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Q Acoustics 5040

New cone technology and a shift in sonic character

From our point of view, Q Acoustics appears to be a prisoner of its own success. The brand burst onto the scene back in 2006 with a terrific range of budget speakers, and each new generation of that original range has reinforced the company's reputation as a budget speaker maestro. The truckload of five-star reviews and awards gained over that time have helped too.

The trouble with such success at lower price points is that it has led to a lack of appreciation for the brand's more upmarket products. The £3599 Concept 500 floorstanders are a great example. These are truly excellent speakers for the money, in many ways better than alternatives that cost thousands more; but, in the UK at least, the retail price is lower now than it was on launch in 2017. Given how much prices have risen across the board over the last six years that tells its own story.

The new 5000 series fills the gap between the budget 3000 models and the more premium Concept range. At launch, it consists of two standmounters, two floorstanders, a dedicated centre speaker and a subwoofer. The Q Acoustics 5040 is the smaller of the two towers, and at 97cm high and just 18cm wide is the right kind of size to slip into most rooms without being obtrusive.

Same shape, different drivers

These floorstanders use the company's favoured twin-mid/bass-driver-with-a-tweeter-in-the-middle layout, which has produced good results in terms of dispersion and integration in previous models. In the 5040, however, those mid/bass drivers are a brand-new design that uses what Q Acoustics calls a Continuous Curved Cone. This new driver has a geometry that is claimed to marry the rigidity advantages of a standard conical cone profile with the high-frequency break-up characteristics of a more flared design.

The cone material is the company's favoured impregnated paper and the diaphragm's diameter is a pretty slim

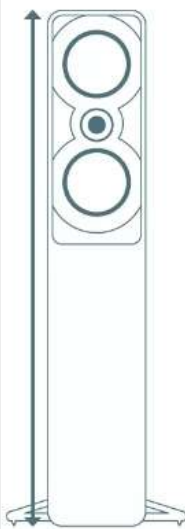
KEY FEATURES



125mm Continuous Curved Cone mid/bass driver x 2



Sensitivity: 91dB/W/m



Size: 97 x 18 x 28 cm (hwd)

The 5040 will flourish when paired with a fairly muscular amplifier

125mm. In our meetings with the engineers it becomes evident that they are really proud of this design, so don't be surprised to find it implemented in future models.

The tweeter follows company traditions by being a 25mm soft-dome that is decoupled from the front baffle to reduce any distortions caused by structural vibrations. The three drive units are linked by a relatively simple second-order crossover network that uses metallized polyester film capacitors, air core inductors and high-power wire wound resistors. The result is a speaker that is rated at just over 91dB/W/m sensitivity and has a claimed nominal impedance of 6 ohms. That impedance dips to a minimum of 3 ohms, which suggests that partnering the 5040s with a muscular amplifier like the Cambridge Audio CXA81 makes sense.

Good build quality

We have no complaints about the 5040's build and finish. Q Acoustics tends to do such things well and the story hasn't changed here. The cabinet feels rigid thanks to the 25mm thick HDF front baffle and the carefully considered internal bracing employed. The other panels are all 20mm thick MDF. Once you get the speakers out of the box you need to screw on their aluminium outriggers on the back end of the base, but beyond adding the spikes there is little more to do.

Speaker positioning isn't too much of an issue. The 5040s sound tonally balanced when placed around 40cm away from the rear wall in our 3 x 7 x 5m (hwd) listening room. You can put them even closer if you use the supplied foam bungs to block the rear-firing ports, but

the speakers' presentation loses a little fluidity this way. We get the most convincing stereo imaging with the 5040s slightly angled towards the listening position, aimed so that they cross just behind our listening position.

A break with tradition

We use our reference system of Naim ND555/555 PS DR music streamer and Burmester O88/911 MKIII amplifier for some of the testing but also use more price-compatible amplification such as Naim's Nait XS3 and Cambridge's CXA81 to see how the 5040 react.

Traditionally, Q Acoustics products have always proved easy-going and unfussy when it comes to system matching. We don't think that is the case any more. The front-footed 5040 are impressively transparent for the money and that means that they are quicker to show up any shortcomings further up the audio chain. If your source or amplifier is prone to aggression or brightness, these speakers will alert you to that fact. Partner them with refined electronics and you won't go far wrong.

Clarity, precision and definition

Once you get it right, these speakers serve-up an excellent sound for the money. We start with Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture* and the 5040s waste no time in impressing. They sound wonderfully clear and precise with the leading edges of notes crisply defined and rendered without any excess harshness. There is plenty of detail here from lush instrumental textures to the subtle clues that go into defining the acoustic space of the recording venue.

Tonally, these floorstanders sit just on the lean side of neutral, but not so far as

"The 5040 are even-handed performers that simply step out of the way of the music and let it shine. When partnered with care, they deliver a performance that is class-leading at this level"

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to cause issues. This presentation helps to give them plenty of agility and grip. Low-frequency notes come and go with little overhang yet lack nothing when it comes to punch and authority. We like the way these towers always sound composed and controlled, and that sense of organisation doesn't falter when the music becomes demanding.

The overture's punishing crescendos are thumped out with enthusiasm, and the 5040s stay composed even as the volume levels rise. Stereo imaging is equally impressive. Once these speakers are positioned with care, they paint a spacious, focused and nicely layered soundstage. With eyes closed, we can easily locate the exact positions of the orchestra's various sections. That soundstage stays stable too, regardless of musical complexity.

Pacy delivery

We switch to Drake's *Under Ground Kings* and the 5040s continue to impress. They convey the music's sustained momentum with conviction while allowing us to track every word of his distinctive drawl. These towers sound fast and fun. There is plenty of attack but enough in the way of solidity and refinement to avoid accusations of aggression.

This impression of a properly rounded performer is reinforced as we work our way through our music collection. We spend an afternoon moving from Post Malone to Nitin Sawhney and then finishing with Miles Davis's *Sketches Of Spain*, and never do these speakers sound out of their comfort zone.

The Q Acoustics 5040 are even-handed performers that simply step out of the way of the music and let it shine. When partnered with care they deliver a wonderfully expressive and insightful performance that is class-leading at this level. So, is this speaker good enough to establish Q Acoustics as a force at more premium price points? Judged on ability, we certainly hope so.

A tweeter flanked by two mid/bass drivers: a favoured Q Acoustics set-up

WHAT HI-FI?

RATING ★★★★★

SOUND



BUILD



COMPATIBILITY



FOR

- Excellent clarity and detail resolution
- Expressive dynamics
- Build and finish

AGAINST

- Needs care in system matching
- Not as forgiving as previous Q Acoustics models

VERDICT

Take a bit of care with system matching and these speakers will be superbly insightful and entertaining