Q Acoustics 3050

MARTIN COLLOMS GETS VERY ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT A SURPRISINGLY INEXPENSIVE PAIR OF FLOORSTANDING LOUDSPEAKERS

"It remains sweet and unfatiguing irrespective of the complexity or loudness of the material, and it throws almost magical image depth with articulate detail throughout the frequency range"

Q Acoustics' 3050s (from £499) had been hanging around in the review queue for a while, and one never knows what to expect until a product is actually fired up. However, Steve Reichert (Q Acoustics UK brand manager) has been singing the praises of this tall slim loudspeaker for quite a while – indeed singing along with it at demonstrations.

This unusually slim design stands 1m tall on its spikes. It has a vertical driver line up that comprises a pair of 165mm frame drivers above and below a treble unit. Two wood pulp and aramid (Kevlar) fibre cones flank a 32mm soft dome tweeter with a 22mm voice-coil; the latter has a compliant anti-vibration mounting to improve treble clarity. Not as heavy as it looks, the enclosure has a new form of bracing, using stiff rods that have been strategically placed as a result of laser vibrometric analysis to link the enclosure panels. Short outriggers are used for the rear spikes to aid stability, and optional rubber caps are provided for polished floors, but the supplied steel spikes were preferred (for example, on coins or similar). Our samples did look a touch dour in their matt black faux leather finish, though happily the sound proved to be anything but.

Installation was initially complicated by deciding whether or not to install the foam port plugs at the back. The prime purpose of these is to control excess bass in difficult acoustics, and also to compensate when they might need to be sited close to a wall for room layout reasons. Certainly there was unexpected quality for the price when ports were plugged, but the sound of the *3050* unmistakeably took off once the bass ports were left unplugged.

The crossover uses high power semi-shielded inductors and is essentially a fourth-order Linkwitz/Riley configuration at a nominal 2.6kHz, which will help to optimise the phase relationships between the tweeter and bass unit. Twin terminal pairs permit bi-wiring: enthusiasts might wish to replace the terminal linking straps with pure wire. Connections may be made by any combination of 4mm plug, spade, or bare wire.

Sound Quality

Placed in free space away from boundaries and with the ports open, I began by using a classic 'reference' integrated amplifier (an Orelle *Evo 100*), alongside Denon and Creek examples for variety. However, the *3050* quickly became so entertaining that I also tried it on the end of my reference Linn/Naim system and was shocked by how well it picked up on the improvement in sound quality. It has bass power that would almost be sufficient for home theatre programme, but the stereo sound is also exuberant, dynamic and well paced.

A mark of its quality is the ability to play at almost any conceivable loudness, which the *3050* possesses in spades. It remains sweet and unfatiguing irrespective of the complexity or loudness of the material, and it throws almost magical image depth with articulate detail throughout the frequency range. Rarely is a loudspeaker so much better than its likely partnering equipment than is the case here.

Optimum sound quality and image focus was obtained with the grilles removed, the speakers set on spikes, and aligned so that you could just see down the inner sides of the speakers. (Incidentally the

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grilles were rather better behaved than usual, with only a modest loss in quality when fitted.)

Once one has settled down, taking in the mildly lush, large scale effect that's even a little rich at first, a massive enveloping soundstage takes hold, with good width, surprising depth, fine ambience, and stable focus. Vocals were highly articulate and unstressed, and the whole was imbued with natural timbres and rich detail. It played all kinds of music – rock, pop, jazz and classical – with aplomb, and had that rare quality of making friends with your ears. It could play at ridiculously high levels without strain, and also sounded better timed and more upbeat than much of the competition.

Conclusions

If there was ever proof of my contention that a combination of high sensitivity with a high impedance loading can make for a better sound, then this is it. Overall this design has to be considered a Meisterstück – a masterpiece in its class – so well blended is the mix of skilful engineering for the price. Voicing the ingredients to give a great sound with all types of music shows excellent taste, and there's no artifice, cunning, or tweaking. Here we see a really skilled design at a remarkably moderate price, so the Q Acoustics 3050 is an amazingly accomplished, highly musical Best Buy.

Test Results

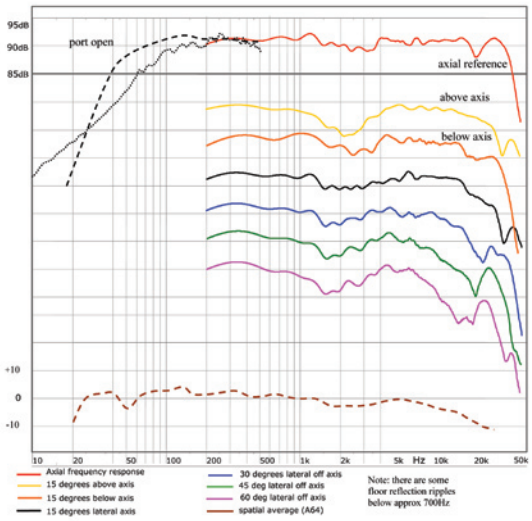
Sensitivity was high and way above average (very close to the claim), while the impedance was also a very good load – relatively high and even easy for valve amplification. The frequency response was so flat that it fitted within tight ±2dB limits from 50Hz to 19kHz – something that's rarely achieved at any price.

The overall response spanned 40Hz to 35kHz at -6dB, and crossover integration was also very good with almost symmetrical vertical responses (if better below axis, as they should be). Little change in quality was found laterally off-axis until 30degrees, and even at 45degress it managed ±3dB response limits out to 14kHz.

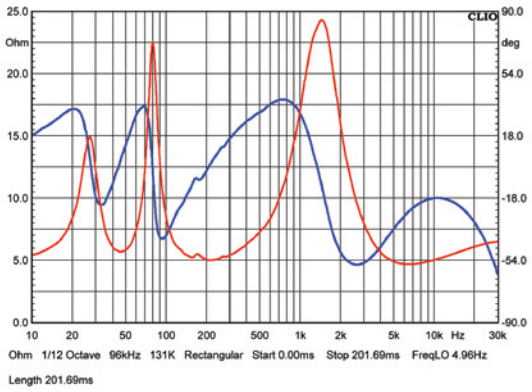
The in-room response trace confirms the mildly rich sound balance, but the bass is really well tuned and will still drive the room at fair power down to 30Hz, while the treble is also more extended than most. At typically 0.2% above 75 Hz (even at a high 92dB for 1W), midband distortion was better than average. It took substantial power down to 40 Hz (at 100dB/m output) and did not overload a 40Hz sine wave, right up to a challenging 35W. The very reasonable 0.2% distortion was also held right through to the upper frequencies.

The waterfall representation, showing energy damping with frequency, is initially almost linear phase as claimed. The rapid early decay is associated with clean transients, and is considered more than satisfactory thereafter. The impedance averages a high 9ohms, which means an easy electrical loading, while the port is tuned to a low 45Hz, and the load phase angles are satisfactory

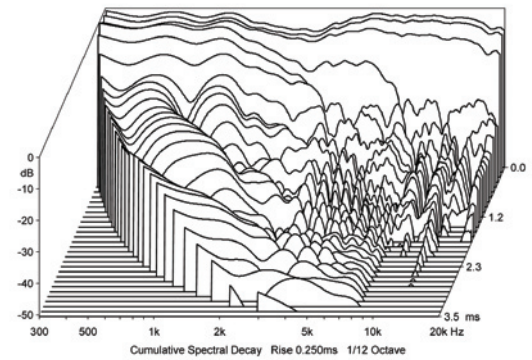
Q Acoustics 3050 Frequency Responses (91.5dB/W sensitivity)



Q Acoustics 3050 Frequency Response: Impedance RED and Phase



Q Acoustics 3050 Energy Decay Waterfall versus Frequency



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HIFICRITIC Loudspeaker laboratory measured test results: October 2015

Make	Q Acoustics
Country	manufactured for the UK
Model	3050 moving-coil, floorstanding, port-loaded
Price per pair	£500 - £650 (according to finish)
Size (HxWxD)	20x100x30cm
Weight	17.8kg
Type	Bass reflex 2 way, 2x165mm custom bonded synthetic aramid pulp cone bass/mid, 32mm soft dome tweeter
Sensitivity	91.5dB @1m (2.83V)
Amplifier loading	Very Good: 8ohm (5ohm min.)
Frequency response, axial	50Hz - 19kHz ±2dB (listener axis) (very good tolerance)
Frequency response off- axis	Very Good: see graphs and in-room response
Bass extension	40Hz -6dB, (28Hz, -6dB in-room)
Max loudness	107dBA for a stereo pair in-room
Power rating (max, min)	100W, 15W
Placement	Floorstanding, spiked, free space

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