

Quad 23L Classic £1,300

From a venerable name better associated with electrostatic panels, here's its biggest box to date

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Quad 23L Classic

ORIGIN
UK/China

TYPE
Floorstanding
loudspeaker

WEIGHT
17.2kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
225 x 925 x 316mm

FEATURES

- Three-way, reflex ported loudspeaker
- 25mm tweeter, 3x 125mm mid/bass units
- Claimed sensitivity: 88dB/1W/1m

DISTRIBUTOR
International Audio Group

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quad-hifi.co.uk



Once upon a time, one of Britain's brightest stars launched a pair of electrostatic loudspeakers that changed the way many listened to music. Quad's Peter Walker has long since passed away, but his brand remains and its speakers are held in high esteem. The 23L Classics hark from the affordable end of the range; they're standard box speakers and not panels. This is the smaller of two floorstanders in the range, and is available in wood veneers, plus premium lacquered finishes – all are superlatively well done.

The 23L is a three-way design, sporting a 25mm fabric dome tweeter with shallow waveguide, 125mm woven Kevlar midrange cone and an identical unit to do bass duties, plus a passive 165mm down-firing ABR (Auxiliary Bass Radiator) to add low-end reinforcement. This new model gets an enhanced crossover with 'top-quality' components used

throughout, including precision-wound inductors, laminated silicon-iron cores for the bass coils and polypropylene capacitors in the signal path. The cabinet carcass uses two different wood materials to minimise resonances and specially selected long-hair acoustic absorbent lining is used inside and twin rear firing reflex ports are fitted. Despite this, the 23L sits happily quite close to a wall and is easy enough to drive.

Sound quality

These Quads have a surprisingly light and spruce sound; there's no sense of them being quiet, shy or retiring. The cabinets appear extremely well damped and don't contribute one jot to the sound, instead that honour goes to the Kevlar mid and bass units, which have a distinctively finely etched, intricate sound that throws masses of detail out at you in an immediate, engaging way. The tonal balance certainly isn't dull, and I'd imagine it could veer towards hardness in the wrong system. *Birdies Sing* is a joy; lots of information pours out with great eagerness and punch, making for a very animated presentation. Dynamics are good, the speakers give a lovely, fast, taut snare drum sound, which sits behind the close-miked vocals. Backing vocals aren't quite as apparent as the Spondors, the Quads preferring to work with the instruments towards the front of the mix.

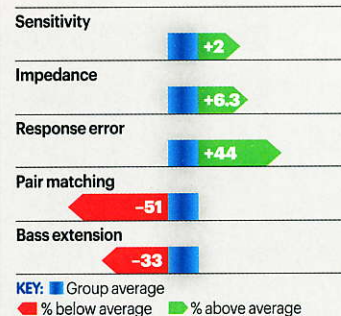
The New Order track follows the same theme; masses of information is ferreted out of the busy mix, with lovely rhythmic interplay between electronic snares and hi-hats. Vocals sound intimate and close-up, and those digital synthesisers sparkle with harmonics. The downside is that the bassline isn't particularly strong, although it certainly bounces along nicely, and there isn't much stage depth to the proceedings; as with the High Llamas track, everything is served up right at you without any room to roam.

The Lou Donaldson piece again shows the Quads' fine rhythms.

ON TEST

Quad's reputation for conservative specification lives on in the 23L, the claimed 88dB sensitivity being fully 1.5dB below our pink noise figure of 89.5dB. This is achieved in part by resort to low impedance, our measured minimum of 3.6 ohms being a little lower than Quad's claimed 4 ohms and inconsistent with the 8 ohms nominal specification. Impedance phase angles are quite large at LF, but the minimum EPDR of 1.7 ohms is slightly higher than the group average. On-axis response errors of ± 5.0 dB and ± 3.7 dB would be a lot better, but for a peak at 16kHz. Pair matching error was a little high at ± 1.5 dB, but the largest disparities were above 10kHz. Bass extension is disappointing at 79Hz, the gentle roll-off beginning at a high 130Hz. The CSD waterfall confirms fast initial energy decay, although there is a rather poorly damped resonance at around 3kHz. **KH**

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



However, although they are explicitly detailed and with lacerative speed, they don't really better the Spondors, yet the latter manages a more beguiling, subtle and natural presentation. This got me musing that the 23Ls sound more like Missions than they do Spondors, which is something you'd never have said of Quads of yore! This isn't to denigrate them; match to a warm source and place them close to the wall and you'll have a vivid listening experience with masses of detail and insight, yet retaining that slightly 'dry' tonality that has been the brand's trademark. Interestingly voiced, they're well worth a listen ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY

★★★★★

VALUE FOR MONEY

★★★★★

BUILD QUALITY

★★★★★

EASE OF DRIVE

★★★★★

OVERALL

★★★★★

LIKE: Fast, dry, detailed sound; fine speed; sublime finish

DISLIKE: Light, low bass; bright in some systems

WESAY: Classy standmounters with a sparkly, musical sound



Group test verdict

He's shifted more than his fair share of hefty speakers, so before he puts his feet up for a well-earned cuppa, it's over to **David Price** for the results

LOUDSPEAKERS ARE SURELY one of the most personal things you can buy, so all prospective purchasers should hear them first; this group test should be taken purely as a guide. People have different tastes, and we can't legislate for all of them! Still, there were big differences across the group; here's what we heard.
 The Focal's inability to get into the musical groove marks it down; on the surface it's a powerful box with punch and presence, but it just didn't gel musically. Factor in the rather glassy sounding drive units and poorly controlled cabinet, and it came a

resounding last. Shame, as in other ways it's a lovely package.
 From this point upwards, all the other speakers here proved really good in their own respective ways. Although the Acoustic Energy came fifth, it's a really nice loudspeaker, and if you've got a bright source it will really work well. Smooth, easy to listen to yet fun – what's not to like?
 The Quads are really accomplished, with a wonderfully detailed and forensic sound that will suit classical music well. Tonally they're a bit dry. Factor in their superlative finish, and they're great value for money.

The Tannoys come third; flawed but enormous fun, everything they play sounds dramatic, big, powerful and arresting. But they're not the most transparent here, as those drive units leave an obvious sonic footprint on the music.
 The Epos Elans are the runner up, but some may regard them as the winner, as they manage to combine the Focal's physicality, the Tannoy's sophistication and insight; if you are looking for an affordable floorstander that gives lots of sound per pound, this is it!

WINNER

The Spondor A3s pull you right to the heart of the music. So smooth yet super-detailed, these baby floorstanders are wonderfully natural and beguiling to listen to. They're so effortless and natural sounding that everything you play is a pleasure.

Make/model	Acoustic Energy AE 305	Epos Elan 30	Focal Chorus 726 V	Quad 23L Classic	Spondor A3	Tannoy Revolution DC6T SE
Price	£1,000	£1,000	£1,200	£1,300	£1,295	£1,000
Sound	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Value	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Build	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Ease of drive	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Overall	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Key features	Superb build and finish at the price, plus a lovely smooth and musical sound	Very musically satisfying to listen to with a powerful, wideband sound	Impressive looking package, but sounds a little uncouth and musically muddled	Absolutely stunning build and finish with a super-clean and revealing sound	Wonderfully musical, couth and inviting sound, yet highly detailed, too	Great fun to listen to with excellent rhythms and a big bold sound
Two-way	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
2.5 way	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
Three-way	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Biwire	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Plinth	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

TRY WITH THESE

CD PLAYER:
 Audiolab 8200CD **£700**

Still our favourite mid-price silver disc spinner, it gives nothing away in performance terms to any rival and provides a powerful, detailed source for them to work with. Its digital inputs give it added DAC functionality, and very good it sounds too!

CABLE LOOM:
 vdH The Wave/CS-122 Hybrid **£130/£20/m**

Another recent Group Test winner, this interconnect and speaker cable combination makes music snap into focus and lets it fly rhythmically and dynamically. Unlike a number of similarly priced looms, the music has a lovely lilting flow.

INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER:
 Exposure 3010S2 **£1,350**

This crisply styled one-box integrated amplifier puts out a serious amount of power and sports a stripped-down feature set. Its sound quality is so good that it won July 2013's integrated amp Group Test, and will be an ideal match to any of the speakers here.