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Issue No. 491

August 2022

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AUGUST 2022 £5.75
9 770955 111144 08
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Higher Concept

The Concept 50 puts the basics of the outstanding Concept 30 into a floorstander.

Ed Selley finds out if it is as talented

Q Acoustics didn't exactly rush into the £1,000-£2,000 speaker segment, but when the Concept 30 did break cover it more than met expectations. Coming in at a little less than many key rivals, it proceeded to show a clean pair of heels to most. The Concept 50 follows both the same engineering practises as the 30 and the processes by which Q Acoustics floorstanders differ from standmounts. The same pairing of a 25mm soft dome tweeter and 125mm mid/bass driver are employed here. These follow a similar basic practise as the rest of the Q Acoustics range, but have been specifically developed

for this application. Of course, the key difference between the standmount and the floorstander is that there are now two 125mm mid/bass drivers that run together in a 2.5-way configuration. Like other Q Acoustics floorstanders, these are positioned above and below the tweeter.

The change to the frequency response that this doubling of drivers and the larger cabinets has achieved is not as dramatic as you might expect. The HF roll-off of the Concept 50 is unchanged from the 30 at 30kHz. The quoted low-frequency figure drops to 42Hz at +/-6dB, which is fairly conservative for a speaker this size. Sensitivity climbs to

a useful 90.5dB/W claimed figure, though, ensuring that the Concept 50 is easy to drive.

The basic construction of the cabinet is similar to the standmount and represents a halfway house between the enormously solid build of the Concept 500 (HFC 426) and 300 (HFC 486) and the long-lived Concept 20 (HFC 372) and 40 (HFC 404), which were the first outing for the 'Gelcore' principle of constrained layer damping. Here, the cabinet is a single section of Gelcore (that is to say two thin layers of MDF with a non-setting gel sandwiched between them that turns unwanted energy into heat) like the smaller speakers, but it also includes the top of the cabinet.

The cabinet is then stiffened using the principle of 'P2P' (point to point) bracing that adds reinforcement with a laser measure determining where it's really needed rather than where it's convenient. This bracing also serves as the mounting point for the drivers as a simplified version of the higher specification Concept speakers. The crossover remains at the base of the cabinet on its own metal plate intended to protect it from unwanted

The 50's carefully matched drivers result in a cohesive all-round sound

interference. A refinement that's specific to the Concept 50 and trickled down from the more expensive speakers is the fitment of a Heimholz pressure equaliser, which converts unwanted air pressure into velocity. Each cabinet has a single large rear bass port for which a foam bung is supplied to assist with air management.

The larger and taller cabinet of the Concept 50 does nothing to hurt the looks. The decision to eschew a wood veneer and instead offer lacquered black, white and grey finishes pays off brilliantly. This is instantly recognisable as a Q Acoustics speaker, but also manages to look and feel it's worth the asking price. My only dislike is the decision to fit the large outrigger at the back of the cabinet for stability. This gives the Concept 50 a huge footprint (larger than anything else I can recall testing at this price) and there's no way of fitting the spikes without it. This is a comparatively minor gripe, however, and for those people that don't tend to have multiple speakers running as I do, it will undoubtedly be less of an issue

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Q Acoustics
Concept 50

ORIGIN
UK/China

TYPE
2.5-way
floorstanding
loudspeaker

WEIGHT
22.9kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
418 x 1,025 x 319mm

FEATURES
● 25mm silk
dome tweeter
● 2x 125mm
treated paper
midbass drivers
● Quoted sensitivity:
90.5dB/1W/1m
(6ohm)

DISTRIBUTOR
Armour Home
Electronics

WEBSITE
qacoustics.co.uk

– although the Concept 50 will struggle to fit into some spaces that rivals (see box out) won't have difficulty with.

Sound quality

Perhaps the most important aspect of the Concept 50's performance is that it retains the signature ability of the more advanced cabinet Q Acoustics speakers to simply disappear from the soundstage it creates. With a little toe-in applied and placed at least 40cm from a boundary, the impression that you have from the listening position is one of drivers in free space. Not six drivers either; the 2.1kHz crossover that the Concept 50 uses and the carefully matched nature of the drivers results in an impressively cohesive all-round sound.

The result is an admirably transparent listening experience. *Dropout Boogie*, the latest effort from The Black Keys, has a carefully crafted rough-and-ready feel to its production that is achieved while still doing justice to the music itself. In the hands of the Concept 50, the effect is a portal into the studio. The lively opener *Wild Child* fizzles with energy without coming over as relentless or wearing and instruments and vocals are absolutely tonally convincing. Immediately noticeable is the bass response. In this room, the stated 42Hz figure feels fairly conservative



Sonus faber's Lumina III (HFC 469) is (at the time of writing at least) the same price as the Concept 50. It is also well made and easy to drive. In performance terms, the two can trade blows all day, with the Concept 50 being better at disappearing into the soundstage that it creates and being the more forgiving of the two models. The Lumina III hits back by offering slightly more bass extension and is a little more fun. The Lumina III is a good few centimetres narrower than the Q Acoustics at the base and this might be what makes the difference for some.



to say the least. More than outright shove, however, the Concept 50 has an impressive authority and scale.

The low piano notes in Nils Frahm's *Hammers* carry a genuine force, which helps you to appreciate the scale of the instrument. The manner in which this scale is employed is impressively well judged too. When the Q Acoustics needs to sound big, it does so – but there's no unwanted scale to smaller and more intimate material. It's part of a wider balancing act of enthusiasm and accuracy that both the Concept 30 and 50 do so well. The 50 is as happy thundering its way through the glorious *Brothers In Arms* from Tom Holkenbourg's score for *Mad Max: Fury Road* as it is capturing the angst of Eliza Shaddad's *The Woman You Want*. This is also a usefully forgiving speaker. It will make you aware if you aren't listening to a recording for the ages, but does so in such a gentle way as to ensure that no part of your collection should be off limits.

The only slight fly in the ointment is that, by an admittedly small margin, I don't find the 50 to be as expressively joyous as the 30. There is an agility and out-and-out sense of engagement to the standmount that the larger speaker never entirely replicates. How pronounced this is depends to a large extent on what you elect to use the speaker with. The relatively gentle presentation of my resident Cambridge Audio Edge A isn't the best partner, but the more energetic Rega Elicit MK5 (HFC 490) and

Exposure 3510 (HFC 485) both bring some of this liveliness back. The good news is that your amplifier need not be a powerful one; while the claimed sensitivity figure might be on the high side, this isn't a hard load to drive.

Conclusion

In fact, this is a very easy speaker to live with, full stop. While I don't feel the Concept 50 is perhaps quite as sensationally talented as the 30, it's hard to argue it is anything other than a formidable all-rounder. So long as you can accommodate its hefty outtrigger, the Concept 50 embodies the Q Acoustics ideal of everyday brilliance. It's attractive, well made, easy to drive and impressively forgiving of less-than-perfect material. Then, when you do fancy appealing to your audiophile sensibilities, it will deliver a performance that is right at the top of this price point ●

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OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★	LIKE: Balance between refinement and liveliness
VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★	DISLIKE: Fractional lack of excitement; very large footprint
BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★	WESAY: Not as magnificent as the Concept 30, this is still a formidable all-rounder
EASE OF DRIVE ★★★★★	

OVERALL

