

# Wilson Audio Tune Tot

by Chris Thomas



If you are one of the lucky few who have a dedicated listening room where speakers can be situated in exactly the optimum place for your hot-seat enjoyment and cables can run where they will without fear of accident, damage or other 'social pressures' then I envy you. For most of us the installation of an audio system brings a whole series of compromises, especially where speakers are concerned. This is especially true in the UK and particularly in small space city flats or apartments that dominate the living spaces of almost every major city in the world. Just about every speaker I have reviewed over the years has required me to make them fit my listening space in one way or another. Not so true of the Wilson Audio Tune Tots where I had to devise various ways of creating situations into which they could be utilised in the way that Wilson designed them to be.

The Tune Tots are very small two-way speakers that incorporate all the Wilson hallmarks, from their amazing finish to a number of engineering options and solutions to very specific challenges. They come from Wilson's Special Applications Engineering (WSAE) department and have been designed to fit just about anywhere, except on top of a dedicated stand which, in the UK at least, is exactly where most hardened audiophiles would look to site them.

The Tune Tot will sit happily on a bookshelf, a desk, a cabinet of some description, or a table top – just about anywhere. In fact, the Tune Tots are designed to go where no high-end speaker has gone before. They are small and have restricted bass below about 65Hz but they are still lively enough to energise any surface, particularly home cabinets and storage units. This would normally spell disaster, but through judicious employment of variable length spikes that fit directly into the speaker's base, an optional custom pair of plinths, dense foam bungs for the rear facing slot ports, and a detachable grille and of course that Wilson cabinet, most hostile environments can be tamed and the speaker 'tuned' to provide spectacularly good musical performances. ▶

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▶ The speaker cabinet carries the classic Wilson trademarks of an immaculate finish on top of their proprietary composite material construction. When you hear the music flow from them you realise that this is a masterpiece of design. They have no parallel surfaces and the X and S materials that the enclosure is constructed from have variable thicknesses. Wilson Audio is a world leader when it comes to cabinet design and claim that the Tune Tot has the same level of care with its configuration, construction, and use of composites, as found in both the Alexia Series 2 and the WAMM. This most certainly includes their highly evolved internal reflection management system, which goes some way to explaining the out-of-the-box music-making they are capable of. It's worth mentioning that Wilson don't see the Tune Tot as an entry-level product at all and I understand exactly where they are coming from here. This is a fully-fledged Wilson speaker that has limited bandwidth but can operate in situations that are, conventionally, unusual. I can imagine many existing Wilson owners finding a place for a pair of Tune Tots in their home.

The driver array starts with a 146mm paper pulp mid/bass rear-vented through a slot port. This is from Scan-Speak's Revelator range. A Wilson Convergent Synergy 25mm doped silk fabric tweeter (also found in the

Sabrina) in its own sub-enclosure handles the high frequencies. These are mounted on a tiny baffle, treated with Wilson's customary damping materials around the tweeter and the lower corners. Minimal reflections are the order of the day here and the Tune Tot takes full advantage of this when it comes to their presentation and sheer clarity. They are not particularly sensitive at 86 dB but also not a difficult impedance load. Wilson suggest amplifiers with a minimum of 25 watts. This was ideal for my listening and I used them with the lovely Vitus SIA-025 integrated amplifier, running in full 25-watt Class A mode. Although they are accommodating of inexpensive amps, the quality of the amplifier is more important than the power output as these tiny Wilsons are capable of serious ▶

► refinement. The trusty Vitus proved a perfect match. Rear connections are a robust pair of gold plated types able to accept spade or 4mm plugs, usefully angled to make connection easier.

Siting the Tune Tot is always going to be fun. With just about any other small speaker that might conventionally sit on a stand, possibly hard back against a wall, dialling their sound into the room is relatively easy. But, for any high-potential speaker to flourish you need to create the right environment and the Wilsons bring a whole new set of decisions and options and obviously they have their own set of compromises. Wilson have cleverly addressed their conventional small-cabinet shortcomings of low-frequency extension and turned it to their advantage. Nobody is going to buy these speakers for their bass weight. I used them on my desk where they were very, very near-field and on a pair of wooden cabinets in my listening room where they were in a more conventional setting, essentially using the furniture as stands. It soon became clear that, without the usual metal stand, the Tune Tots are likely to find themselves in any number of weird and wonderful locations and as I mentioned earlier, Wilson have provided what they term as Ecosystem tools to allow the user to extract the best possible results for most situations.

In a situation where they will excite all sorts of resonances within a hollow cabinet there are a pair of custom plinths. Forget the usual laminated block of medite or some other materials. The Tune Tot's plinths are a thing of beauty in themselves. They are called ISObase and are designed to provide vibrational isolation between the speaker and the dangerously resonant locations where they are going to find themselves seated. They are formed from constrained layers of composite materials and some newly developed polymers that add to the damping characteristics. These are immaculately finished in matching paint with aluminium decoupled features and elongated slots to allow a little to and fro location of the spikes. There's a possibility you won't need them for some applications but, having said that, I always preferred the sound with them in place. They look great too.

Wilson supply two different types of spikes for each speaker, one much longer than the other. Depending on the height of the speakers relative to the listening position, the longer spikes can be used at the front or the rear position to change the tilt orientation of the cabinet. This is fundamental to the Tune Tot's performance as it allows for fine adjustment of the whole time domain. Just sit the speakers down and they will sound pretty good, but my advice is to take time to finely adjust the angle of the cabinets. When the time factor is aligned the Tune Tot really takes off. Alternatively, the spikes can be used directly onto the surface and Wilson provide a nice set of protectors should you want to avoid surface scratches. There is a useful reference starting point where you can visually adjust the front spike in relation to the front lower lip of the cabinet to get a rough time alignment setting and then the spikes can be finely adjusted and locked off with the splendid set of ratchet spanners in the included tool kit.

The rear slot port, while allowing for a fuller flow of air and a more extended bass, can also be blocked by the hard foam bungs and I tended to prefer those in place in just about every situation. Likewise the front grilles, constructed around a solid frame. No roughly hewn piece of ply with a grille cloth stretched

across it for Wilson Audio. These are formed from a laminated composite, cut from a billet and the way the cloth is attached is both complex and probably very time-consuming. It's details like this, the packaging, and the tool kit that reinforces Wilson's attention to detail for me. They do nothing by halves. I tended to prefer them without grilles and Wilson can also supply a rather neat anodised ring, in several finishes, that covers the bass unit mounting hardware for those with fine aesthetic sensibilities. It is magnetically attached and I can hear no downside to the music when they are attached.

I used the Wilsons with the Vitus amplifier fed by a dCS Vivaldi streaming Tidal, all hooked together with some Nordost cabling and the results were stunning. Wilson have taken full advantage of the small reflective areas on the front baffle and as a result the Tune Tot has a unique sense of presentation and soundstage. The music appears in the air around the speakers. With little low frequency ambience to tie it to the cabinet the view is quite different. Time taken with time alignment pays off here and lends a clarity and extreme sense of focus to just about everything. The bass is obviously limited in extension but the response is fast, fluid and dynamic without ever becoming bloated or dragging. This is where quality small speakers can absolutely excel. They sail through even the most complex bass sections with remarkable coherence and always with good manners.

The Tune Tots' overall tonal balance is superb and I would describe them as being rather smooth. There is tonal colour aplenty too. That tweeter installation produces a textural and nuanced performance that I have only heard flow from a couple of other speakers of comparable size but the Tune Tot's wonderful ability to 'throw' their voice out into the room make them sound like a pair of tiny ventriloquists. It gives them space and a certain allure, especially on anything percussive. It is enormously attractive and musically beguiling. I particularly loved the way they tell the musical story and I will

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- ▶ mention David Crosby’s album *Here If You Listen* [BMG] and the opening track ‘Glory’ as the perfect synergy between melody, production, and system. The way the interwoven harmonies creep around the room is fascinating.

Obviously the caveats are going to be well understood by anybody in the market for these Wilsons. But once you have come to terms with that I reckon you will be surprised at how good they are with horns and orchestral pieces. There is no sense that the music is being squeezed out of such a small box. No unwanted edge or tonal nasties from the cabinet. Even drums are enormously coherent and totally understandable as are pianos, often a real contentious proposition for such small speakers. This is due to the superb way they cope with the leading edge, or attack of instruments and voices. Vocals and solo acoustic guitar can be mesmerising. Don’t expect to feel your chest cavity resonate along with the Timpani though.

These tiny Wilsons completely live up to the reputation of quality, long established by the company. They are a niche product in so many ways. Designed to allow you access to very high quality music in situations where few speakers even begin to work. They take full musical advantage of all the great things that a small speaker can provide. Speed, lightness of bass touch, out of the box sound staging, and the ability to start and stop very, very quickly... these are all strong points of the Tune Tot and are vital to good music making. They have exceptional pace and pinpoint timing if your installation is precise and tonally they never stop surprising, even at surprisingly low levels.

They are not cheap. No Wilson speaker ever has been and I will leave opinions on the price to you. But the whole package is so beautifully presented and packaged and the engineering solutions, designed specifically to help you extract that last ounce of performance, so comprehensive and clever that they certainly deliver the musical goods. You are going to need some serious partnering equipment too. But the rewards are well worth it. Actually, I am sorry to see them go but they leave behind them the memory of some real fun listening sessions and that is hard to put a price on. +

## TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

**Type:** Two-way rear ported speaker

**Drivers:** 1 × 5.75 inch paper pulp bass/  
mid driver

1 × 1 inch doped silk fabric tweeter

**Freq. Response:** 65Hz–23 kHz

**Sensitivity:** 86 dB

**Impedance:** Nominal 8 ohms

**Recommended amplifier power:**  
25 watts per channel

**Dimensions (HxWxD):**

37.67 × 21.87 × 25.88 cm

**Weight:** 31.75 kg total shipping weight

**Colours:** Quartz, Teak, Ivory, Carbon,  
Crimson. Matching/contrasting  
woofer ring also available. Grille  
available in six fabric colours

**Prices:**

**Speakers:** £10,998

**IsoBase:** £2,398 per pair

**Grille:** £335 per pair

**Tune Tot Ring:** £698 per pair

**Manufacturer:** Wilson Audio

**URL:** wilsonaudio.com

**UK Distributor:** Absolute Sounds

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