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# Hi-Fi Choice

**PASSION FOR SOUND**

Issue No. 515

June 2024

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# Utterly spellbound

Ten years on from the S3, which was surpassed by the MkII, this three-way has trickle-down tech from the flagship M9

**A**s updates go, the latest version of Magico's S3 speaker, isn't what you'd call a mild refresh. Just as the company's MkII was a major reworking of the original, so this new arrival has been comprehensively redesigned, drawing both on the technology of the flagship M9 and the measurement abilities of Magico's enhanced development tools. It's yours for a couple of quid short of £57,000 a pair in the five powder-coat M-Cast finishes Magico offers, or £66,000 in a choice of six high-gloss M-Coat shades, including the striking blue colourway pictured here.

Despite the familiar model number, it's basically an entirely new speaker. Given that the S3 has long been one of Magico's most popular offerings, the thinking was clearly to keep it that way as the company hits its 20th anniversary. Significant updates have been facilitated by the latest equipment now added to its R&D arsenal at its 'campus' in the San Francisco Bay area. It's here that its products are designed, engineered and hand-assembled, a tradition dating back to the company's first product, the Mini standmount of 2004, and including the massive four-way, six-driver M9, delivered with an offboard analogue crossover to take the all-up weight of a pair to just over a tonne.

Newcomers to the Magico way of doing things are likely to be surprised at how the S3 2023 is constructed, with the beautifully finished cabinet the most obvious initial eye-catcher. Where many speakers use either a wood-based enclosure or some exotic material such as carbon fibre, Magico is all about heavy metal, with four extruded aluminium panels ranging in thickness from around 12mm to the better part of 50mm forming the structure, the pieces precision-milled to give the impression of a design that's all but seamless.

Crowned by a hefty top-plate, curved to control diffraction and tackle internal standing waves, the whole enterprise sits on an even weightier baseplate to extend the speaker's footprint, lower the cabinet's centre of gravity and improve its stability. Three adjustable feet are included, these with a flat, compliant base rather than spikes. Incidentally, the bass arm of the crossover is located within the baseplate while the mid/treble arm is fixed onto the S3 2023's second brace.

## The S3 2023 can 'do bass', but ruthlessly controlled while it's shaking the room

As much research has been poured into the speaker's new drivers as the new cabinet. The tweeter is now a 28mm unit, its diamond-coated beryllium dome's increase in size – from the previous model's 26mm – achieved without significant increase in moving mass. This larger driver includes a new back-chamber, a neodymium motor system and better integration into the baffle, for increased power handling, lower distortion and improved off-axis uniformity.

The S3 2023's new 125mm midrange unit has an aluminium honeycomb cone with a graphene and carbon fibre skin that aims to improve stiffness, also without adding any weight and, by virtue of its profile, enhance dispersion. It's driven by an underhung motor system combining extra-large neodymium magnets and a pure copper pole-cap. A key feature of the new unit is a (stable) lightweight foam roll surround in place of the rubber used before – again to boost efficiency and transient performance.

The 230mm cones of the twin bass drivers are, in practice, larger versions of the midrange cones with their alloy

### DETAILS

**PRODUCT**  
Magico S3 2023

**ORIGIN**  
USA

**TYPE**  
Three-way floorstanding loudspeaker

**WEIGHT**  
101kg each

**DIMENSIONS**  
(WxHxD)  
300x1,120x430mm

**FEATURES**  
• 28mm diamond-coated beryllium diaphragm tweeter  
• 125mm honeycomb aluminum core sandwiched midrange driver  
• 2x 230mm Graphene Nano-Tec cone bass drivers  
• Quoted sensitivity: 88dB/1m/1W (4ohm)

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honeycomb core sandwiched between stiffening layers of carbon fibre/graphene. A 125mm titanium voice coil, with a pure copper cap, combines with the suspension to give over 12mm of excursion, delivering deep, low-distortion bass at high output.

Heavyweight hi-fi typically requires assistance in its unboxing and installation, and the S3 2023 is no exception given the weight and the sheer size of the wooden packing crate in which it's delivered. The instruction manual has a nine-step photographically illustrated sequence should you wish to try it for yourself. There are also detailed instructions for positioning the speakers, opening with some daunting advice: "All that's required is a tape measure, a pen, a calculator, a ball of string, a couple of demo CDs and some patience".

### Sound quality

We end up with the S3 2023 positioned about half-a-metre proud of the rear wall, well clear of side walls, and with the slightest of toe-in towards the listening position. The front-end is a familiar setup – a dCS Vivaldi One APEX player running straight into Constellation's Centaur II stereo power amp, located between the speakers for the classic 'long interconnect run/short speaker cables' layout, with all cabling courtesy of Transparent Audio. Controlling the system with a dCS Mosaic app, the music is hosted and sourced from USB-connected SDD storage, the cost of which is almost comical in the light of what is a truly

Designed to be striking on the eye and ear



**IN SIGHT**

- 1 Single 4mm cable terminals
- 2 28mm diamond-coated beryllium dome tweeter
- 3 125mm midrange driver has an aluminium honeycomb core stiffened with layers of graphene and carbon fibre
- 4 Two 230mm bass drivers feature a larger version of the midrange driver's 'Graphene Nano-Tec' cone design
- 5 3x adjustable feet

**IN THE FRAME**

All-alloy cabinets have long been a hallmark of Magico's loudspeakers, whether in the form of an extruded section, like the original S3 or the machined castings used for the enclosure walls of the S3 2023. Five thick aluminium horizontal plates divide up the internal volume here, as well as bracing and damping the enclosure, but this speaker's choice of materials isn't solely about weight and stiffness. Rather than "bracing the hell out of it," quips Magico CEO Alon Wolf, "we now brace it right". During our call with him to accompany our review, he explains that the new 3D laser interferometry system, "enabled a very efficient analysis of the cabinet surfaces. We could see where the vibrations – the main panel modes – were occurring, and this informed the placement and forces applied by our bracing, and position of our constrained-layer damping".

A skeletal alloy frame is bolted to the inside of the cabinet panels, pulling them together and applying a specific tension at intervals. As a rule, resonances are unavoidable but this pushes them higher in frequency, and Q, making them easier to damp. This is achieved using BH5 (Black Hole 5) damping sheets – a laminate of vinyl, elastomer and foam layers – applied to all exposed surfaces on the inside of the walls. In addition, an alloy/elastomer constrained layer (known as EAR), 'tuned' to specific frequency bands, is applied between the drivers on the rear of the baffle. The mix of these techniques is calibrated to selectively 'suffocate' unwanted noise emanating from these huge panels. The laser interferometry provides a window onto the vibration, and provides proof of concept, enabling Magico to claim its new S3 enclosure is "30 percent quieter" than its predecessor.

glorious six-figure system. But then that's high-quality listening for you.

The Espen Eriksen Trio/Andy Sheppard recording of *In The Mountains*, from the album of the same name is a perfect choice for the S3 2023 to set out its stall – the immediate impression being one of supreme presence and three-dimensionality, along with fine instrumental timbres, especially in Sheppard's sax. Similarly, Anais Reno's atmospheric *Live At Pizza Express*, on the venue's own PX Records label, is performed with all

of its ambience intact. It's a real 'you are there' experience.

The recent Lang Lang Saint-Saëns album is so deceptively easy to listen to via this loudspeaker that it's easy to overlook the sheer amount of information that's on offer, from the scale and delicacy of the soloist's piano to the accompanying orchestra. There is a lovely light airiness to the woodwind section in the *Aviary* movement, plus tight control of the plucked strings, while the *Fossils* section proves joyous with its xylophone and exuberant finale.

**HOW IT COMPARES**

If Magico's magnificent S3 is just too much of a stretch then there are many other flag-waving floorstanders you really must hear. KEF's £30k Blade One Meta gets closer than almost any loudspeaker to the ideal of a full-range 'point source' while PS Audio's similarly-priced aspen FR30 (HFC 490) offers an exquisite blend of planar-magnetic mid and treble with alloy-coned bass drivers and ABRs. The Signature version of B&W's 801 D4 is another statement speaker which, at £45k, takes the brand's iconic range-topper to new levels of performance. Directly in the Magico S3's firing line are PMC's towering fact fenestrias at £64k and Wilson Audio's three-way Sasha V (HFC 506) at £54k. All these brands have their own design philosophy, which inevitably informs their voicing, but few will paint the music picture with such attention-grabbing clarity as Magico's latest S3.

Without doubt, the S3 2023 can 'do bass' – as much as you could ever reasonably require, but ruthlessly controlled while it's shaking the room. Play Dizze Rascal's *What You Know Bout That* from his *Don't Take It Personal* album and the low-end is simply thunderous, but with unstoppable drive and Mr Rascal's chatty vocals entirely intelligible.

Liam Gallagher and John Squire's eponymous album sounds impressive in the way that this speaker opens up the big dense mix of *I'm So Bored*, delivering it with bags of texture and speed. Meanwhile the simpler *Mother*

## As much research has been poured into the new drivers as the new cabinet

*Nature's Song* has that 'sitting in the studio' impact and detail. The sound is redolent of The Beatles and George Martin, which I'm sure was very much part of the intention.

We put this wonderful speaker through its paces with more than the usual review variety simply because it is such a treat to spend time with it. It may take a hefty remortgage to own a pair of your own, but there's no denying its totally involving presentation.

**Conclusion**

Magico's S3 2023 very much lives up to the manufacturer's name with a presentation that's every bit as vivid as it is refined, and as compelling as it is analytical. The finish is immaculate, and the cabinet construction as solid as you'd expect given the price tag, and while this may only be a 'mid-range' offering in Magico's product catalogue, there's nothing middling about its performance. Drive it with an amplifier commensurate with its capabilities, and prepare to be completely enthralled ●

**Hi-Fi Choice****OUR VERDICT**

<b>SOUND QUALITY</b> ★★★★★	<b>LIKE:</b> Immaculate finish; vivid, refined presentation; build and finish
<b>VALUE FOR MONEY</b> ★★★★☆	<b>DISLIKE:</b> Price, obviously
<b>BUILD QUALITY</b> ★★★★★	<b>WE SAY:</b> Prepare to be entranced
<b>EASE OF DRIVE</b> ★★★★★	

**OVERALL**