Q Acoustics 3020c

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In recent years, Q Acoustics has been systematically fleshing out its range so that it now stretches evenly into the thousands of pounds bracket, but it has now returned to the segment that it built its reputation on. The 3000C models replace the 3000i range; the company has decided against changing the number again, presumably to maintain the gap to the 5000 models.

The 3020c is the middle of three standmounts and represents a £100 price jump over the outgoing 3020i (HFC 441). The basic layout and dimensions of the cabinet are unchanged, but you do gain some useful refinements for the extra cash. In a change to the preceding model, the tweeter is is hermetically sealed. It's a 22mm unit that follows a classic Q Acoustics pattern of a soft dome tweeter that features a prominent outer roll to it. The company has also bolstered the isolation behind the baffle and lowered the crossover point, but otherwise left it as is.

The driver it crosses over to is all new, however. It is a variation on the Continuous Curve Cone (C3) that we first saw in the 5000 Series. As the name suggests, this cone dispenses with the centre dust cap and uses a specially calculated curve that merges the benefits of a traditional straight conic cone with the high/midrange frequency control of a flared cone. In the 3020c it's 120mm across and is augmented by a rear-firing bass port.

The cabinet follows principles that were adhered to in the 3000i models and augmented in the 5000 Series. This means there is no constrained layer damping involved, but the cabinet itself is a fairly solid object with its distinctive radius edges and relatively deep profile. This shape, combined with the narrow footprint of the 3020c means that the optional £175 stand that Q Acoustics offers is likely to be a decent purchase.

Even allowing for the higher price point that the 3020c contests, the level of fit and finish on show here is entirely in keeping with the competition it finds itself arranged against. Four finishes are offered; two wood effect laminates together with White or Graphite. A prominent trim ring helps to make the front panel look a little more interesting but, in the grey finish especially, it's still a fairly subdued piece of design. You do get magnetically secured grilles as standard, though, and details like the bespoke speaker terminals are nicer than on some rivals at many multiples the price.

Sound quality

The single most important thing that the newest iteration of the 3020 does is not regress over anything that its predecessors did so well. There may not be a gelcore cabinet in use here but, so long as the 3020c is placed with a gentle level of toe-in relative to our listening position a little over 2m away, it vanishes very effectively from the soundstage it creates. It's a usefully spacious presentation too considering that this is a fairly small speaker. Fink's Beauty In Your Wake has the space it needs for the surprisingly complex presentations to open out and reveal the speaker's hidden depths.

There is also more bass on offer than the stated 60Hz lower roll-off might suggest is possible. The remarkable Vakler by Svaneborg Kardyb is delivered with far more low-end heft than you might expect while all the time managing to stay on top of the dizzying flurry of drum beats. Really lean on the Q Acoustics and some of the composure begins to wilt, but you have to be deeply unsympathetic to achieve it.

In fact, the 3020c is more than capable of keeping the more expensive 5020 (HFC 502) honest. Both speakers have genuinely convincing tonality and excellent cohesion across their two drivers. Where the more affordable model falters slightly is at the top end. The 5020's more sophisticated tweeter conspires to be both more detailed and demonstrate a little more sparkle with Public Service Broadcasting's rather lovely The Last Flight. The more expensive speaker continues to justify its existence even though the 3020c can push it close.

Conclusion

Crucially, though, the 3020c does enough to sit in the £400 speaker category like it belongs there rather than because inflation has pushed it there against its will. The detail changes that Q Acoustics has made to its long-running budget champ are good enough to ensure that it still delivers a huge chunk of easily exploitable, user friendly performance at a wholly sane price point. It might have been busy towards the higher end, but Q Acoustics still knows how to cut it at the entry level. **ES**

DETAILS

Product: Q Acoustics 3020c
Type: Two-way standmount loudspeaker

FEATURES

- Inputs: 22mm silk dome tweeter
- Outputs: 120mm 'CCC' mid/bass driver
- Quoted sensitivity: 87dB/1W/1m (6ohm)