

EQUIPMENT REVIEW



Magico Q1 loudspeakers

By Alan Sircom

The Magico Q1 is a standmount loudspeaker with an integrated stand (which is bolted to a recess in the underside of the speaker) and is shipped as standard with this mounted in place. It's a two-way sealed box that sits on a single column pedestal. And that is inevitably going to be twisted into "it's not a real standmount" by rivals. Because "it's not a real standmount" is going to be the excuse that will issue from those trying to justify their place in a post-Q1 loudspeaker world.

Their styling is bold... and none more black. The Q1s stand tall for a pair of floorstanders (the 25mm Beryllium dome tweeter is above ear height for most sofa-dwellers) and the squared off corners and thick black aluminium plates make the Q1s look like small monoliths from *2001 – A Space Odyssey*. I left some Ligeti playing overnight to give them some running in and by the time I came down next day, my cats had started using primitive hand tools. Three days later, they were building a space station.

Joking aside, the Q1 are an uncompromising styling exercise for the home. Deliberately so; they make the big, bold physical statement because audio makes a big statement in its own right through these speakers. Music is an unapologetically stirring experience through these speakers and we need more things this uncompromisingly good and exciting if we are ever to reach out to a new audience.

Although you'll never get to see inside the box (it's a sealed box design, and they do mean sealed), it's like a little city under the hood. The cabinet bolts to a complex cross-braced aluminium skeleton, with additional mounting plates at the front and rear of the cabinet, for the drivers and the crossover respectively. These massy plates also add stiffness to an already unfeasibly stiff cabinet. There's constrained layer damping inside instead of anything soft and sticky, fluffy or foamy, because the cabinet is so thick and dense and non-resonant that a spot of BAF wadding or long-haired wool wouldn't make a shred of difference to performance. This does.

The drive units could be seen as a sign of just how seriously Magico takes the whole process of speaker making. The 25mm beryllium dome tweeter and 177mm NeoTech (carbon fibre meets Rohacell sandwich) mid-bass unit have been seen before in the Q5. Except they haven't; in the intervening time between the first and subsequent Q models, Magico has been performing a series of improvements to both drive units. Not significant enough to warrant Q5 owners returning their speakers for a new set of drivers, but specific improvements to the Q1 driver set to make the speaker all the more correct. But in a way, you can see the dedication that goes into the Q1 in every aspect of the speaker, even down to the little spike wrench the company supplies with the speaker.

The reason for the stand being an integral part of the design becomes clear if you scratch the surface (good luck with that by the way; you might want to

try a diamond cutter, because that's probably the only way you'll get under that black coat). The stand is directly coupled to the speaker by being bolted to it. That acts as an effective damping mechanism, in precisely the opposite way most stand-mounts at the high-end tend to work; Magico feels the normal way of minimizing resonance in standmounts (adding mass to the stand and decoupling the loudspeaker) is fundamentally flawed.

The result of all this development was a long time coming. A two-way sealed standmount like this, with its single-wired crossover and slightly curved front baffle, shouldn't have taken long to engineer, given the whole Magico way of things (everything, right down to the aluminium factory, is in house or made to order). But, given the whole Magico way of doing things (no retreat, no surrender, no compromise), it actually took a surprising amount of work bringing these speakers to market. There is a lot of computer modeling, prototyping, measuring, listening, re-working and going back to the computer CAD/CAM pen tablet type thing (it was so much simpler when it was 'back to the drawing board').

The result is a speaker of powerful appearance. It's a simple, timeless design in the same way a Le Coubusier chair is timeless. Functional to the point of utility, engineered at a premium for those who have no knowledge of the meaning of the word 'over-engineered', well proportioned no-quarter stuff. It's the kind of loudspeaker that you want to know how to field-strip it in less than 30 seconds flat with your eyes closed. It's all very Y-chromosome stuff; like flight-recorder boxes, boxing stats and Tonka toys.

Installation is simple, but deserves and demands painstaking adjustment to get it right. Give it some air, preferably a metre or



▶ so from side and rear walls and somewhere between two to three metres apart, with a slight toe-in. Fortunately, being sealed boxes with almost no rear or side radiation pattern, if you cannot quite achieve the rear and side-wall positioning, it's not a big deal. Like the Mini II's these speakers replace, they benefit from being placed in a larger room than you'd normally consider for floorstanders, but unlike the Mini II, that's 'benefit', not a mandatory recommendation.

Similarly with amplifier choices, the church has been broadened. It's a relatively low sensitivity speaker by today's standards (claimed 86dB) but a relatively benign load by the same high-end benchmarks (five ohm nominal, with just a four ohm impedance dip at 156Hz). This means amplifiers of 50W and above will drive the Q1 well, although a couple of hundred watts of good, clean power will drive them exceptionally well. Especially as the Q1s seem to have been designed for the occasional Mr Hyde elements inside all of us that leaps out and turns the volume up to stupid for a while.

There is no such thing as an unburstable loudspeaker. Too little power played pushed into clipping, or way too much power burning out the voice coil can kill drive units. But with the Q1, you'd have to really hook the speakers up to something outrageously powerful and have scant regard for your hearing to do overpower the drive units. I played AC/DC so damn loud on these babies, I was unable to hear myself speak two rooms away and they didn't turn a hair. For the bulk of the test, I used a Devialet D-Premier to drive them perfectly (I'd imagine two of them would drive the Q1s perfectly squared).

My listening notes on this loudspeaker are, er, brief. In fact, just two words, written big. The second word was '... me!' The other word was short and earthy and not suitable for publication. The big reason for this; it goes back to that old and lost goal for audio – high-fidelity – and makes you remember why it was important. The audiophile-baiter might turn up their nose at this statement and point at a lesser loudspeaker and claim that it does the same job at a fraction of the price. And that argument has complete validity... until they get to the end of the first bar of music played through the Q1, and realise just how much closer Magico gets to that high-fidelity goal than other standmounts.

It gets voices right, making them sound like real people, not wide-mouthed human impersonators. It gets instruments like the piano right too, and it's perhaps here where you start to get an understanding of why it is so good at its job. Of those 88 keys, I'd say 82 of them were all present and correct.

Of the remaining six, they were portrayed without boost or bloat, but just didn't have the same energy and dynamism of the rest of the left hand. That in itself is remarkable on any speaker, but on a standmount it's worthy of high praise indeed.

But what really got me was the way it not only tied everything together musically, but made a truly huge sound in the process. Not artificially big, bloated or bounced off the side-wall expanded, but just right. So when you played 'Flume' by Bon Iver, you got that small, falsetto-frail voice and a real-sized guitar, and when you switched to Beecham conducting *Carmen* (EMI), you got all the scale of the operatic stage. And yet in both cases you could get past the scale and listen into the music. Justin Vernon (Bon Iver) is particularly key here, because the recording isn't stellar and lesser 'audiophile' speakers will be caught out by that. The Magico Q1 just resolves good music.

The big advantage to standmounts is they image better than otherwise similar floorstanding peers. The disadvantage is the lack of bottom end. So any speaker that can do both would be an immediate winner, but to date none do. Until now. Magico claims 32Hz at -3dB in the wild, which is deeply impressive, but I think is understatement. In my room, there was still a lot happening at 28Hz. Even the mighty Mini II it replaces couldn't compare. The Mini II had slightly less bass and was a lot more demanding of the room it sat in. The Q1 has a good 8Hz at the bottom end in room on the Mini II (which ▶

► means it has a good 8-10Hz in room at the bottom end on almost every other small speaker), and the Q1 is quite capable of being installed in small to medium room; the ideal place for a small loudspeaker to behave like a loudspeaker, which was the big limit for the Mini II.

By making a loudspeaker that works in a small room and delivers unparalleled bass response, Magico has answered the Big City Audiophile question. Those who have enough money to afford speakers like Q1s tend to make their wealth in cities. And if they live in the big city where the money happens (be it London, New York, Tokyo, Frankfurt, Singapore or what have you), space is often at a premium. The traditional loudspeakers the size of a garage door will not work in a room 3m wide and 4m long, but even that space may set the listener back a fortune.

This is perhaps the most important loudspeaker I've ever sat in front of. Why? Because it doesn't try to bend the rules of physics. Instead, it shows us just how much more we can get out of the physics if we try really hard.

Magico's Q1 demonstrates that real-world and honest bottom-octave sound is possible from a two-way standmount sealed box loudspeaker, and from a speaker design that isn't the size of a large fridge.

That throws down a challenge to all – if the Q1 can do it, why can't your speaker? Hopefully, others will rise to the challenge, and that suddenly raises the standard for audio across the board.

And there's more! For those who can't afford the Magico Q1, you should still be happy this loudspeaker exists. This is the Formula One car of our world. Things that go on inside this speaker are being watched by intellects vast and cool and sympathetic to the audio cause, just as things that go on inside a Formula One car are watched by those looking to create the next generation of production car. What the Q1 does is create a trickle down set of ideas for subsequent generations of loudspeakers (whether or not they have a Magico badge on the front). That way, audio gets just a little bit better at doing its job. Of course, if you buy the Q1, you get to be the audiophile equivalent of a Formula One driver.



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Design: Two-way

Enclosure: Sealed

LF Driver: 177m Nano-Tec cone

HF Driver: 25mm MBe-1 dome

Frequency Response: 32Hz–50kHz ±3dB

Sensitivity: 86dB SPL @ 1kHz @ 1W @ 1M

Nominal Impedance: 5Ω

Minimum Impedance: 4Ω (at 156Hz)

Dimensions (Inc Stand):

1120×370×250mm

Weight: 54kg (Inc Stand)

Price: £28,500 per pair

Manufactured by: Magico

URL: www.magico.net

Distributed by: Absolute Sounds

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So not only is the Magico Q1 an excellent loudspeaker, it will help bring out excellence in future loudspeaker designs. Rival manufacturers will need a solution that challenges this speaker, fast. That being said, I think I'm comfortable in saying it's going to be some time before anyone catches up with the Q1. Few companies could even start to build with the dedication and single-mindedness that is needed to build a speaker this fantastic. +