

Q Acoustics 3010i | Stereo speakers | £199 | whf.cm/3010i

View offers

Entry-level babies sound all grown-up

FOR Refined, detailed and energetic; low-end fullness

AGAINST Lack the scale or dynamic reach of larger rivals



We now live in a world where the latest smartphones come with almost four-figure price tags and Cadbury Freddos no longer cost 10p. In comparison, £200 for a pair of hi-fi speakers seems a more attractive price than ever.

There has long been a decent choice at this price point, but as the years have passed the competition has become more intense as manufacturers manage to squeeze even better performances out of their speakers.

Take the Q Acoustics 3010i, for example. These bookshelf speakers were a key part of the company's five-star 3000 AV package. But now there's a new and improved version to replace it, the 3010i. These are the babies in Q Acoustics' recently launched Q3000i range, and among the finest speakers you can buy for this money.

A mature sound

The extra 'i' appears to have brought an extra sonic maturity with it, making its predecessors sound comparatively crude and less detailed in comparison. The 3010i exercise greater clarity and refinement, and prize open the soundstage that bit wider for a more convincingly layered presentation. And it makes all the difference.

We play Lord Huron's *When The Night Is Over*, and discover that the bass plucks are more textured than on the 3010s. More than that, there's also a more obvious

fullness that you wouldn't expect from a speaker of such small proportions.

That rich substance extends right the way up the frequency range, past the fleshed out midrange that's more than transparent enough to get under Ben Schneider's raspy tones and into a treble that's precise and has just the right amount of sparkle. We are already well acquainted with Q Acoustics' refined sonic signature, and that manifests itself here too.

Musically, these speakers hold everything together well - even the

"That rich substance extends right the way up the frequency range into a precise treble"

kaleidoscopic disco funk patterns that define Spoon's latest album, *Hot Thoughts*. The track *Can I Sit Next To You* is an animated composition with fits and spurts of dynamism, and the Q Acoustics start and stop each note punctually.

The track's poised yet playful tone parallels the speaker's temperament. The delivery may not be as snappy or liberated as rivals such as the Dali Spektor 2s, our current Award-winners, but this measured yet fun approach is still enough to inspire fervent foot-tapping.

However, the Qs' soundstage is more confined than those of physically larger speakers, such as the Dalis and Monitor Audio Monitor 100s. The 3010i's less spacious, smaller-scale presentation doesn't work in their favour when fed a thinner recording such as The Psychedelic Furs' *Pretty In Pink* via Tidal. The track sounds a touch cluttered and the 3010i can't quite match their rivals for scale or dynamic freedom either. To their credit, the 3010i still manage to deliver a cohesive and entertaining performance.

Ringling the changes

Such a performance hasn't come out of the blue though. Q Acoustics has done some substantial tinkering, mostly to the cabinet. The brand's point-to-point (P2P) cabinet bracing aims to make the cabinets quieter by adding extra support to the parts of the box that require stiffening.

The corners of the cabinets have been internally braced, too, with the baffle

Some key cabinet revisions - including a 25 per cent increase in size - have given these speakers a performance boost



Terminal sockets are now embedded in the cabinet itself

further thickened to provide a better, more solid support for both the tweeter and the mid/bass driver.

Q Acoustics has also replaced the traditional terminal panel cut-outs with embedded sockets within the cabinet. Unlike those used with the previous 3010s, banana plugs can now satisfyingly be pushed all the way into their sockets.

A growing family

Like the Q3020i standmounters further up the range, the Q3010i have increased in size, and are now 25 per cent larger than their predecessors. There's a revised crossover, too.

As with other models in the range, the Q3010i have a 20mm soft-dome tweeter, decoupled from the baffle via a suspension system to isolate it from vibrations from the 10cm mid/bass driver, which sits directly underneath it.

KEY FEATURES



Dimensions: 15 x 25 x 25cm



4 x finishes



Magnetic speaker grilles

The speakers' four rubber feet might make them difficult to fit properly on some stands - that's where Q Acoustics' new Q 3000FSI stands come in - although they will work well placed on a bookshelf, or even mounted on a wall. Here, Q Acoustics would no doubt point you to its Q 3000WB wall bracket.

Up against the wall

Unlike *Dirty Dancing*, these babies can be put in the corner. While it may be tempting to parade their slimline, curvaceous cabinets (available in grey, walnut, black or white finishes) and chrome driver surrounds in the middle of a room, the 3010i work best with some wall backing. We find this firms up their midrange and bass frequencies for the best tonal balance.

The 3010i may not be the most sonically versatile standmounters at this price point,

but they're certainly among the most engaging and musical.

And if the improvements made in the 3010i over the 3010s is mirrored over the rest of the range, including the (bigger) 3020i standmounters and 3050i floorstanders, Q Acoustics' Q3000i range has a very good chance of rounding up more five stars reviews in the future.

WHAT HI-FI? says

Rating ★★★★★

SOUND ★★★★★

COMPATIBILITY ★★★★★

BUILD ★★★★★

VERDICT Great budget bookshelf speakers for smaller living spaces

SYSTEM BUILDER

Total build £549



TURNTABLE

Pro-Ject Elemental ★★★★★ £150

This distinctive turntable offers an entertaining sound and solid build quality. It's good value for money too (see p32)



STEREO AMP

Onkyo A-9010 ★★★★★ £200

A real bargain, this old-timer remains one of the most musically satisfying budget amplifiers we've heard for years