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Q ACOUSTICS CONCEPT 50 5.1/£4,225



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BEST BUY

Mark Craven believes Q Acoustics' mid-level Concept speaker package was worth waiting for

Concept hits the sweet spot

It was almost a decade ago that Q Acoustics launched its Concept range. At the time, the relatively new UK brand was known for affordable loudspeakers, and the 2013 arrival of the Concept 20 bookshelf was billed as a step toward the high-end. Okay, it was still on the right side of pricey, but later on in 2017 came floorstanders (the Concept 500s) at £4,000 a pair.

Ever since then, the Concept range – Q Acoustics' flagship proposition – has had a curious gap between its entry-level and premium points. But not anymore.

Announced towards the end of last year, the Concept 50 floorstander, Concept 30 standmount and Concept 90 centre speaker occupy that once-vacant space. They're a step-up from the Concept 20 standmount and '40 floorstander, and a step-down from the Concept 300 standmount and '500 floorstander. Those other models remain current and on sale. These new speakers don't replace anything, they just flesh out the lineup.

Q Acoustics has used these three fresh speakers to assemble a multichannel 5.1 package, putting the '50 floorstanders up front, and the '30s on surround. There's no sign yet of a smaller bundle using the standmounts both front and back, but there's no reason you couldn't assemble one yourself.

So solid crew

As usual, the design of these new speakers has been informed by what's come before, most notably in their cabinet construction, which adheres to the basic concept that gave the range its name. Right from the off, this lineup was engineered with a strong emphasis on rock-solid, acoustically inert enclosures, and nothing has changed.

All three models feature the same Gelcore cabinet design that first appeared on the Concept 20 bookshelf. Here, two layers of MDF sandwich a third layer of a non-setting gel. The thinking here is that extraneous high-frequency cabinet noise is damped.

Then there are the low frequencies to be tackled, which comes in the form of Q Acoustics' P2P (Point to Point) bracing on the '30 and '50. Here, we're told, Finite Element Analysis and laser interferometry is used to identify specific points of the cabinet susceptible to resonances, which are then selectively braced. None of this is apparent

from the outside, of course, but Q Acoustics will show you heat map-style graphics that it says highlight the benefits of its P2P system. Or, like me, you can just give the cabinets a good wrap on the knuckles and notice how utterly non-reverberant they sound.

Another architectural trick, borrowed directly from the Concept 500, is the use of Helmholtz Pressure Equalizer tubes on the Concept 50. These aim to negate internal standing waves in the floorstander that might otherwise cause unwanted bass bloom.

While the cabinets themselves have a kind of 'Greatest Hits' vibe, the speaker drivers and crossovers are entirely new, developed specifically for the range. In keeping with the rock-solid ethos, Q Acoustics describes them as being 'designed as an integral part of the mechanical structure of the cabinet'. To this end, both the coated paper 5in bass/mid and 1in dome tweeter assemblies are mounted on a 3mm-thick, damped aluminium plate, fixed to the

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
Floorstanding 5.1 speaker system

POSITION:
Q Acoustics' premium home cinema bundle

PEERS:
Focal Chora; B&W 600 S2; Klipsch Reference Premiere

1. The Concept 50 5.1 set marries the floorstanders with new '30 standmount and '90 centre, plus the Q B12 subwoofer

2. Gloss silver is a finish option, as well as black or white





cabinet by spring-tensioned studs. The tweeter then gets a die-cast chassis that is 'hermetically sealed and mechanically isolated', and outputs into a shallow waveguide. The bass/mid, meanwhile, is also given a die-cast chassis, and borrows voice coil and suspension ideas from the Concept 500.

A final new feature worth highlighting is the floorstander's supporting feet. These feature curved, chrome wings that screw into the base plate, and can then be fitted with studs or spikes. They provide a good, wide footing, but don't be surprised if the speaker itself still has a bit of wobble: Q Acoustics' new base plate, which also acts as a house for the crossover network, features a suspension system to isolate it from the speaker above, and allows for a 'calculated amount of movement'. It can be locked in place, using a supplied allen key, if you wish.

All three new Concepts are bass-reflex designs with rear ports (two on the centre speaker). Foam bungs are provided; with all the cabinets setup quite near (around 20cm) from rear walls, I discovered these could be useful in keeping a check on bass performance.

Looking good

If you ask me, Q Acoustics has never released an ugly speaker. Its designs have always had something about them, even its angular M3 and M4 soundbars. And on the loudspeaker side, its long-running use of curved corner cabinets and white finishes has leant them a clean-lined, contemporary feel.

The Concept 50s share some of the look of the costlier Concept 500s, but do away with the rear-end veneer panels. They're therefore perhaps more of a kin to the company's 3000i series, albeit considerably more expensive. Simply put, they look gorgeous.



Finish options are the aforementioned white, plus black or silver. Natural wood is out, as that's so last decade.

The subwoofer part of this package is the Q B12, a familiar face as it's been doing bass duties on the brand's larger AV setups for some years now (see *HCC #256*). Q Acoustics used to (and still does) make slim subs better suited to tucking away in a living room, but these were often deemed to be letting the side down a little when it came to high-impact home cinema, so it went away and came up with a conventional model with 12in driver and 220W Class D amplifier. Finish options for this are black or white in gloss or matte, but this £4,225 package includes a gloss model to suit the other speakers.

Full-bodied

If you want this system described in one word... well, I'd struggle. But if you can cope with two, I'd opt for 'rich' and 'meaty'. Throughout my listening, I never stopped admiring how this six-pack brought scale, weight and heft to film soundtracks. And this isn't just a case of copious LFE; it's the way all the passive models sound generous and full-bodied themselves. This extends from a bass presence with a degree of warmth through to a mid-range with plenty of nous when it comes to textures and nuance. There's still scads of detail retrieval, but the top-end sounds somewhat smoother and less

clinical than other speakers that aim for ruthless transparency. This makes the array eminently listenable and unfatiguing, but importantly there's still slam and punch to go with it.

Used with an Arcam AVR850, the speaker's bass drivers seemed to be held in a firm grip and responsive to power. Yet even when I swapped to a far less gutsy Marantz NR1710 receiver, the Concept 50s' admirable sensitivity came to the fore. These are easy to drive.

With the core 5.1 soundtrack to *Freaky* (Sky Cinema), the system brought real articulation to Foley effects and latched on to the orchestral score. String stabs to

'I never stopped admiring how Q Acoustics' six-pack brought scale, weight and heft to film soundtracks'

accompany jump scares were fulsome and layered, the instruments well separated, while even mundane soundtrack elements, like a door closing or footsteps, had a solid feel to them.

This big-boned sound carries into the centre channel. At 55cm wide this unit is large enough to demand dedicated mounting space, but with that size comes robust, focused dialogue. This isn't merely about intelligibility, it's about sounding natural too. Vince Vaughn's rapid-fire patter in *Freaky* varies between gruff and panicky, and these nuances are all conveyed with aplomb.

The pack's seamless LCR stage often does most of the heavy lifting, but it's worth emphasising how accomplished the smaller bookshelf speakers are at finishing off the surround field. They share the same lush tone as the bigger cabinets, and sound impressively large, so that when effects transition from front to back, or a film score plays from all corners, you feel completely engrossed. The attack-on-the-house scene in *The Book of Eli* (Blu-ray), with its maelstrom of panned bullet effects, found the five speakers creating a cohesive, laced-up soundfield.

I'd be wrong to describe the Q B12 subwoofer as a weak link, even if it's the least immediately impressive element of the setup. It does sound a shade less tight than some rivals around this price point, and not quite as ready to really hammer home a bass transient. But it dovetails brilliantly with the rest of the array, adding appreciable low-octave presence to the already impressive Concept 50s, and coming into its own when a soundtrack demands it, particularly with details in the upper bass range, but also dropping deep to render rumbles and explosions. When flaming comet fragments pound the highway in disaster flick *Greenland* (Prime Video), the Q B12 brought a glorious level of viscerality to the chaos.

Brilliant with Bernstein

If you want to also use your AV rig to listen to music, this system puts you in very safe hands. That smoothness of treble mentioned earlier works brilliantly to take the edge

SPECIFICATIONS

Concept 50

DRIVE UNITS: 2 x 5in paper cone bass/mid; 1 x 1in soft dome tweeter **ENCLOSURE:** Rear-ported bass reflex with Helmholtz Pressure Equalizer technology **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 42Hz-30kHz **SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 90.5dB **POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED):** 150W **IMPEDANCE (CLAIMED):** 6ohm (nominal); 3.6ohm (minimum) **DIMENSIONS (INCLUDING FEET):** 1,025(h) x 418(w) x 319(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 22.9kg

Concept 30

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 5in paper cone bass/mid; 1 x 1in soft dome tweeter **ENCLOSURE:** Rear-ported bass reflex **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 54Hz-30kHz **SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 87dB **POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED):** 100W **IMPEDANCE (CLAIMED):** 6ohm (nominal); 3.9ohm (minimum) **DIMENSIONS:** 284(h) x 180(w) x 319(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 7.9kg

Concept 90

DRIVE UNITS: 2 x 5in paper cone bass/mid; 1 x 1in soft dome tweeter **ENCLOSURE:** Dual rear-ported bass reflex **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 67Hz-30kHz **SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 90dB **POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED):** 150W **IMPEDANCE (CLAIMED):** 6ohm (nominal); 3.7ohm (minimum) **DIMENSIONS:** 184(h) x 550(w) x 259(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 12.3kg

Q B12 (subwoofer)

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 12in long-throw bass driver **ONBOARD POWER (CLAIMED):** 220W Class D amp **ENCLOSURE:** Sealed **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 28Hz-300Hz **REMOTE CONTROL:** No **DIMENSIONS:** 400(h) x 400(w) x 440(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 21.5kg **FEATURES:** LFE input; stereo line input; phase, crossover and gain control; auto on

TESTED WITH



THE BOOK OF ELI: This post-apocalyptic riff on the Western genre features Denzel Washington kicking ass, Gary Oldman chewing scenery and Tom Waits in a great cameo. It also has a bonkers DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix. A 4K/Atmos do-over would be welcome, even if the heavily graded visuals might not suit the HDR format.



off poorly mastered tracks, so that even something as rough and raucous as Aerosmith's *Rocks* album (CD) begs you to settle down for a long listen. With better recorded material, such as the recent *West Side Story* soundtrack (Tidal), the Concepts showcase their ability to make all manner of instruments sound almost tangibly in the room. Stereo playback does find a slight limit to the floorstanders' soundstage spread far and wide, something that was less apparent with movies. But imaging and focus between the cabinets is superb. Where I'd like to see the Concept system taken next is into the Atmos arena. I'm aware that Q Acoustics sells a variety of in-ceiling models, but some style- and timbre-matched Atmos modules, to put atop either the Concept 50 or '30, would be the icing on the cake. But even without that top layer, this 5.1 package is sweet enough ■

3. The centre speaker mirrors the driver complement of the Concept 50 floorstanders

4. The new bass/mid and tweeter units are mounted on a 3mm-thick aluminium plate

5. Stand options for the Concept 30 include Q Acoustics' four-legged Tensegrity model

HCC VERDICT



Q Acoustics Concept 50 5.1

→ £4,225 → www.qacoustics.com

WE SAY: This package offers a brilliantly big, rich, moreish soundstage, and one where the surrounds and centre don't play second fiddle. Gorgeous styling and immaculate build, too.