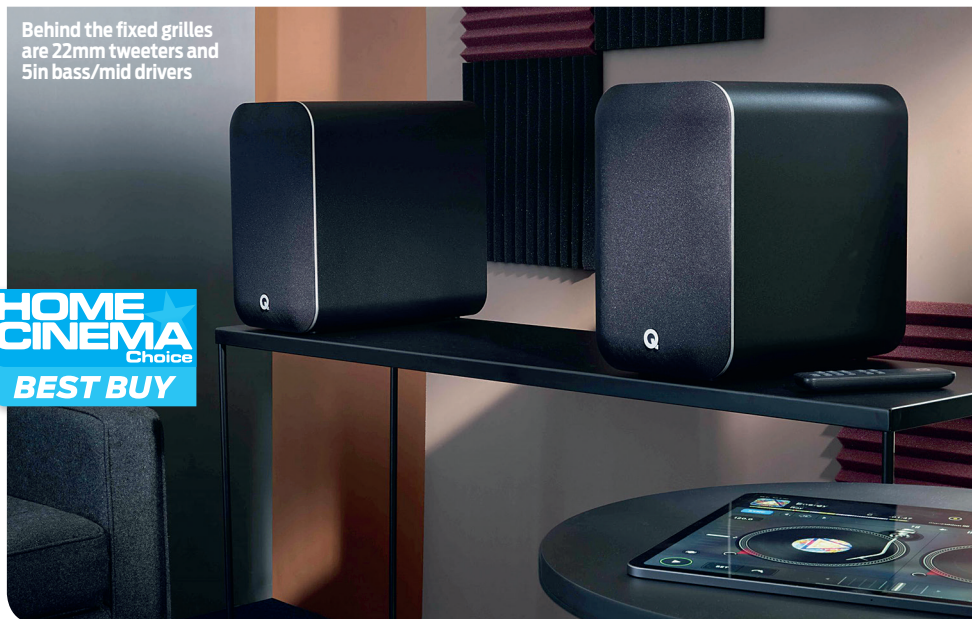


Q Acoustics M20

The Brit speaker maker has turned its attention again to compact, powered bookshelf models, and, says **Ed Selley**, cooked up a *bona fide* bargain

Behind the fixed grilles are 22mm tweeters and 5in bass/mid drivers

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BEST BUY



AS WELL AS multiple ranges of conventional passive speakers, Q Acoustics has been involved in making self-contained speaker solutions for most of the time it has been in business since 2006. The new M20 is the replacement for the long-running (but excellent) BT3, which launched in 2014, and takes its place below the more recent, and more sophisticated, Active 200 that we looked at in *HCC* #319.

As you might expect given the difference in price – £400 versus £1,500 for the Active 200 – the design of the M20 is far simpler overall and follows a template that's become popular of late. One of the two speakers contains an amplifier, which powers both the speaker it's in and the partnering one; the two enclosures connect via a run of supplied cable to speaker terminals on the passive unit. The amplifier suffers a little from 'optimistic

quoted power output syndrome' (it's rated at 2 x 65W peak, and 32W continuous), but the spec that matters is the claimed 20 watts per channel at a distortion of below 0.2% THD.

The cabinets have two-way driver arrays that partner one 22mm soft dome

tweeter with one 5in bass/mid unit augmented by a rear-facing bass reflex port.

Connectivity, found on the rear of the active speaker, is very thorough considering the price point. There is an analogue stereo input on RCA, perhaps for a disc player or phono stage/turntable, plus an optical audio connection for digital sources, including a TV (there's no HDMI ARC connection, however). The M20 then has a USB-B input that supports PCM files to 24-bit/192kHz.

These wired inputs are accompanied by Bluetooth 5.0 with aptX, aptX HD, aptX Low Latency, SBC and AAC; that is to say, everything bar the 'specials.'

The M20 is something of a visual cross between Q Acoustics' 3000i cabinets and the more visually striking Active 200. It is (for the moment at least) only available in a black finish and this, in combination with the fixed grilles, makes it quite a dark and sober-looking product, albeit well made and finished. Setup is quick (and you can select the master speaker to be the left or right channel to better suit where your connecting hardware is located) and the combination of controls on the master speaker and IR handset make it simple to operate.

Twenty's plenty

Connected to my LG OLED TV via optical, this stereo package impressed from the moment I started using it. 20 watts might not sound like

SPECIFICATIONS

DRIVERS: 1 x 5in doped paper bass/mid-range, plus 1 x 22mm soft dome tweeter per speaker **ONBOARD POWER (CLAIMED):** 2 x 32W **CONNECTIONS:** 1 x USB; 1 x optical digital audio input; line-level stereo RCA input; 3.5mm audio input **DIMENSIONS:** 170(w) x 279(h) x 296(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 5.5kg (powered); 5.1kg (passive)

FEATURES: Bluetooth 5.0 (aptX, aptX HD, aptX Low Latency, SBC and AAC compatibility); 24-bit/192kHz over USB/optical; remote handset; foam bungs supplied for bass reflex ports; 55Hz-22kHz claimed frequency response

a huge figure but here it is absolutely plenty. With Netflix's flawed but charming *Cowboy Bebop* remake, the M20 shows off a natural width to its presentation that ensures the experience is immersive even though it's coming from just two cabinets. Dialogue is clear and well established centre-stage. The sense of detail and cohesion is excellent.

Music replay is arguably even better, as hooking up the M20 via USB to my Roon Nucleus music server reveals a level of performance that is extremely impressive for a relatively affordable speaker. Listening to a Qobuz stream of W.H Lung's synthpop album *Vanities*, the system brings genuine weight and drive to the lower registers while handling vocals in a nuanced and tonally believable manner. Push it very hard and it hardens up a little, but you have to be fairly merciless for this to be a problem. At more sensible levels this is a rich and engaging performer with a surprising amount of bass left to it.

More than anything else though, the M20 is fun. It latches onto rhythms, and has an unburstable joy to the way it sounds that I've found hugely enjoyable. This fundamental liveliness is just as present on the Bluetooth input as it is USB.

In for the long haul

Final evidence of the M20's five-star status is the fact I've spent longer listening to it than is technically necessary for the purpose of this review. In some ways, it's a more compelling product than the pricier, smarter-looking Active 200. It can't do quite as much, but the level of performance and functionality it offers for £400 makes it an absolute bargain. Those in the market for a powered stereo system should rush to audition ■

AV INFO

PRODUCT: Stereo wireless/wired powered speaker system

POSITION: Q Acoustics' entry-level powered model

PEERS: Klipsch R-41PM; Ruark MR1 MkII

HCC VERDICT



Q Acoustics M20

→ £400 → www.qacoustics.co.uk

WE SAY: The M20 combines a comprehensive specification with outstanding performance, and all for just £400.