

Q Acoustics Concept 20 review

Best stereo speaker £200-£400, Awards 2014. Looking for a pair of top class sub-£500 standmounters? Q Acoustics' Concept 20s could well be the answer **Tested at £350**

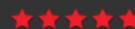
Our Rating



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Our Verdict



Best stereo speaker £200-£400, Awards 2014. Looking for a pair of top class sub-£500 standmounters? Q Acoustics' Concept 20s could well be the answer

For

- Impressive clarity, seamless presentation
- Pleasing refinement
- Excellent build and finish
- Terrific stands

Against

- Dedicated stands aren't cheap (£200), but they're essential to hearing the Concept 20s at their considerable best

As we sit writing this review, the [Q Acoustics Concept 20](#) speakers are playing the *Skyfall OST* in the background. We're in our main listening room, and there's no shortage of quality speakers at hand. The choice includes [KEF LS50s](#), [ATC's SCM50](#) and [Quad's ESL 2812s](#) – but it's the Concept 20s that remain connected. Not because they're better sounding than the far more expensive speakers we've mentioned. They're not; it's more that they do everything well enough for us not to feel any need to swap over to something more exotic. That's some compliment when you consider the array of pricey talent we can choose from. Then again, the Q Acoustics Concept 20 is quite some speaker.

Design and specs

In simple terms the Concept 20s are essentially the Award-winning [2020is](#) with a better cabinet. The drive units are the same – soft-dome tweeter with carbon fibre and ceramic-coated paper mid/bass – as is the crossover, bar some minor tweaks.

The tweeter remains decoupled from the front panel to reduce any (sound-degrading) vibration from the mid/bass spoiling the high frequencies.

That new cabinet design certainly is special. It needs to be – Q Acoustics is charging an extra £150 for it compared to the old model in gloss finish. The Concept 20 enclosure uses a box-within-a-box idea, where the inner and outer enclosures – both made of 10mm MDF panels – are separated by a compliant compound called Gelcore.

The Gelcore helps to damp any panel resonances, turning that unwanted energy into heat. No, the Concept 20s didn't get noticeably hotter after a long listening session – certainly not hot enough for us to notice.



The idea behind the cabinet design is to silence the enclosure, leaving the sound coming from the drive units alone. The new cabinet brings a number of subtle changes over the [Q Acoustics 2020i](#) speakers.

While the internal volume is fairly similar, the speaker terminals are now on the rear panel rather than mounted in a plastic tray at the base of the speaker as on the cheaper model. The Concept 20's terminals are smart and mounted solidly on a metal plate, just below the rear-firing reflex port.

Overall fit and finish of the speaker is excellent and the choice of finishes is limited to two gloss options, white and black

Q Acoustics has also taken the welcome step of designing dedicated stands for these speakers. They are about 65cm high, and bring the soft-dome tweeters up to ear height, at least when we're sitting at our listening position. This is no me-too support. The metal top plate is another sandwich arrangement, with Gelcore providing the filling to produce a well-damped platform. There are three threaded metal discs that screw into the underside of the speaker and locate it correctly on the top panel.

The main pillar is made of MDF and there are three floor spikes to finish things off. The rear two are mounted to a thick glass bracket and are adjustable. The front spike is fixed in place.

The stand's design incorporates cable management too, and overall fit and finish is good. At £200 a pair, these supports seem expensive when compared with the price of the speakers, but we couldn't find any alternative that did the job better or represented better value.

If you're thinking of buying the Concept 20s, consider the stands essential if you want to hear what the speakers can really do.



Q Acoustics Concept 20



Q Acoustics Concept 20 stands



Q Acoustics Concept 20 speakers back

Sound quality

It's amazing just how much difference the new cabinet makes. We're massive fans of the [2020is](#), but these new speakers are really in a different league when it comes to performance (as they should be with the price difference). Placed on their stands, positioned clear of the back wall, and angled in slightly towards the listening position gave the best results in our room.

While the 26cm tall Concept 20s can dig deeply into the bass for their size, they're never going to match larger rivals such as [B&W's 685s](#) or [KEF's Q300s](#) when it comes to bass quantity or absolute dynamic reach. Yet they still sound excellent.

Such is their dynamic verve and clarity throughout the frequency range that we were repeatedly drawn into listening to complete albums rather than the more usual short sections of songs during testing.

The Concept 20s sound all of a piece – seamless in fact – and have a consistency of character from the deepest bass upwards that's rarely heard at this (indeed any) price.

The presentation is articulate and subtle yet has the punch and attack to satisfy, even when we listen to the likes of The Dead Weather's *60 Feet Tall*. There's a measured hand when it comes to rhythms, but changes in pace and the underlying momentum of the music is easily heard.

It's the transparency that impresses most, though. Q Acoustics' claims regarding that cabinet ring true: there really is the feeling that the enclosure isn't contributing much to the final sound at all. The result is a high level of precision, excellent definition and the ability to play complex music without a loss of organisation. The Concept 20s are immensely composed, even when pushed hard, and can fill most rooms with a scale and volume of sound that seems scarcely credible from such a small cabinet.

Another benefit of that cabinet design is stereo imaging: these speakers are brilliantly precise, throwing out a huge soundstage populated by pleasingly focused instruments. With the cabinet not contributing a great deal to the sound, it's hard to pinpoint the physical location of the speakers within the sound image.

Verdict

Such is these Q Acoustics' spread of talents that they sound at home with all types of music. They have the insight and finesse to deliver Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata* with real grace while being more than happy to charge along to the likes of Eminem. How much difference does a cabinet make? When it comes to the Concept 20 we'd say a massive amount. We're great fans of the Q Acoustics 2020i speakers, but the Concept 20s show how much more those drive units can do. Looking for a top-quality sub-£500 standmounter? Ignore this one at your peril.

Read more at <http://www.whathifi.com/q-acoustics/concept-20/review#yBJUgZO5SiQyrYl.99>