy sounding with no real dynamic range. Give it a good thrashing for a few hours and things are very, very different. Suddenly the sound seems to fill in and grows some dynamic range. Put simply, it goes from ‘glorified clock radio’ to ‘viable Bluetooth music source’ like someone threw a switch.



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Type: Wireless streaming one box system

Power Output: 2 X 45W (8 ohms)

WiFi: IEEE 802.11 b/g/n

Bluetooth: 4.2 AptX

Ethernet: RJ45 10/100K

Audio Formats: APE, FLAC, WAV, ALAC, AAC, MP3

Colours: Blue, Black, Green, Grey

Dimensions: 196 x 360 x 150 mm

Weight: 5.1 kg

Price: £599/€599

Manufactured by: Triangle

URL: triangle-fr.com

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► In fact, once the speaker driver has bedded in, the only real downside is “how do you pronounce ‘AIO’?” Is it ‘Ay-Eye-Oh’ or ‘Eh-Oh’, or even ‘Aye-Oh’? If you are from Yorkshire in England, it’s probably ‘Eeee, aye-owe!’ which is almost straight out of Old MacDonald’s Farm.

What you get from the AIO 3 is a ‘good plus’ sound, but for the money, the clientele, and the competition, ‘good plus’ is exceptional. the AIO 3’s main strength is its midband clarity and speed. This comes across best when playing something like ‘Come Down’ by Anderson .Paak [*Malibu*, Empire]; his voice is usually somewhat swamped by the rest of the mix (in particular that insistent hi-hat and funky bass line), but here it’s pushed to the fore, very articulate, and rhythmic. Granted, the midrange clarity does cut through the mix because the top and bottom end of the music are more recessed here, but it also cuts through the innate compression slapped on that album. Often at this level of equipment, you hear the lose-lose of a curtailed frequency response with a muted midrange. The Triangle system works from the midband out, which is always a good sign in any system.

Triangle have also taken the (in my opinion, correct) line of going for a more honest, less DSP-driven sound. This does mean the loudspeaker system doesn’t give the same impression of room-filling bass than some of its rivals, but the key word there is ‘impression’... and not necessarily a good impression at that. The key indicator in this is piano, specifically ‘Young and Foolish’ by the Bill Evans Trio [*Everybody Digs Bill Evans*, Riverside]. Too much ‘playing’ with the sound cuts into the attack of the piano keys, a bit like putting cards in the spokes of a bike wheel (we all did it), but at a much lower level. The AIO 3 instead goes for a more naturalistic approach, once again leading from the middle registers. It’s a fast and refined sound, albeit not one for those who want oodles of bass, powerful dynamics, or a large holographic soundstage. It does go surprisingly loud in a non-threatening manner, though.

In getting very used to this kind of system, there seem to be two ways of using them. Systems like the Naim Mu-so for example are ‘planted’ devices; you place them in a room, and they stay there. The AIO 3 is more a ‘roving’ device; although it’s not designed like a portable radio (there’s no handle), you do find yourself moving it from room to room more than you might expect. Of course, this would go away with the simple expedient of more AIO 3 models dotted round the house, but I found it worked well as a ‘transportable’ device rather than a product that collected dust in one room.

In fact, the only use-case of the AIO 3 I didn’t warm to was using it as an alarm clock. It works, and works really well in fact, but I kept slamming my hand on the top of it to try to press the snooze button. I guess some habits are ingrained. But, in fairness, the sound jolts you awake... in a good way.

If you think good sound has to be a fun-free, cloistered experience, where each musical morsel deserves praise and every musician must be a virtuoso, the Triangle AIO 3 is not for you. Instead, it’s for those who like to enjoy their music with the least fuss or bother. +