

FOUR SQUARE

Quad's latest floorstander in the successful 'L' Series hits the stores. Noel Keywood admires their attempt to appeal to all in the sophisticated form of the 22L.

Seven coats of piano lacquer over a richly patterned Birds Eye Maple veneer is enough to make Quad's 22L floorstanders an attractive feature in the room. This light hued and richly patterned wood catches the eye and looks superb in a modern setting. There's little you can get from Ikea to Habitat (and John Lewis) with a finish like this that is so distinctive, which is why the Quads stand out. But of course appearance, although important, is only half the battle to win the approval of a potential buyer. After the eye has seen the ear will listen and anyone who knows a little about Quad will wonder whether the 22Ls are likely to follow tradition, which means - or meant - catering to conservative tastes and delivering supreme refinement.

As much as anybody, I am a Quad man, you could say, having used ESL63 electrostatics for many years. I am well aware that Quad's famous electrostatics possess a level of subtle ability far beyond conventional loudspeakers. They are one of the world's greats. Do the 22Ls carry forward this tradition? Are they better off with Mozart than Motorhead?

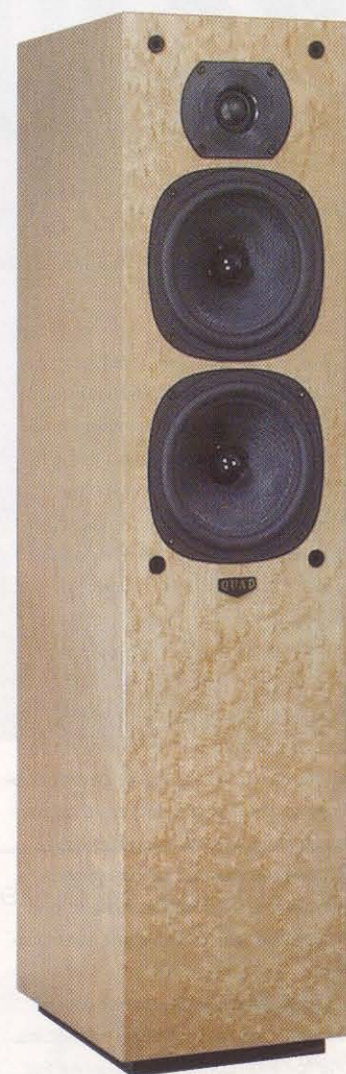
The short answer is "no"! Quad are now out to compete in a wide market and are trying to appeal to broader tastes. The 22Ls tackle rock music with gusto and, in that they have an extra bass driver for added oomph, could be seen to be the company's premiere rock proponent. At the same time though, Quad are a company who have always valued accuracy and the 22L is, under measurement, very accurate too. In other words, these speakers should

reproduce violin as well vocal.

The 22Ls are not idiosyncratic; they follow normal design principles in an attempt to fit in with modern tastes and expectations. A woven Kevlar bass/mid unit (170mm/6.5in) works in conjunction with a textile tweeter to cover most of the audio band. An additional Kevlar unit of the same dimensions works below 150Hz to supplement bass output and increase power handling. This is an important feature for listeners who will be turning volume up to get real bass power, because if you want to go loud there's no substitute for multiple drivers. Quad claim to use top quality drive units, designed and built in-house. The crossover uses quality components and allows bi-wiring. A rear port provides reflex loading and the plinth carries threaded holes for floor spikes for stability.

In their handbook Quad rate the 22L as being able to handle 300W, considerably more than the other speakers in their range. This is largely because of the twin drivers. The 22Ls are really aimed at use with powerful amplifiers of 60W or more in order to be able to get high volume, so sensitivity isn't much of an issue.

I drove the Quads with a Mission Cyrus 7 amplifier bi-wired with Van den Hul cables and fed by a Denon DVD-3800. In basic character the 22Ls struck me from the first CD onward as a fairly brightly lit but concise loudspeaker, with plentiful bass. Having measured them I guessed they would have a sheen, since there's no absence of upper treble and this was a feature that occasionally made itself known with poorer recordings. Spinning a DVD-A track like Toy Matinee's 'Last Plane



Out' showed the sort of dramatic dynamics the 22Ls are able to convey. A cohesive production like this showed the Quads to be full bodied and powerful, able to keep a tight control on rhythm and visceraally fast but muscular too. Their hard edged embodiment of vocalists almost took my breath away.

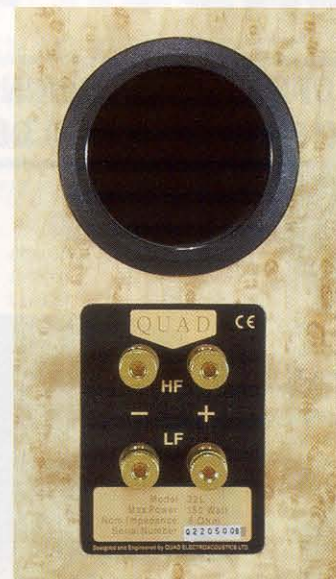
Staying on solid rock from DVD-A, Foreigner's 'Juke Box Hero' again showed just how clean and powerful things can get from the Quads; they've got the sort of bottom-end grunt needed to underpin a track like this. Vocal harmonies came over as a little strained and short of real depth at times though.

The Corrs DVD-A album, *In Blue*, had the hit single *Breathless* sounding a little jangly and incohesive, but I suspect this is partly down to the recording. However,

moving back to Cro-Magnon digital (you know, where the digits bonk you on the head) showed the 22Ls revealing surprising amounts of bass detail within the ample bass lines of Angelique Kidjo's Tatchedogbe. There was real power and good control too. For gut wrenching bass lines, the 22Ls acquit themselves well. They are ahead of the opposition here.

It was with older material that the Quads sometimes proved a little too revealing, to the point of being a little ruthless. Disgusted that a modern survey of one hundred most popular female vocalists failed to even mention Janis Joplin, I put on 'Cry Baby' from Pearl, to expunge the very thought of Emma Bunton. The Quads were a tad hard here, and a bit short on depth resolution too. True, some of those old recordings could be a little suspect in the fidelity department but they invariably have atmosphere and Pearl is no exception. However, as loudspeakers become progressively flatter in their response and tweeters match up better, without the once-common crossover dip, they have also become brighter and this sort of presentation isn't uncommon nowadays.

But of course Quad have always been known for their highbrow approach so, putting on my carpet slippers, I popped in a reasonably modern (1999) digital recording of



Wagner's *Rienzi* Overture. The Quads were nice and clean, but certainly forward. They pushed orchestral sections into a plane in front of the 'speakers, bringing a vividness and sense of detail to some sections unlike anything I've heard before. This effect was accompanied by a flattening of perspectives, giving drama precedence over naturalness. There's no problem with orchestral scale. With ample, well controlled bass Orff's *Carmina Burana* kicked off with suitably powerful timpani thwacks, choir well to the fore with each section again vividly lit.

As long as the recording is a good one, the 22Ls come across as clean and highly detailed, a DVD-

Audio disc of Beethoven's *Eroica* passing muster in this respect. With classical vocal music, Renee Fleming's voice was a little too light and edgy for my belief system to fully engage. As recordings got older and dodgier then so the Quads became more critical. In a nutshell then, the 22Ls handled classical well, but they favour good, modern recordings and I did find, by the way, that the DVD3800 was not good enough with CD to be used with them; even an NAD 521i sounded a lot better!

Quad's 22Ls are good, modern floorstanders. By this I mean they are ruthlessly revealing, which rather favours good recordings over historical ones, shall I say! Their accuracy cannot be denied, nor can their ability. The way they project is dramatic and as a result partnering equipment needs to be chosen with care. In particular they need a very smooth sounding CD/DVD player as a source, plus a matching amplifier from Quad, Mission or Creek, I'd suggest. So equipped, the 22Ls are a superb package that provides the elegance Quad products are known for, together with a super-modern, high tech. presentation of what lies on your discs.

Quad 22L £699

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MEASURED PERFORMANCE

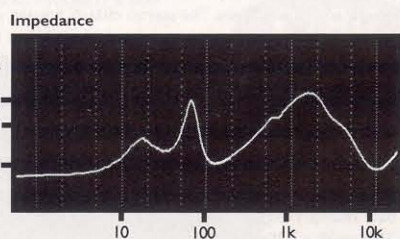
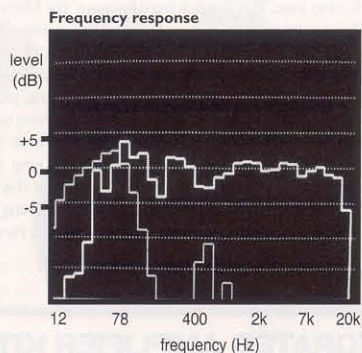
Output from the 22L reaches down to 40Hz and there's plenty of it, so I would expect this floorstander to produce good amounts of deep bass. More unusual is the speaker's impedance curve which suggests more damping than usual to cone movement, meaning the 22L is likely to give a tighter sound at low frequencies.

The 22L's frequency response extends smoothly right up to 16kHz and in this respect it performs well against the best modern designs. I would expect good levels of detail and quite well defined treble, but an up-front sound that will tip very obviously into brightness with bright CDs.

Sensitivity was normal at 86dB for one nominal watt of input (2.84V). Amplifiers of 40W or more should be adequate. With a measured impedance of 60ohms the 'speaker measures much the same as rivals here. Reactance stays low; there are no sudden changes of impedance, so on balance measurement shows the 22L is a fairly reasonable load.

The Quad 22L measures very well in all areas. It should sound smooth, detailed and concise, and is likely to have plenty of solid, well controlled bass. It will be on the bright side though.

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World Verdict

Very revealing, with a definite monitor-like accuracy. The 22Ls have impressively low and tight bass but could be a tad too forward for some. Superb finish and build.