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**Fun and finesse:**  
Q Acoustics' Concept 30 compact standmount



# Hi-Fi Choice

**PASSION FOR SOUND**

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# High concept

Q Acoustics bridges the gap between its affordable and premium ranges – borrowing from both.

**Ed Selley** judges the result

**S**ometimes, the ‘obvious’ product that a company should make can be a long time coming. The circa-£1,000 speaker market is booming and you might have thought it a natural hunting ground for Q Acoustics. Some 15 years since the introduction of its original Concept range, the company is a recognised force both at entry-level price points and – thanks to the Concept 300 (HFC 448) and 500 (HFC 426) – at more premium ones too. Until recently, the space between these two points was less well covered, but the Concept 30 is the smaller of two speakers intended to bridge this gap.

As you’d no doubt expect, the engineering that the Concept 30 employs can be seen as a gently simplified version of the more expensive 300, but that does rather underplay how much of it is all new. The 25mm soft dome tweeter and 125mm doped paper mid/bass driver

are very much in keeping with what you would expect to find in a Q Acoustics design, but have been specifically developed for this range. The focus for both has been resonance control. The tweeter is placed in a hefty metal frame that helps to drop the resonance to 700Hz (or, well beyond the point it actually operates at). Care has also been taken to limit the back pressure it experiences.

The mid/bass driver also has a large front frame to assist its relationship with the front panel. The size of the voice coil may have been increased, but – thanks to the use of copper-coated aluminium – the weight of the overall assembly has not. The quoted frequency response of the Concept 30, however, is far from spectacular; Q Acoustics claims 54Hz-30kHz at +/-6dB, but the results in room suggest that lower figures can be bettered in reality.

The cabinet also takes thinking from existing models, but combines it with

some new stuff too. The sides, rear and top are made from the ‘gelcore’ process of layers of MDF separated by a non-setting glue that absorbs vibration and converts it to heat. This is a double layer rather than the triple offering you’ll find in the larger Concept models, but it still makes for a very inert-feeling speaker. Where the Concept 30 breaks new ground is the baffle is a separate assembly made of 3mm-thick aluminium attached to the main cabinet. The lower section of the Concept 30 is also separate, taking the form of an aluminium chassis; itself made of multiple, damped layers. The crossover is placed on this ‘raft,’ isolating it from the exertions of the speaker itself.

Some other aspects of the design have been seen before. The bracing arrangement takes the same ‘point-to-point’ principle as seen in the larger speakers, but modifies the idea so one of the internal braces acts as the mounting point for the drivers. You can also bi-wire the Concept 30 and links are supplied for those that don’t wish to. The optional FS75 stand that first appeared with the Active 200 speaker is recommended, but at £325 a pair is a fairly expensive add-on and gives each speaker a considerable footprint due to the played legs it relies on for stability.

The rest of the industrial design is excellent, however. The visual cues all

## ▶ DETAILS

**PRODUCT**  
Q Acoustics  
Concept 30

**ORIGIN**  
UK/China

**TYPE**  
2-way standmount  
loudspeaker

**WEIGHT**  
7.9kg

**DIMENSIONS**  
(WxHxD):  
180 x 284 x 319mm

**FEATURES**  
● 25mm silk  
dome tweeter  
● 125mm paper  
mid/bass driver  
● Quoted sensitivity:  
87dB/1W/1m (6ohm)

**DISTRIBUTOR**  
Armour Home  
Electronics

**WEBSITE**  
qacoustics.co.uk

convey that it is unmistakably Q Acoustics, but the manner in which it's been done is wholly in keeping with the £900 price point. The decision to use a painted finish in particular is one that I think works extremely well and the silver of the review sample is a very strong choice – although more traditional black and white options are also available. The build quality is also immaculate; it is impossible to know that the front panel is a separate section by carefully examining the cabinet and everything feels carefully considered and well executed.

### Sound quality

The Concept 30 is an undeniably simple speaker to drive. In its time on test running alongside a Naim Supernait 3 (HFC 456), the amp's volume knob barely passes 9 o'clock for all but the most ballistic of listening. As well as pleasantly benign characteristics, the standmount puts in a sensational performance. The work that the company has expended on its design means that it does a fine job of creating a cohesive, consistent and entirely believable soundstage, which the cabinets themselves are able to simply disappear into.

This is a trick that benefits pretty much anything you play. With the wonderfully immediate *The Moment I Said It* by Imogen Heap, it manifests Heap as a physical presence, slap-bang in the middle in a way that feels natural but can be maddeningly hard to replicate, even with more expensive hardware. Push it firmly in the other direction and select the vastness of Daft Punk's *Recognizer*



The Concept 30 has a more ornate and sophisticated cabinet than Sonus faber's Lumina II (HFC 478), as well as superior bass and it does a better job of vanishing from the presentation. It's also better made and £100 cheaper. The Sonus faber puts up a decent fight. Its clever plinth-mounted port ensures it is less fussy about placement and there is a midrange energy it possesses that the Q Acoustics (and pretty much anything else at the price) has no real answer to. By a small margin, the Concept 30 is the better all-rounder, but the Lumina II remains a quite fabulous performer.

The gelcore cabinet design is quite beautiful



and the sound expands far beyond the physical location of the speakers while remaining no easier to tie down in the presentation itself.

With this neat attribute in place, the Concept 30 builds on it. The decision to stick with relatively 'low-tech' drivers results in a speaker that sounds consistently correct with voices and instruments. There's a uniformity to how it handles a wide spread of material that points to it being very hard to unsettle. You can argue that there are more revealing rivals at this price and there are

### An undeniably simple speaker to drive that puts in a superb performance

certainly ones that are more ebullient (see How it compares), but for the usefully unflappable ability to do justice to both excellent recordings like the 24-bit/88.2kHz download of Dead Can Dance's *Spiritchaser* without leaving the not remotely audiophile *Out Loud* by the Boom Boom Satellites sounding hard and brittle, it has no match. Even with listening levels firmly bordering on anti-social, the Concept hardens up a little, but does so only gracefully.

And it's not done there. The seamless integration of the drivers and absence of any perceived air management from the rear bass port feels fast, rhythmically engaging and, above all, fun. The glorious cover of *Rated X* by Jules Buckley and the Heritage Orchestra is a delight because the fundamental qualities it possesses work together almost perfectly. The scale of the track is well

handled ensuring the orchestra has the space it needs. Individual instruments reveal believable tonality and enough definition to be easily perceivable and, having stitched this all together, the Concept 30 then proceeds to have the whole creation positively fly along with all the carefully recaptured swagger firmly in place. Without ever sounding forced when not playing lively material, this a speaker that has absolutely no issue with enjoying itself.

### Conclusion

The Concept 30 is magnificently free of issues full stop. It places no great demands on your partnering equipment, is commendably unfussy about where you place it and it manages to look fantastic once you've done so. Q Acoustics has taken engineering and thinking that have come to define it, further tweaked the details and delivered a product that can keep any standmount I can recall testing at £1,000 honest, while saving you £100 into the bargain. The result is a sensational speaker that needs to be on any shortlist at the price ●



### Hi-FiChoice

#### OUR VERDICT

- |                                 |                                                                                                          |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>SOUND QUALITY</b><br>★★★★★   | <b>LIKE:</b> Sensational blend of accuracy, refinement and fun                                           |
| <b>VALUE FOR MONEY</b><br>★★★★★ | <b>DISLIKE:</b> Fussy and expensive stand                                                                |
| <b>BUILD QUALITY</b><br>★★★★★   | <b>WESAY:</b> An outstanding speaker that barely puts a foot wrong, the Concept 30 is a superb performer |
| <b>EASE OF DRIVE</b><br>★★★★★   |                                                                                                          |

#### OVERALL

