

Ed Selley is reminded that Q Acoustics isn't only interested in bookshelf speakers

# Brit Concept aims high

FROM A LATE start (2006), Q Acoustics has become one of the major players in affordable loudspeakers. Its policy of using relatively conventional materials in well thought-out speaker designs has earned a lorry-load of awards and a large fanbase. But it's not content to focus only on the budget category...

On test here is the company's new Concept series in a 5.1 guise. This is Q Acoustics' flagship product. Although if you think that 'flagship' equates to rare metal drivers and designer cabinets, think again.

This is still, in loudspeaker terms, an affordable system (£1,750), predominantly because of the drivers used – there is no real difference between the ones employed here and those found in other Q Acoustics speakers that cost a good chunk less.

Rather than produce a 'clean sheet' design, the Concept is all about the cabinet. Gone is the fairly straightforward MDF affair of the 2000 series and in its place comes something more unusual. A Concept 'Gelcore' cabinet is assembled from two layers of MDF separated from one another by a resonance-cancelling compound. The result is a 'cabinet within a cabinet' and a very inert set of speakers that feel radically different to their cheaper brethren.

The range itself mirrors the more affordable models with the floorstanding Concept 40, standmount Concept 20 and the imaginatively titled Concept Centre. There is no Concept subwoofer. Q Acoustics is at pains to point out that a sub needs to be inert from the outset, and as such sticking an existing model in a Gelcore cabinet won't achieve a great deal other than increasing the price. To this end, this package is completed by the existing 2070Si model with its twin 6.5in drivers (mounted on the same baffle) powered by a 150W amplifier.

The Concepts are unmistakably Q Acoustics in design. The midbass drivers are doped paper; the tweeter are soft domes. But

the cabinets are more attractive and beautifully finished. Tap the sides and the speakers feel almost solid to the touch.

They are available in a black or white gloss finish (there are currently none of the walnut and leather options the brand offers elsewhere). The build quality seems extremely good. Overall, these are a triumph when it comes to aesthetics and pride-of-ownership.

An area where the Concepts differ from their siblings – and many rivals – is their mounting options. The Concept 20 has a dedicated stand available that uses a Gelcore column stabilised by a pair of glass outriggers. The Concept 40 also makes use of these outriggers, ensuring they are impressively stable but bulkier than you might expect. Even the Centre has a set of decent feet to give it a little isolation.

The speakers share some traits with other Q Acoustics models in that they are fairly relaxed about placement. They are all rear-ported but supplied bungs allow for use near a wall, and none of the speakers showed poor traits working in relatively confined spaces – possibly as a result of losing so little energy radiated via the cabinet. The Concepts also have fairly benign impedance and reasonable sensitivity that should ensure that they work well with a variety of AV receivers.

## Old faithful

The idea of relying on a set of drivers notionally designed for a less expensive range of speakers might sound like a risky one, yet it works well here, with a few unexpected

## AV INFO

**PRODUCT:** Floorstanding 5.1 speaker array

**POSITIONING:** Q Acoustics' current flagship system

**PEERS:** Acoustic Energy 100; Tannoy Mercury; DALI Zensor



Q Acoustics' Concept speakers use new triple-layer Gelcore cabinets





benefits that might be of considerable help depending on your back-end components.

Most importantly, the Concepts never sound like cheap speakers in an expensive suit. Give them the well-mastered and lively *Jurassic World* Blu-ray and they unpick the detailed and spacious DTS-HD soundmix with aplomb. The initial escape of the *Indominus rex* is handled effectively, with the near-silent jungle suddenly becoming a mass of noise and fury as the creature finally appears. Little

## 'Great looks and great sound – Q Acoustics' Concepts unpick detailed soundmixes with aplomb'

details, such as the almost engine-like burble of the *Indominus* when it's searching for Chris Pratt's dino wrangler, are recreated with attention-piquing realism.

The Concepts locate effects correctly without being unduly directional; dispersion is impressive. And the soundstage across the front three channels in particular sounds seamless and three-dimensional. The two-and-a-half-way centre speaker isn't a weak link in the chair; dialogue remains clear and easy to follow, and LCR audio pans retain their body.

When reality intrudes into *Jurassic World's* tapestry of CGI dinosaurs – regular noises such as shattering glass and thrumming park jeeps – such effects have scale and tangibility, and they combine with the more fanciful aspects of the soundtrack to create an impressively layered soundfield. Tonally, the sound here is neither unduly bright or dark.

One aspect of the Concept 5.1 Cinema Pack's performance that is especially beneficial is the relative sensitivity of the

speakers – the floorstanders claim 90dB. Connected to a Yamaha RX-A3040, the speakers rarely needed more than -35 on the dial to sound healthily loud. And they are capable of being deafening if that's what you're after. More importantly, at lower volume levels they stay clear, detailed and able to deliver the same honest and open presentation. This means they have a real-world usability that can elude some rivals which struggle to deliver their best at less than 'event' levels.

These speakers are more than up to the task of working with less bolsterous material

– vital, as we can't all be watching sci-fi blockbusters on a loop. The brooding cityscapes of drama flick *Nightcrawler* are rendered with the space and slightly ephemeral quality that the film demands. As before, when the soundmix needs impact, the Concepts can supply it instantaneously, but when delicacy is demanded, they excel at getting out of the way and letting the movie unspool. The only slightly discordant note is that the 2070Si subwoofer is less subtle than its passive brethren. It is still a staggeringly good woofer for the asking price (£280 if you buy separately) and has more low-end urge than you would expect from its twin 6.5in drivers, but it lacks some of the delicacy at low volumes that the rest of the array showcases.

Musically, the system is hard to fault. My partnership of Yamaha receiver and the Concept 40 floorstanders running without the subwoofer (hi-fi-style stereo) is genuinely listenable, with enough bass extension from the L/R pair in its own right. That same detailed and refined presentation that's apparent with Blu-rays is equally adept at drawing grins with a wide range of music.

Use the set for broadcast TV, and it's happy with everything from C4 drama *Deutschland '83* to kids' caper *Ben & Holly's Little Kingdom*. And, again, the sensitivity is especially useful for late-night or early morning playback. This is a set you can have on permanent use.

### Classy concoction

What Q Acoustics has done with its Concept line is extremely welcome. By making the cabinets the main focus of development, it has rustled up classy, consistently neutral and cohesive speakers. The revised cabinets leave them better proportioned and altogether smarter than the speakers from which they evolved. And the really clever part is that they are no harder to drive and live with than their more affordable stablemates.

Great looks, great sound. Great job ■

### SPECIFICATIONS

#### CONCEPT 40

**DRIVE UNITS:** 2 x 5in doped paper midbass drivers; 1 x 1in soft dome tweeter  
**ENCLOSURE:** Rear-ported  
**FREQUENCY RESPONSE:** 53Hz-22kHz  
**SENSITIVITY:** 90dB  
**POWER HANDLING:** 150W  
**DIMENSIONS:** 170(w) x 972(h) x 288(d)mm  
**WEIGHT:** 18.5kg

#### CONCEPT 20

**DRIVE UNITS:** 1 x 5in doped paper midbass driver; 1 x 1in soft dome tweeter  
**ENCLOSURE:** Rear-ported  
**FREQUENCY RESPONSE:** 64Hz-22kHz  
**SENSITIVITY:** 86dB  
**POWER HANDLING:** 75W  
**DIMENSIONS:** 170(w) x 260(h) x 288(d)mm  
**WEIGHT:** 12kg

#### CONCEPT CENTRE

**DRIVE UNITS:** 2 x 4in doped paper midbass drivers; 1 x 1in soft dome tweeter  
**ENCLOSURE:** Rear-ported  
**FREQUENCY RESPONSE:** 75Hz-22kHz  
**SENSITIVITY:** 88dB  
**POWER HANDLING:** 75W  
**DIMENSIONS:** 430(w) x 150(h) x 198(d)mm  
**WEIGHT:** 6.8kg

#### 2070SI (SUBWOOFER)

**DRIVE UNITS:** 2 x 6.5in doped paper woofers  
**ENCLOSURE:** Ported  
**FREQUENCY RESPONSE:** Not given  
**ON BOARD POWER:** 150W  
**REMOTE CONTROL:** No  
**DIMENSIONS:** 195(w) x 425(h) x 560(d)mm  
**WEIGHT:** 14.6kg  
**CONNECTIONS:** Stereo phono input

### HCC VERDICT



**Q Acoustics Concept 5.1 Cinema Pack**  
 → £1,750 approx → [www.qacoustics.co.uk](http://www.qacoustics.co.uk)  
 → Tel: 01279 501080

**HIGHS:** Expansive and open sound; neutral tone; excellent build and aesthetics; usefully sensitive; decent price

**LOWS:** Spiked stand arrangement a little bulky; sub not quite as impressively subtle

**Performance** ★★★★★

**Design** ★★★★★

**Features** ★★★★★

**Overall** ★★★★★