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REVIEW PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

Q Acoustics 5020

Beautifully finished, keenly priced and with remarkable performance for its size and cost, this compact standmount/bookshelf loudspeaker is an exceptionally attractive buy



Q ACOUSTICS 5020

Type Standmount two-way speaker

Price £599/pr

Drivers 25mm soft dome tweeter, 12.5cm Continuous Curve Cone mid/bass

Frequency response (-6dB) 53 Hz - 30 kHz

Sensitivity 87.9dB/w/m

Nominal impedance 8ohm

Recommended amplifier power 25-100W

Dimensions (HxWxD) 28.4x18x29.3cm

Finishes Satin black or white, Santos rosewood or Holme oak

qacoustics.co.uk

An alternative to the 'big name' speakers in the affordable arena? That may have been how British-based Q Acoustics started out, more than 15 years ago, but since its arrival some things have changed. One is that the intense competition between brands such as KEF, Mission, and Tannoy in the 'super-budget' market has all but evaporated, as those manufacturers have 'premiumised' their ranges in the hunt for better margins from their products.

The other is that, having entered the market with a low-cost appeal combined with slick styling, Q Acoustics has proved that it can weave its value-for-money magic in several market sectors, all the way up to its Concept 500 flagship model. These floorstanders may cost somewhere just north of £3500, but then have the performance to worry more than a few much more expensive designs, showing that having appeared as a budget buy, the company is now a major player at many levels of the speaker market.

Along the way, the company has added active speakers and wireless models, subwoofers, in-ceiling speakers and multichannel packages for surround sound, and even a rock-like outdoor speaker

design. It has also introduced engineering innovations from the obvious – the spidery Tensegrity stands, with their tripod of slender metal rods and tensioning cables – to the amount of clever design hidden within most of its speaker models.

A bass that's as weighty as it's tightly controlled, and a midband and treble that flow together to give a sound that's open and attractive

And yet, though we've clearly come a long way from the old idea of what made an affordable speaker – two drivers in a plain box stuffed with damping material – the Q Acoustics range still starts at a budget-friendly level, with models such as the 3010 listing at just £119 a pair, and a good choice of product in the sub-£250 market. The 5020 model we have here, selling for £599/pr, is from a newly-launched range just a little further up the price range, and is the second-smallest model in a line-up starting with the £499/pr 5010 and running all the way up to the big 5040 floorstander, at £999/pr. There's also a dedicated centre channel, the 5090, plus a choice of

5.1-channel packages based around the 5010 and 5040, with the promise of an even larger floorstander, the 5050, on the way at a price to be confirmed.

The 5020 is a standmount design, but though it's larger than the entry-level 5010, it's hardly huge: it stands just over 28cm tall, while the typically Q Acoustics 'deeper than it's wide' cabinet – a clever way to present compact dimensions to the world while still maintaining a decent cabinet volume – is just 18cm across but closer to 30cm front to back. Those larger dimensions, 2-3cm greater on each side, allows the 5020 to use a larger mid/bass driver than the starter model: here it's 12.5cm rather than the 5010's 11cm unit, while the two share the 25mm treble unit found throughout the 5000 Series range.

And while the style of the 5000 models may look familiar from other Q Acoustics models, with its rounded off corners to the enclosure and the way the front baffle, holding the drive units, is set into the cabinet, much is new here – starting with the drivers themselves.

The mid/bass unit uses the company's new C3 Continuous Curved Cone, which as the name suggests uses a one-piece dished diaphragm in place of the

SUGGESTED PARTNERS

This easygoing speaker design can be used with modest amplifiers or systems, such as ...

NAD C 338 AMPLIFIER

The slimline NAD C 338 amplifier has more than enough power to drive the speakers, plus a comprehensive, flexible feature-set.



AUDIOLAB OMNIA

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more common 'cone and centrepiece' construction, and combining the bass advantages of a straight cone profile with the midrange benefits of a flared design, plus a controlled frequency response ensuring easier integration with the treble driver, without the need for complex crossover electronics.

The mid/bass driver is driven by a substantial magnet, almost as large as the cone itself, plus a lightweight voice-coil wound from Copper-Clad Aluminium Wire (CCAW) on a glassfibre former.

The tweeter, meanwhile, is mounted in its own sealed housing, decoupled from the front baffle, so its output isn't affected by the output from the mid/bass unit, while the tweeter section is also vented to the rear to allow dispersion of unwanted energy from the rear of the dome, while a shallow waveguide to the front improves the directivity of the treble output for better imaging.

The cabinets are made from 20mm MDF, with the front baffles in 25mm, laminated with butyl isolation and an acrylic front trim, while Point to Point bracing is used within the enclosures to damp down resonances, and the terminals for the cable connections are set into the

rear panel of the speakers. This enables the speakers to be wall-mounted if required, using the company's Q WB75 brackets, which offer tilt and turn adjustments, and the speakers come with foam bungs to tighten the bass when they're used close to the wall behind them. Alternatively 3000FSi stands are available.

PERFORMANCE

Easy to drive, thanks to 6ohm nominal impedance and 87.9dB/W/m sensitivity, the 5020 speakers are as well suited for use as an upgrade for packaged or all-in-one systems as they are to use with high-quality hi-fi separates. Run for a few days, an initially bright sound soon gives way to something much better integrated, with a bass that's as impressively weighty as it's tightly controlled, and a midband and treble that flow together to give a sound that's open and attractive, but very much 'of a piece'.

The slightest toe-in towards the listening position – just enough to make possible a glimpse of the outer faces of the cabinets – will fix the stereo image with fine definition and depth, after which the impressive focus, power and fluidity of the sound are there to be enjoyed. And this is a remarkably lucid and entertaining speaker for what

is, after all, very sensible money: playing Sarah Connolly's recital of Mahler Lieder on Signum Classics, one is immediately taken by the natural, unforced depiction of the mezzo voice and the accompanying piano in an acoustic with just enough space to deliver ambience without losing detail, even in the deliberately chaotic and dramatic 'In diesem Wetter'.

But there really is a huge amount of information available from these speakers, as is evident in the Sinfonieorchester Basel/Russell Davies recording of Philip Glass's 'Heroes' Symphony, taking its themes from the David Bowie album of the same name: the microdynamics within the orchestra are as impressive as the more obvious changes in tempi and level as the work progresses. Thrilling, too, is the new live recording of *The Rite of Spring* under Nagano from Verbier on DG, which allows the Q Acoustics speakers to show both what they can do with fine detail, and also how well they deliver the full drama of a work.

It's too early to tell whether these compact speakers are the 'sweet spot' of the new range, as I'm yet to hear the other 5000 Series models, but without a doubt these are highly accomplished speakers at this level, and something of a bargain. **G**

Or you could try ...

Though the Q Acoustics speakers are keenly priced, they're not exactly without competition in the £500-1000 speaker market.

Wharfedale EVO 4.2 speakers

The larger Wharfedale EVO 4.2 speakers manage to offer a three-way configuration, complete with a ribbon tweeter and a dedicated midrange unit, for the same kind of price as the 5040s, as you can discover at wharfedale.co.uk



Focal Vestia No.1 speakers

French company Focal brings its unique in-house speaker-making technology to bear in its Vestia No.1 standmount model, which uses a 'slatefiber' mid/bass cone made from recycled carbon fibre, and an M-shaped inverted dome tweeter to deliver the treble. The leather-effect front baffles add an extra touch of style. See more at focal.com



Prodigy 1 speakers

Prodigy's an appropriate name for the new entry-level range from PMC, which brings together the company's experience in the professional audio market with its heritage of excellent domestic speakers to create designs offering phenomenal levels of performance for the money. Find out all about the small yet mighty Prodigy 1 at pmc-speakers.com

