





Magico S3 Mk II loudspeaker

by Alan Sircom

Magico is a perfectionist brand, run by perfectionists, for perfectionists. If you read this as a vague insult or back-handed compliment, Magico clearly isn't the brand for you. Magico folk pride themselves in their perfectionism. It's what defines everything they do, and everything they buy. As these are expensive loudspeakers for perfectionists, it wouldn't be surprising to see a high percentage of Porsche 911 drivers among Magico's owners – not because a 911 is fast or showy, but because of the purity of its engineering ethos. Like Porsche, Magico is that kind of brand, and attracts that kind of clientele.

So when Magico began to uprate its S-series of loudspeakers, Magico owners simply nod their heads in approval of what they consider to be the best receiving a series of improvements. No gnashing of teeth or wailing about 'simply change for change sake' or how their S3 of a few years ago is now out-of-date... just the same quiet understanding of perfectionist engineering that applies to a Porsche 911 driver buying the latest Porsche 911 because it is better than their existing model. There is an implicit trust between owner and manufacturer – that improvements aren't just for their own sake – and that is something that is earned by the manufacturer by years of providing good, consistent products and product upgrades.

So it is with the Magico S3 Mk II. Magico has systematically applied changes to its S-series that draw heavily from designs like the limited run M-Project and the Q7 Mk II. These upgrades are internally consistent, in that the changes brought to a design like the S1 to bring it to S1 Mk II status apply to the S3 Mk II, just on a far larger scale. And, just like the S1 Mk II, although the loudspeaker looks on the surface very similar to its predecessor model, in fact practically everything aside from the main enclosure and loudspeaker terminals have been changed. The one downside to that is there is no upgrade path, and owners of existing S3 loudspeakers have to sell on their older design if they want to enjoy the benefits of the S3 Mk II, but audio is one of the few aspects of modern consumerism that even has an upgrade path – imagine taking your 2014 MacBook Pro back to the Apple store and asking them to update it to 2018 specification! This has an added bonus for those with aspirations on the Magico S3 but not the funds to buy one new – suddenly there are some original Magico S3 models for sale at more attainable prices.

The move from S3 to S3 Mk II is extensive, even if that might not seem the case if you take a cursory look at the two loudspeakers. The key stories here are the addition of the new 25mm MBD7 beryllium-diamond tweeter, the 152mm M390G XG graphene-coated Nano-Tec midrange driver, and two 229mm M905G XG graphene-coated Nano-Tec bass drivers. The sealed solid aluminium monocoque chassis/enclosure remains the same curved cabinet with a diameter of an impressive 40cm, however, the internal bracing in this enclosure has been significantly beefed up.

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► We’ve discussed the high-techiness of these drive units extensively in reviews of the M-Pro and the S1 Mk II, but it bears repeating. Graphene is a very new material developed in the University of Manchester in the last decade and has only recently come to the commercial world. It’s effectively a molecule-thin lattice of carbon. As such, Graphene is a super-light material with the kind of tensile strength that makes steel look like chocolate mousse by comparison. The results of using graphene with Magico’s existing Nano-Tec carbon-fibre material are obvious, as at a stroke the cone is three times stiffer and at the same time 20% lighter. It also has what Magico describes as a new “underhung neodymium base motor system” and a long-throw voice coil, both of which contribute to better power handling. The tweeter, too, is a trickle-down design from the M-Pro, and the 25mm MBD7 dome tweeter is unique to the brand in that it combines a thin layer of beryllium with an even thinner layer of diamond. This really is high-tech stuff, in that these drivers not only didn’t exist, but couldn’t have existed a decade ago.

Naturally, changing the drive units means redrawing the crossover, utilising the ‘elliptical’ design that trickles down from the M-Pro (this limited edition, 50-strong thank you present to Magico’s most loyal buyers on the occasion of the company’s tenth anniversary has proved to be the seed-bed for an enormous amount of modern Magico loudspeaker design). In the process, Magico has managed to make the S3 Mk II slightly less demanding of amplifier than before, upping the nominal and minimum impedance.

Unless you look hard at the rear of the aircraft-grade aluminium cabinet, you might not notice that extra internal bracing (hint: look for bigger bolts), and you definitely won’t see the improved chambering (with ‘angel hair’ damping) for the midrange driver. What you will see, however, is the new plinth and reflection reducing elliptical top plate, both gently rounded and made in-house. The speaker comes with armour-piercing spikes (and feet) as standard, but Magico’s QPod vibration-dissipation devices are recommended as for the best performance. These don’t come cheap, but are addictive and people end up using them under power amps, stands, and more. There are grilles, but they are best only used to hide drive units from the passing thumbs of children!

The days of Magico uttering the ‘you can have any colour you want, so long as it’s black’ policy Ford used to deploy are long gone. The loudspeaker is available in the standard textured M-Cast or a high-gloss M-Coat finish, both of which come in six colours. OK, so if you want your loudspeakers to match the plumage of your flock of flamingos, other brands are available, but the refined and restrained Magico colour palette fits the requirements of those perfectionists we described earlier.

Installation is actually remarkably easy, with the obvious caveat that manhandling just over 77kg of loudspeaker is never *that* easy and best performed with multiple people used to manipulating loudspeakers. The ‘easy’

part here is because it is a sealed box, the S3 Mk II – like all its Magico siblings – is relatively room independent. It needs less than a metre from the rear and side walls, and at least 2m between them to fall into the right zone, and then careful adjustment to get the toe-in right. Fortunately, these are not loudspeakers that require any kind of tilt or rake, so rigid and level is the way forward. Also, once settled they stay settled, and there is no need to fine-tune the installation after a few days of bedding in.

Electronics selection is largely dictated by loudspeaker price, in that no-one’s going to partner a £36,000 loudspeaker with a £100 second-hand amplifier. The use of graphene-coated drivers and their stiffer, yet lighter measured performance has opened up the options, however, and it’s now no longer mandatory to partner a S3 with a solid-state powerhouse. Good sounds can be had with good tube amplifiers, too, and demonstrations have been made using CAT and Jadis valve amps to great effect.

That all being said, the Magico S3 Mk II is at its most comfy being driven by something beefy and solid-state, and the obvious choices here are Constellation or D’Agostino. Constellation and Magico often demonstrate side-by-side, and in the UK at least, all three brands have the same distributor. I listened to the S3 Mk II through good mid-range Constellation electronics and the loudspeakers really sang well.

That’s the thing about Magico loudspeakers. They manage to combine all the state-of-the-art Masters of Objectivity design that would satisfy the most meters-only audio enthusiast with the sort of sound that is both precise and passionate. It’s kind of like the perfect storm of good audio rolled into one loudspeaker. ►

“There is something about that midrange that is just so right, so natural, and so open that you can’t help being captivated.”

► Part of this comes from that just damn lovely midrange unit, which manages to express the kind of detail and emotion that got people like me involved in audio in the first place. I don’t want to start using words like ‘magic’ (despite the obvious ‘Magic in the Magico’ quips that follow), but there is something about that midrange that is just so right, so natural, and so open that you can’t help being captivated by the S3 Mk II sound from the get-go. All it takes is one voice, even if that voice is the ultimate stoner drawl of Keith Richards on the studio cut of ‘Love in Vain’ [Rolling Stones’ *Stripped*, Virgin]. This is one of those recordings that makes you wish more Stones albums were mixed that way, and the rehearsal is beautifully (if probably accidentally) recorded and untouched. Keef’s voice is surprisingly articulate and his wry humour comes across all the better for the speaker getting out of the way.

After that, the loudspeaker extends out to the treble and well into the bass. It’s not as cavernous or as powerful in the bass as more up-scale designs, but I would struggle to find a loudspeaker at the price or below that made better sounding bass – ‘more’ bass, I grant you, but better? This does not mean the loudspeaker is bass light – far from it in fact. I played *Surfin’* by Ernest Ranglin [*Below The Bassline*, Island] and those deep, dub bass notes pumped out powerfully and with a fine sense of ‘throb’ needed in these circumstances. That deep bass was portrayed honestly and well, without overhang or ‘flab’, and to combine those elements with even more bass requires a serious investment in audio, way beyond even the S3 Mk II. The big question – the one that no audiophile will answer or wants to have answered – is whether it’s worth paying a significant amount more for perhaps a quarter of an octave deeper bass at this point. The S3 Mk II doesn’t answer that question because it doesn’t *need* to answer that question. It does bass; enough bass, done right.

In a way, this last paragraph highlights one of the problems with trying to describe sound in word form. It’s easy to give the wrong impression. A surface reading of a review of the Magico S3 Mk II might conclude that this is a good, if analytical loudspeaker with a dry-sounding bass. This would be entirely wrong, but also entirely understandable given the nature of the way the sound of the Magico is invariably described. What’s missing from this picture is the way you relate to this sound. It’s honest and accurate and able to play loud, but these points alone don’t do the loudspeaker justice. There is something deeper at work when you listen to the Magico S3 Mk II. You find the lack of character in a loudspeaker really begins to hit home after a few minutes of listening, and this happens in an entirely positive way. It’s not just about the great dynamic range or the three-dimensional, well-wide-of-the-speakers soundstage, it’s about being something of a musical intuition pump. The S3 Mk II invites you to listen deeper. Not in an analytical way (although you can certainly do that with these loudspeakers) but like the music is being presented to you shiny and new. Your inner musicologist is set free as a result.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Type: three way sealed floorstanding loudspeaker

Driver Complement: 1 × 25.4mm MBD7 Diamond Coated Beryllium Dome, 1 × 152mm M390G XG nanographene cone midrange, 2× 229mm M905G XG nanographene cone bass drivers

Sensitivity: 88dB

Impedance: 4 Ohms

Frequency Response: 24 Hz–50 kHz

Recommended Power: 50 watts

Dimensions (H×D×W): 122 × 30.5 × 30cm

Weight: 77 kg

Price: £36,000 per pair (M-Cast), M-Coat price on application

Manufactured by: Magico LLC

URL: www.magico.net

Distributed in the UK by: Absolute Sounds

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The truth is, this job can leave you musically jaded. You listen to the same reference pieces of music over and over again to assess components. It’s all too easy to fall into the trap of writing “It’s day 736 of my captivity” style reviews. The Magico S3 Mk II is the perfect cobweb-blowing antidote to jaded. It is accurate and yet musically enjoyable, and that combination invites you to hear more music and more from your music. If you have played the same piece of music a thousand times and the Magico makes you want to hear it anew, then the S3 Mk II comes very highly recommended! +