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# Sonus faber Chameleon B loudspeakers

by Alan Sircom

Loudspeakers are great, but sometimes they don't do 'sexy'. There are still a lot of rectangular wooden 'monkey coffins' out there, virtually unchanged in basic design for more than two generations. Fortunately, there's also Sonus faber.

The Chameleon is Sonus faber's new entry-level range, effectively replacing the diminutive Toy models. The range comprises the Chameleon T ('Tower' floorstanders), the Chameleon C (for 'Centre'), and the bookshelf Chameleon B, tested here. The B is a ported two-way design, with a 29mm ferrofluid-damped fabric dome tweeter, and a 150mm polypropylene cone bass unit. There are broad similarities in design between the Chameleon and its predecessor; like the Toy, the Chameleon has a trapezoid side aspect, which gives the front baffle and back panel a distinct slope. The sloping front and back help break up internal standing waves, and also gives the loudspeaker a small degree of time alignment. Both the Toy and the Chameleon also feature a leather covered wooden cabinet. But the similarities end there.

The Toy, so very indicative of the new look of Sonus faber a few years ago, looks positively old-fashioned next to the Chameleon. The older speaker's fixed wood or leather side-cheeks have given away to solid, interchangeable, colourful, and glossy side panels — six in total at the moment, with more said to follow. You get one set with the loudspeakers when you buy them, and can buy more at will, whether you want to change your mood or décor. I imagine most will initially opt for the black, white, or red options, but I can see people also getting more ambitious after a while and opting for orange or 'metal blu', or even some of the future options, like turquoise or vivid yellow. Theoretically, if you have enough sets of panels, you could create a palette of colours, with different colour panels on each side of each loudspeaker (although that could get expensive). Changing these side panels is quick and easy, as you can easily swap over a set in a couple of minutes. What's more, the large push locators don't rattle even when the speaker is played loud. The side panels have

a small recess cut into one side to allow the "Sonus faber Italy" logos to show. And, because the side panels can fit either side, Sonus faber has included this logo to the front and rear of the sides of the loudspeaker, so there will always be a logo staring back at you, regardless of how you insert these panels.

I guess we should not be taken aback by this small, but significant, step change in product design, because Sonus faber has long relished its Italian style, creating some of the most elegant loudspeakers in the business. And, in great fairness, the idea of interchangeable colour panels is not ▶



▶ exactly a new one; it's not even a new idea in loudspeaker design. But Sonus faber is the first to take the concept beyond the lower ends of the audio world. These are more than interchangeable cheap plastic colour panels on a cheap plastic soundbar: the Chameleon is a credible loudspeaker in its own right, one that affords the listener considerable input in the ultimate design.

A clever touch here is the vent itself. A down-firing port (complete with permanently fixed foam bung) would normally be a problem with a standmount design, but Sonus faber has created a combination plinth and front-firing vent for the port that manages to look good, provide a mass-loaded base for the loudspeaker, and make the vent less room dependent. It's one of those neat and simple solutions that constitute one of the distinctive features of the Chameleon B.

However, the one aspect of the Chameleon B's design I'm not convinced by is the reintroduction of bi-wire terminals that doesn't, I believe, significantly benefit a loudspeaker of this kind, even bi-amped (at least, it didn't for a Roksan

with integrated and power amp combo); a good, single wire terminal block should be better. This might be a trifle, but we all know what Michelangelo said about trifles: they make perfection.

When it comes to the sound quality of the Chameleon B, the loudspeaker also combines the modern and the classic presentations of Sonus faber in one, integrating elements of the Venere with those of the Minima standmounts. Consequently, the Chameleon is lyrical and beguiling like the Minima, but detailed and fast-paced like the Venere. This is a very good and very 'now' balance. It lends itself to contemporary classic tracks like 'Royals' by Lorde [*Pure Heroine*, Universal], giving the music a combination of room-filling vibrancy and soaring trebles.

It's very clear, very quickly, that you are in the presence of good quality audiophile fare when you sit between the Chameleon B's. The soundstaging in particular is open and expressive, with excellent width and depth, and even some height. The one thing small standmount speakers like the Sonus fabers do exceptionally well, is they act like an effective point source. Play 'Mi Buenos Aires Querido' from the album of the same name by Daniel Barenboim, Rodolfo Mederos, and Héctor Console [Teldec], and you get the sense of a classically inspired Tango trio physically occupying your own room. Coupled with an overarching sense of refinement, and you have the sort of insightful and deeply enjoyable presentation you get from the best high-end audio. But with one reservation: bass.

The 'B' in 'Chameleon B' might stand for 'bookshelf', but it doesn't stand for 'bass'. The Sonus faber loudspeaker tries well to deliver good, taut bass, which is a lot better than faking it with boomy, woolly noises at around 80Hz, but while this honesty means you can follow a bass line, it doesn't mean you can follow it very far. There is a gentle roll-off that kicks in at the upper bass, and by the time you get to the far left hand on a piano, the pedals on an organ, or the deepest, flubbiest bass lines from a dub album, those notes are present in homeopathic quantities. ▶



*"It's very clear, very quickly, that you are in the presence of good quality audiophile fare."*

► I actually prefer this to a loudspeaker that goes more for the 'smoke and mirrors' effect; the Chameleon B's last few octaves are more akin to a LS3/5a design. Nevertheless, if your musical tastes demand full-on bass depth and solidity, look elsewhere.

The Chameleon B occupies ground held by no company before, and its potential owners will not be swayed by 'non-design' designs. Such design-led music lovers have often been fobbed off with poor sounding – but cool looking – loudspeakers. But here we get that rare thing: a loudspeaker that looks good, but which also sounds good enough to satisfy demanding listeners. Although there are loudspeakers that will prove more satisfying to those wanting deeper bass or a more taut or a more rhythmically integrated sound, I suspect that is missing the point entirely, because the Chameleon B is an exercise in reducing compromise across the board. Those who only care about how a loudspeaker sounds, and not

how it looks, are never going to 'get' a loudspeaker like the Chameleon B, and will tend to dismiss a loudspeaker that has aesthetically pleasing component out of hand. But this is not mirrored in those wanting a more design-led loudspeaker. If many are as unwilling to sacrifice sound quality as they are aesthetic values, the Sonus faber Chameleon B is their next bookshelf loudspeaker.

Think of the Sonus faber Chameleon B as a 'best of both worlds' design. It combines old (wood and leather) and new (ABS and state of the art drivers) design, with performance. It is every bit a 2015 loudspeaker in looks and sound, but one that doesn't shake off its heritage in the process. Our little audio world is hide-bound by those who forget a loudspeaker in a living room has to look good as well as sound good; for those that remember the importance of both, this important little loudspeaker comes highly recommended. +

## TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

**Type:** Two-way vented box standmount loudspeaker

**Driver compliment:** 29 mm high definition precoated fabric dome tweeter with no ferrofluid. 1x 150 mm free compression basket woofer with polypropylene cone. Both custom Sonus faber designs

**Frequency Response:** 50Hz–25kHz

**Crossover Point:** 2.5kHz

**Sensitivity:** 87dB (2.831V/1M)

**Nominal impedance:** 4Ω

**Suggested Amplifier power output:** 30–150W (without clipping)

**Dimensions (H×W×D):** 32 × 19 × 28cm

**Optional stand (H×W×D):** 72 × 31 × 37cm

**Optional dedicated stand (H×W×D):** 725 × 306 × 370 mm

**Weight (per loudspeaker):** 6.7kg

**Price:** £700

**Manufactured by:** Sonus faber

**URL:** [www.sonusfaber.com](http://www.sonusfaber.com)

**Distributed in the UK by:** Absolute Sounds

**URL:** [www.absolutesounds.com](http://www.absolutesounds.com)

**Tel:** +44(0)208 971 3909

