

stereoplay

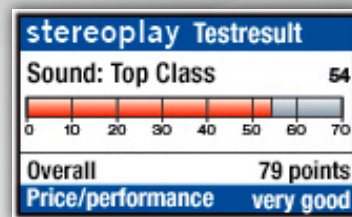


"The Heco Ascada 600 'Tower' is an elegant and powerful sounding complete system boasting a well thought-out operating concept."



HECO

Ascada 600 Tower



Sound:
TOP CLASS

Price/performance:
VERY GOOD



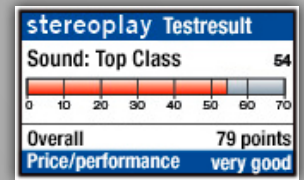
HECO

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HECO Ascada 600 Tower

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Radio tower

Heco is further expanding its portfolio in the wireless segment - but not with a new one box or desktop systems. The Ascada 600 is also called "Tower", and is a fully-fledged active speaker.

This is precisely how it has to work: Unpack, set up, plug in, turn on - and the music plays straightaway. The wireless stereo system from Heco shows how the often neglected term "use-friendly" should be used correctly. The wireless connection between the two floor-standing loudspeakers is established via Bluetooth. Heco has opted for the aptX codec to send audio data from one loudspeaker to the other. This transmission standard is lossy in de facto terms and compresses the PCM data flow of a CD from 1411 kbit/s to 352 kbits/s, but it does use communications engineering rather than psychoacoustic principles. This enables audio quality on a par with that of a CD to be achieved, which is why the aptX codec is becoming increasingly widespread for Bluetooth transmission paths. As practical as wireless technology is, it does have one inherent problem: When a television is connected, there are usually annoying time delays between video and audio due to a certain intrinsic latency in the DER transmission path. Heco counters this by also making wired signal transmission possible between the two speakers in place of the wireless link. The XLR socket on the terminal panel below the cooling fins is provided for this purpose. The package even includes a 5 metre XLR cable to connect the two speakers symmetrically and latency-free. This also ensures synchronous reproduction of video sound, with the wired Ascada 600 a perfect match for the flat screen TV.

Ready to connect

The Bluetooth connection between the speakers worked in the test at the first attempt. Should this not be the case, the pairing procedure described in the user manual must be followed precisely. Following the guiding principle of being as user-friendly as possible, there is an additional button on the connection terminal for this. However, a Bluetooth connection can also be established to the speakers as well as between them, making it convenient to play music from your smartphone, for example. This means that, in an extreme case, the entire system can be operated without any audio cables whatsoever - a nightmare for manufacturers of the corresponding high-end equipment. By pressing the "Pair" button on the remote control or, alternatively, holding down the "Source" button at the rear of the master speaker for 3 seconds, the system searches for Bluetooth source devices, which is signalled by a flashing "BT" in the 11-segment display below the subwoofer.

The speakers are then identified as "Ascada 600 Tower" on the source unit. When this connection is confirmed, the devices are paired and wireless music transmission can begin. Once set up, this Bluetooth path is reactivated automatically, even if the speakers were switched off in the meantime or the source device was out of range. Maximum music enjoyment with minimal configuration - just how it should be! For all of those who don't want to play music via Bluetooth, the Heco system offers numerous other connectivity options. Integrated in the master speaker is a D/A converter that can be controlled via the classic S/PDIF inputs, i.e. an optical link via TOSLINK and coaxial option via cinch, or via USB-B.



However, not too much can be expected from the flatter USB-A connection that can also be seen in the illustration. This can only take loads of up to 2.1 ampere as a power supply connection. It is designed for charging mobile devices and does not have any audio function. So it cannot, unfortunately, be used to play music from a USB stick or iPod. The USB-B port, on the other hand, is designed for the direct connection of a computer: a feature that the 600 has adopted from the Ascada 2.0 compact model intended for desktop operation. In the test, the Auralic Àries Mini (tested in Stereoplay 01/2016) could also be connected to the speakers without any difficulty. Despite the digital connectivity, there remains a small downside for all fans of ultra-high resolutions:

The digital inputs are only suitable for a stereo signal up to 24 bit/96 kHz. However, this quality is more than sufficient for home use, and there is no point in having higher resolutions because of the limited bandwidth of the wireless connection and the aptX coding. The connection terminal at the back of the master speaker is completed by an analogue AUX input. This means there are 5 different music feed possibilities available (digital: optical, coaxial, USB; analogue: cinch; Bluetooth), which can be selected directly on the remote control or be activated using the Volume/Source button on the master speaker control panel. The operating concept, which is otherwise very well thought-out because of its simplicity, does have one small glitch however: The 11-segment display together with the receiving sensor for the remote control has an unfortunate location beneath the subwoofer because the line of sight can be slightly obscured by a coffee table or - as in the test - a rack. This is cleverly solved for Dynaudio wireless systems, for example, by the LED displays fitted to the top of the inside edge of the speakers.

Bass high three plus one

A final feature that you just don't find in every active system is designed for bass junkies. The Ascada 600 itself has 3 subwoofers specially optimised for bass reproduction fitted with the "kraft paper diaphragm" favoured by Heco and further developed over many years. Those wanting to generate even more power and depth - the latter can indeed be expanded, as the readings show - can incorporate an additional active subwoofer into the system via the "Sub Out" socket. This feature alone reveals what target group the Ascada 600 has been aimed at. The focus is not on the sophisticated, audiophile fans of classical music but, rather, the techie, high-power pop music fan. The compact Ascada was confirmed by former test author Reinhard Paprotka as being suitable for dance parties. This is no different for the Ascada 600. The speaker played a varied mixture of pop music numbers concisely and with powerful bass reproduction. However, there's no harm in restraining the bass a little by winding it back around 1 dB using the integrated tone control. Otherwise, the speaker quickly reaches its limits at high levels despite the 3 impressive subwoofers. "Stadttaffe", the solo album from Seed front man Peter Fox, was perfect for the Heco speaker. It pumped the hugely successful assortment of hip-hop, dance hall and classical music into the room - never sluggish, always consistent, maybe with a bit too much treble. So party mood is guaranteed! With the Ascada 600 "Tower", Heco has created an innovative, easy-to-operate wireless system that delivers very good sound for its price category. And like the smaller version, we can confirm that the big Ascada is also a real party animal.