



Power up:
Chord Electronics' Mojo 2's a winner

BUYING GUIDE
100+ essential components p109

Space invader:
Sentry Apollo over-ear, Planar-magnetic cans



Hi-Fi Choice

PASSION FOR SOUND Issue No. 488 May 2022

GO WIRELESS!

GROUP TEST
We ditch the cables and put six networked speakers through their paces

NEWS EXTRA
Launches from Sonus faber, iFi Audio, Marantz, Bowers & Wilkins, Yamaha and more...

RSD JUNE DROP
Vinyl goodies from The Kinks, Miles Davis, Pearl Jam, Dio & Prince...

Smooth Operator
Roksan's Attessa turntable with built-in phono preamp!

BOXING CLEVER
We investigate the science behind speaker cabinet design



SHARP PRACTICE!



Matrix Audio X-Sabre 3 DAC/streamer cuts it

WIZARDS WITH OZ



We humbly bow before the awesome Black Sabbath

BEST IN CLASS



Rogers' LS3/5A SE classic BBC standmount stuns

£5.75 05
9 770955 111144
MAY 2022 PRINTED IN THE UK



Q Acoustics Q Active 200 **£1,500**



Employing BMRs instead of conventional moving coils, the Q is the most technologically advanced here

► DETAILS

PRODUCT
Q Acoustics
Q Active 200

ORIGIN
UK/China

TYPE
2.5-way reflex
loaded design

WEIGHT
7.5kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
170 x 284 x 290mm

FEATURES
● 58mm BMR
tweeter; 58mm
mid/bass BMR;
114mm bass driver
● 1x pair RCA phono;
Ethernet; optical
digital; HDMI; sub;
Bluetooth
● Claimed power
handling:
2x 100W RMS
DISTRIBUTOR
Armour Home

Balanced Mode Radiators are not a gimmick; they're the result of decades of research and a spin-off from military research stretching back many decades. The technology was popularised by NXT, which has licensed BMRs for many applications. The benefits include a wide bandwidth and propagation of sound across the 180° plain; the drivers are way less directional than normal speakers.

Each Q Active 200 loudspeaker has two BMRs, each with its own DSP and amplifier channel. The upper one runs from 20kHz down to 5kHz; the lower only works up to 5kHz. A rear baffle-mounted driver takes care of low frequencies. Q Acoustics offers optional, stylish and expensive stands; conventional ones work well too. Class D amplifiers deliver a claimed 100W RMS per channel. Switchable bass compensation is fitted to the rear of each speaker.

Aside from the B&W, this is the only system to feature a break-out box – although this one comes bundled –

which brings great connectivity. It's the only one here to have proper analogue RCA phono inputs too, which can be switched between line-level and the built-in phono stage. Ethernet, optical and HDMI are also here, plus a sub out. Each speaker needs its own power supply, as does the box, but there's no physical tether.

Setup is first done via the Google Home app. The Q Active app then adds various features, but not streaming – for that you'll need Bubble UPnP or similar. The touch controls are handy, but like the KEF's are a little slow to act. There's a supplied remote, plus voice control via Google Chromecast and Amazon Alexa.

Sound quality

This system comes very close to being the best sounding here, despite being much cheaper than some. It gives a very 'hi-fi-like' listening experience, with a tonally neutral, well-balanced, smooth sound that audiophiles will appreciate, yet isn't boring in the least to hear. It also has excellent stereo

imaging and decent bass weight, making it ideal for all types of music.

Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony* sounds lovely – open, expansive, atmospheric and three dimensional, with a nice tone to strings and brass and lots of inner detail. At the same time, the music flows well and doesn't fall to pieces on dynamic crescendos. The speakers have the classic, slightly laid-back sound of speakers with BMR drivers – akin to electrostatics, in my opinion – because they lack the rough edges of conventional drivers. But once you're used to this, you can enjoy the system's 'strength in depth'; it just does so much right.

Although much of the listening is streamed or via the NAS, the sound is

It has a 'hi-fi-like' sound that's tonally neutral, smooth and well balanced

even better if you use the direct digital input. The techno of *Rave Fantasy* by Manix reveals that this speaker is capable of great things in terms of accuracy, speed and grip; the Q Active 200 really pushes out lots of sound all around in a spookily non-directional way. Rush's *Vital Signs* via Qobuz is excellent too, with smooth but insightful treble, loads of midband detail and a crisp, tuneful bass. Only the much pricier B&W betters it in this respect.

There is a big difference between the Bluetooth input and UPnP; lesser speakers in this group tend to mask the fact that the former is, in sonic terms, very much the poor relation. Not here, though, as Donny Hathaway's *Little Ghetto Boy* is much more open and expansive via the latter input than it is via the former. Overall, this is superb at the price and a truly nice surprise ●

HI-FI Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY



LIKE: Great sonics; design; connectivity

VALUE FOR MONEY



DISLIKE: Nothing at the price

BUILD QUALITY



WE SAY: Surprisingly super-sounding sonics

FEATURES



OVERALL



Group test verdict

After countless hours of comparisons, **Nick Tate** thrashes out the final ranking order and finds a worthy wireless winner

SOMETIMES IT'S HARD to come up with a clear pecking order in a *Group Test*, at others it's easy. In this case it's the latter as these speakers differ in their ability and value.

In sixth place is Klipsch's The Fives McLaren Edition; it's a nice enough product but the go-faster racing stripes don't add enough to justify the price. The plain non-McLaren version is way better value. The system itself is feisty and fun to listen to, but its lack of UPnP functionality holds it back.

In fifth place is Naim's Mu-so 2nd Generation. It's probably best to think of it as 'the world's greatest soundbar'.

It is brilliant at doing what it's designed for, which is to give a super-slick access point for music in a small room, our only grump is that it's getting a bit expensive.

KEF's LS50 Wireless II comes fourth. Again, it is pricier than its predecessor and while better, struggles to offer good value considering the quality of some of the competition. On its own it's a lovely package that is slick and powerful, but others do more for less.

Third is the Pearl Akoya by Cabasse. It's expensive, but sounds and looks it. If you're seeking something that's not your average run of the mill box,

think about a pair of these. They are very well made and cleverly engineered, and many will love the quirky French design, too.

In second place is B&W's Formation Duo. This is the best sounding system here by some way, and the most versatile in terms of multi-room and connectivity if you buy the optional hub. It's the only package here that you can truly sit back and enjoy without feeling it's 'not bad for a wireless system'. It is real hi-fi, that happens to be built a different way. But it's very expensive, unlike the winner...



WINNER

A brave and radical design, Q Acoustics Q Active 200 implements BMR technology to give a great-sounding yet relatively affordable system. It's hard to fault in any way - everything from its connectivity to ease of setup and use is super, and it sounds second only to the B&W.



Make/model Bowers & Wilkins Formation Duo



Cabasse Pearl Akoya



KEF LS50 Wireless II



Klipsch The Fives McLaren Ed.



Naim Mu-so 2nd Generation



Q Acoustics Q Active 200

	Bowers & Wilkins Formation Duo	Cabasse Pearl Akoya	KEF LS50 Wireless II	Klipsch The Fives McLaren Ed.	Naim Mu-so 2nd Generation	Q Acoustics Q Active 200
Price	£4,000	£2,950	£2,500	£1,350	£1,450	£1,500
Sound	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Value	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Build	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Overall	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
	The best-sounding speaker system here by a fair way, it's also the most expensive	French styling meets clever engineering to create a great sounding package	High-tech system, great connectivity and functionality; decent sound too	Feisty and fun, with added racing stripes. Sonically off the pace in this group, though	The king of one-box systems oozes class, but is no sonic match for regular designs	Inspired, high-tech design, stellar sound for the money and great functionality
Website	bowerswilkins.com	cabasse.com	kef.com	klipsch.com	naimaudio.com	qacoustics.co.uk

Key features

	Bowers & Wilkins Formation Duo	Cabasse Pearl Akoya	KEF LS50 Wireless II	Klipsch The Fives McLaren Ed.	Naim Mu-so 2nd Generation	Q Acoustics Q Active 200
BMR	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
Hub	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
MM phono	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
UPnP	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Class	D	AB	ABD	D	D	D
MQA	No	No	Yes	No	No	No

TRY WITH THESE

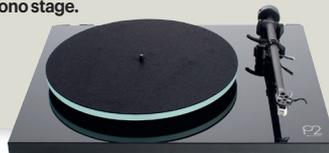
CD PLAYER: Cambridge Audio CXC £400 HFC 401

Most of the systems here have digital inputs, so a great way of playing 'legacy' media is a CD transport. The neat-looking CXC is the cheapest high-quality silver-disc spinner we know, and cracking value too.



TURNTABLE: Rega Planar 2 £475 HFC 413

This is the latest in a long line of brilliant budget Rega turntables and comes with a decent Rega Carbon MM cartridge pre-installed. It's even good enough to work with the B&W Formation Duo, via the optional hub and a phono stage.



MUSIC SOFTWARE: Roon From \$9.99 HFC 448

Roon's a smart interface designed to make streamed music far easier to organise and access. It gives a truly immersive and luxurious user experience - it's expensive, but hard not to live with once you've tried it.

