



# The Final 600i/1000i Speakers

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Some Tasty Panels From Europe

By Jeff Dorgay



**A**fter 25 years, I really believe that you tend to fall in love with one kind of speaker. While I have heard excellent examples of multi-driver systems, horns, mini-monitors; you name it, for whatever reason I always gravitate towards the panel sound. I know that they have their limitations (as does every other variation on the speaker theme) but I really enjoy that transparent, walk-through sound that a panel offers.

I saw the Final speakers quite some time ago at CES and was very impressed with what I had heard, however the room setting was less than ideal and the folks at Final were only using a surround sound receiver to power them.

We started the review with the Final 600i speakers that run \$6000 without subwoofer and then moved up to the flagship 1000i, which run \$10,000 without subwoofer. If you choose the Final sub, add \$1200 extra to the price tag of either speaker. They come finished in a very attractive silver finish, with the perforated fronts in gloss black. There is a flat metal footer that keeps the panels tilted back at about a five degree angle from the rear wall.

For those of you not familiar with electrostatic speakers, they use a large Mylar diaphragm instead of a cone to move air and create the musical signal that we hear. Proponents of the electrostatic method say that the panel is much more lightweight, allowing the transient attack to be much faster than a cone. They also point out the lack of a crossover in the signal path, making the electrostat somewhat of a full range speaker. This is a big part of why they sound so coherent and transparent; no crossover components (and their associated slopes) or multiple drivers to deal with.

But there is no free lunch in the world of high end audio and a bonus in one area usually has a corresponding negative in another. That very thing that gives the electrostat its beautiful transparency takes away from its ability to move a large volume of air forcefully, which is why even the best panels are a bit limited dynamically. To get the panel to move in the first place, the Mylar diaphragm is coated with a conductive coating and sandwiched inbetween a positive and negative plate (stators) that have a relatively high voltage on them. The audio signal is then applied to the stators and it pulls the mylar diaphragm back and forth, creating sound.

Final uses their patented “inverter” technology (read more about it here: <http://final.nl/electro.html#advantage> ) and sends the audio signal directly to the panel surface. They claim that this keeps impedance more stable across the audio band, making this speaker very easy to drive. Back in the old days, the original Quad 57’s and Acoustats were a little fussy when it came to amplifiers, but today’s

electrostats are much less finicky. Having used the current speakers from Quad and Martin Logan, I can’t say that I have had any problems with either of these speakers or the Finals.

### Setup and Initial Listening

Both the 600i and the 1000i are about 14 inches wide, with the 600i’s being about 62 inches tall, while the 1000i’s are 78 inches tall. With any panel speaker, the more panel area the better, because they move more air. The 600i’s weigh in at 45 pounds and the 1000i’s are only five pounds more each. These are easy speakers to set up and move around!

All Electrostats need to be powered to work and the Finals use tiny 12 volt wall wart supplies to keep their panels charged. They thoughtfully included 10 foot cords on the end of the little supplies to make speaker placement a lot easier. My final placement for both sets of Final speakers was about three feet out from the front wall with about seven feet between them. The optimum spot ended up being about nine feet from the speakers, giving the best combination of imaging and sweet spot.

There is one thing that those of you in the audience need to know if you are the type of person that doesn’t read instructions: Pay close attention to the orientation of the Finals or you will be very disappointed with the sound. If you look straight at the front of the panel, you will see that there are three dividers to the panel, going from wide to narrow. It is critical that you have the narrow bands to the inside, otherwise the imaging will be somewhat diffused.

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Should you ignore this while excited to get them up and playing (don't feel bad, I did it too...) just switch the right and left speakers and all will be well again!

I spent about 100 hours breaking the speakers in with the Valve Audio Predator integrated amplifier and the Ayre C5xe CD player. Once they had loosened up a bit, I moved them into my reference system for critical listening where they stayed for the duration of the review.

### **An Interesting Combination of Character Traits**

As with everything in the world of high end audio, almost everyone in this business thinks that their approach is the best, but as we all know the truth lies somewhere in the middle. The Finals have a very characteristic sound and will appeal to a certain type of panel lover.

If you were someone who longs for the sound of a pair of Quad 57's, or your old Acoustats, but don't want to rebuild a pair of speakers or would like more modern packaging, I suspect the Finals (especially the 1000i) could be the speaker of your dreams. I started out listening with the Final subwoofer, with the speakers running full range and my second pair of preamplifier outputs driving it separately. While Final offers you the opportunity to use the very versatile crossover in their subwoofer and use the high pass outputs to go back to your amplifier, I would only suggest doing this if you have a low powered tube amplifier. Freeing a 40 watt per channel amplifier the task of reproducing low bass frequencies will give the Finals more punch.

The Final subwoofer is somewhat loose in the bottom end department, considering you might be partnering them up with a ten thousand dollar pair of main speakers. I would suggest it more for use with one of their smaller panels in a multichannel environment rather than a high performance two channel setup. Marc Mombourquette of Final USA calls it "their crescent wrench sub" and I couldn't agree more. I found myself moving on to my REL B2 with much better results, again running the 1000i's full range and crossing the REL over at about 34hz to pick up the slack.

### **Mellow is the Word**

While I normally prefer the speed and slam of my CJ Premier 350, for me the winning

combination with the Finals proved to be the McIntosh MC275. Its midrange warmth brought out a little bit more palpability and depth to the presentation.

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Because these speakers do not have a ton of dynamic punch, I decided to go for midrange magic. Listening to any really heavy rock or full scale orchestral music left me wanting just a bit more, even with the sub, so I decided to play to the strength of the Finals.

If you listen to chamber music, female vocals, or anything else that is not too taxing at the frequency extremes, the 1000i is a very pleasant speaker indeed. Quadrophonia or Bax's Fifth, not so hot. KD Lang, James Taylor or the Netherlands Wind Ensemble, magic.



My pal Hiroshi in Tokyo has been sending me a lot of great Japanese CD pressings in the "mini LP" format and I must admit I've been buying CDs like a drunken sailor lately. A quick spin of 10cc's *Bloody Tourists* disc on my favorite track "Mr Time" showed just how well these speakers can create a very real, three dimensional space. Moving on to the Doobie Brothers *What Were Vices Are Now Habits* and "Another Lonely Park" showed how well the layered vocals on this track were recorded.

I also spent a lot of time listening to most of my Miles Davis CDs and again, this is the type of music that really makes the Finals shine. Interestingly enough, because of the height of the 1000i panel, the sound does not change when you stand up as it does with many other speakers, panel and cone alike. Needless to say with so much panel area the Final does a great job with recreating the illusion of height. However, because of the flat panel design, the sound falls off pretty quickly as you move side to side.

### **What About the Small Ones?**

Much like the various Acoustats I used to own, the smaller Final 600i sounds almost identical to the 1000i, just with a touch less low bass. It is made for a smaller room, so in a large room will not play as loud, but the sound quality is identical. I used the 600i's eventually in my 11 x 17 living room with very good results and they were quite easy to place. At \$6000 a pair, I felt these were a bit better bargain than the 1000i's, but in the end it will depend on your room to get the right fit. I also preferred the 600i's with the REL subwoofer for all the same reasons.

A number of friends that had never been exposed to electrostats enjoyed the presentation and again, I preferred to go for the warmth of tubes in the end. These speakers sensitivity is rated at 86db, so plan your amplifier accordingly. The spec sheet says a minimum of 75 watts is required and I concur wholeheartedly.

I also tried the 600i's with a few different integrated amplifiers and had good luck there as well, but keep in mind that this speaker like most panels is fairly revealing of the source components in the chain. Because they are very easy to drive, they will work with a surround sound receiver, but you will be better rewarded as you move up the food chain.

### **Conclusion**

I'm a bit biased because I really enjoy the panel sound, especially that of electrostatic speakers. There is just something about the coherency that comes along with no crossover that gives these speakers a very musical feeling.

The Final speakers have a lot going for them. Good sound and great looks should help them blend in just about anywhere. I fear that with our dollar as weak as it is right now, they are getting beat up a bit on pricing. I would like to see these speakers priced at about \$4000 and \$7500 respectively, but these days if you want cool things from Europe it's going to cost you a bit more.

And you will need a subwoofer to go along with these speakers, so that will add a bit more to the price, so budget accordingly unless you have a very small room.

The Final 600i and 1000i have a unique look and sound. You need to take a trip to your Final dealer to find out if it's the sound for you...

### **MANUFACTURER**

**The Final 600i and 1000i Loudspeakers**  
**MSRP: 600i - \$6000, 1000i - \$10,000**  
**Subwoofer Extra**

#### **Contact:**

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### **PERIPHERALS**

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

**Phono Preamplifier:** ASR Basis Exclusive, ModWright 9.0 SWLP

**Power Amplifiers:** Conrad-Johnson Premier 350, McIntosh MC275

**Digital Sources:** Meridian 808, Wadia 581i, Naim CD555, McIntosh MS300

**Analog Sources:** SME 10 turntable w/SME V arm, MoFi 3.5C cartridge, Oracle Delphi V turntable w/SME iV.vi arm, Grado Statement cartridge, Rega P9 w/P1000 arm, Rega Apheta cartridge

**Interconnects:** TARA Labs The One, Cardas Golden Reference, ED 422

**Power Management:** Running Springs Audio Jaco and Danielle power conditioners, Running Springs Mongoose power cords, Essential Sound Products The Essence "Reference" power cords

**Vibration Control:** Finite Elemente Pagode Signature racks with Ceraballs and Cerapucs