

► **DETAILS**

PRODUCT
Quad Z-1

ORIGIN
UK/China

TYPE
2-way standmount
loudspeaker

WEIGHT
6.5kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
219 x 383 x 283mm

FEATURES
• 90 x 12mm
ribbon tweeter
• 150mm Kevlar
weave mid/bass
driver
• Quoted sensitivity
86dB/1W/1m

DISTRIBUTOR
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Raise the bar

Quad's Z-3 was one of our favourite floorstanders of 2016, so **David Vivian** has high hopes for the compact and curvy Z-1



It isn't often we see a tweeter take up more space on a speaker's baffle than its mid/bass driver. In fact, I can't think of another example. So let's get this out of the way: grilles off, the Quad Z-1 does look oddly top heavy until you get used to it, that XXL ribbon unit and bijou Kevlar-coned woofer giving the impression that this curvy standmount's sonic firepower might have a distinct upward tilt.

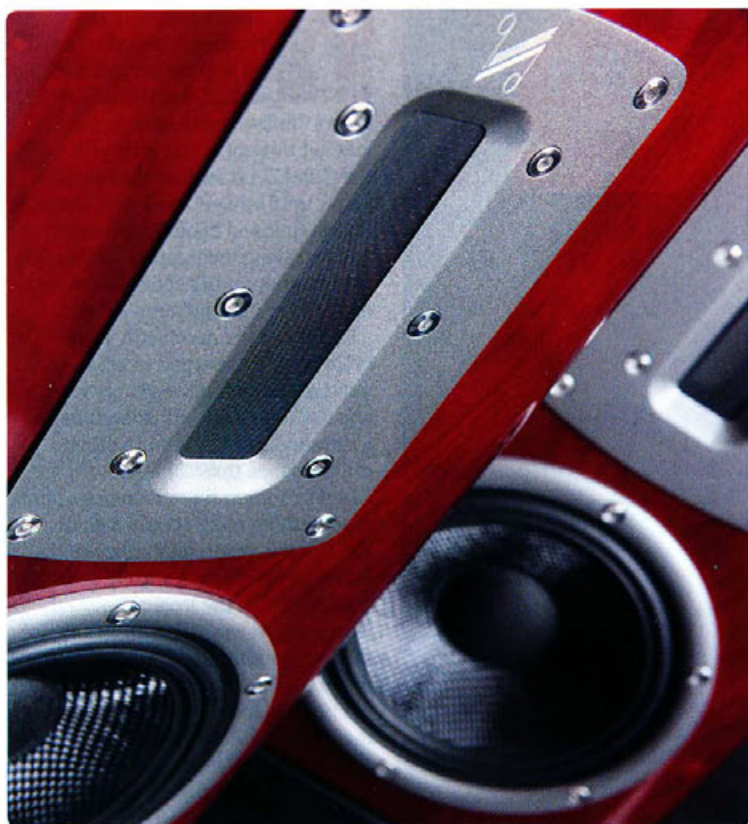
Bigger doesn't necessarily mean brighter, of course, and to set your mind at rest before we go any further you'd actually be hard pressed to find a standmount with a more natural tonal balance than the Z-1.

Design supremo Peter Comeau hints at something more special still for the Z Series, something closer to the brand's own electrostatically delivered gold standard, the iconic ELS. And with the two-way Z-1 – the smaller of the two standmounts in the four-strong range – the outsized prominence of the ribbon lends a certain weight to the claim. While sharing the same composite sandwich construction as the robust yet gloriously fast and transparent ribbon unit found

The Z-1 displays impressive ability to sound airy, organic and unprocessed

in 2015's S models, the 90 x 12mm ribbon developed for the Z Series is twice as tall, granting it even greater power handling, bandwidth and sensitivity. The increased bandwidth is especially useful in a two-way design, taking some of the workload away from the 150mm Kevlar-weave mid/bass driver and permitting smoother integration between the two units, a task marshalled by the re-engineered crossover network. The S Series models use similar Kevlar-coned bass and mid/bass drivers, but they don't have the Z's double-roll cone surrounds which have been designed to control breakup modes with claimed benefits in accuracy and transparency.

Quad's 'acoustic filter bass reflex loading' incorporates a dual-chamber filter system inside the enclosure, with the reflex port (actually, a slot) exiting via a specially shaped expansion chamber in the plinth which, in turn, is filled with resistive foam. The idea is to marry the sensitivity and extension expected from a bass reflex system with the clarity and transient attack of a closed box (infinite baffle) design, avoiding the turbulence and 'chuffing' ▶



often associated with conventionally ported loudspeakers such as this.

The Z-1 is the least costly way into Quad's flagship dynamic speaker range. There's a larger standmount, the £1,500 Z-2, and two floorstanders – the £3,200 Z-4 tower (see *Beautiful System* p90) and the slightly smaller £2,500 Z-3 (HFC 416). These speakers are luxuriously built with rather lovely new boat-backed enclosures further distinguished by their curved, sloping tops and a choice of high-gloss

Its sonic talent exceeds its price by the same wide margin as its build

finishes. Constructed from layers of wood fibre composites with varying densities and strengthened with multiple circumferential braces, the enclosure seeks to reduce panel resonance to below audibility. Internal long hair fibre damping helps absorb unwanted reflections and this, in conjunction with the scattering effect of the curved cabinet sides, is claimed to minimise coloration. On the exterior, multiple layers of piano lacquer are applied over black, white or rosewood veneers, each layer being hand-polished to a face-reflecting gloss before the next is applied. The depth

and intensity of colour is simply superb. You really will want to wear the supplied handling gloves to avoid greasy fingerprints.

Sound quality

Standing in for my usual ATC pre-power amplification and Chord Hugo DAC is another Chord Hugo – the larger and more expensive, mains-powered Hugo TT – and its matching TToby power amp (both reviewed on p42). It's a potent, hugely synergistic, dynamic duo that lovers of rosy and romantic amplification will hate. But I have a hunch the Z-1 will make the most of the resolution and grip team Chord, fed by a Cyrus CD Xt Signature CD transport (HFC 386), serves up.

Much like the floostanding Z-3, the Z-1 swiftly displays a lovely ability to sound airy, organic and unprocessed so that your focus is immediately drawn to the music rather than what the speaker makes of it. If the Quad is guilty of anything, it's of adding a gossamer layer of warmth through the midband so the presentation is even more approachable, rendering aggressive or harsh recordings more listenable. But it does nothing to diminish the honest efforts of the Cyrus and Chord to keep things clear, clean, resolute and on time.

I'd be wary of driving the Z-1 with an amp and source inclined towards



Quad has certainly picked a tough price point for the Z-1 – not because it's teeming with would-be hot shot rivals, but because £1,200 puts it grille-to-grille with a standmount with a bulletproof reputation for studio-class sonic honesty that goes by the name of the ATC SCM11. The sound off points up vivid contrasts, with the ATC sounding drier, punchier and more analytical while the Quad is warmer and a little more open with greater high-frequency subtlety. Two great but very different speakers that are equally recommendable but offer real choice. As always, our tip is to try before you buy.

the soft glow side of the spectrum – the result might just sound a tad too cosy and comfortable. Anything with a fair dose of the clarity, drive, rhythmic integrity, textural colour and sheer musical verve generated by the front end I'm using here should allow the Z-1 to show what it's really capable of.

Confounding expectations raised by the 'polite' personality previously associated with Quad's non-ESL offerings, it doesn't hold back. Steely Dan's *Aja* sounds effortlessly dynamic and tactile, Fagan and Becker's fanatically polished and honed production licks being as faithfully rendered as the meticulously lop-sided pacing. Bass is both fulsome and agile, which helps to make proceedings feel fleshed out with plenty of drive and truly locked down tempo during the drum solo sections. This track can sound a little relentless and up tight on some systems. What's needed is a strong but less tightly coiled spring and that easing of tension is what the Z-1 provides, letting the music breathe and flow in a rhythmically lucid and surefooted fashion.

The Z-1's lovely open, fluid midband and treble provides huge insight, but doesn't punish less than perfect recordings. So when Anita Baker sings *Sometimes I Wonder Why*, it's the soul that powers through and although it's impossible not to notice, you don't get too hung up about the seldom less than astringent edge to the vocal. Once more there's the foundational reassurance of that smooth, deep and

Robust binding posts allow for bi-wiring



IN SIGHT



- 1 90 x 12mm ribbon tweeter
- 2 Bi-wire binding posts
- 3 Bass reflex slot
- 4 150mm Kevlar mid/bass driver

TREBLE TOP

The use of a ribbon-based driver is not new to Quad. In fact, the company's first loudspeaker in 1949 was known as the Corner Ribbon. Back then, ribbon drivers were delicate affairs, prone to burning out if overpowered. Like the ribbon unit developed for the S Series, the composite sandwich construction of the Z Series ribbon ensures it is robust enough to handle high-powered amps, but it is significantly larger than the S Series ribbon. The ribbon driver is fully immersed in a powerful magnetic field so it can accomplish its dual role of being both the voice coil

and the sound radiator. This is a key difference between ribbon treble units and conventional dome tweeters, in which the voice coil 'motor' is attached separately to the diaphragm. As well as advantages in transient response and detail, the Z Series ribbon treble unit is claimed to remain smooth right up to the highest musical overtones beyond the limits of human hearing. Controlled directivity maintains sound quality over a wide horizontal arc to give a broad listening sweet spot while vertical dispersion is tailored to avoid floor and ceiling reflections.

nicely tuneful bass underpinning the intensity and emotional expressiveness of the performance with no hint of boominess or flab, but a great deal of grip and control. Special, too, is the ability to vanish within the bounds of an expansive soundstage and, with a suitable 'live' recording, easily convey the acoustic character and scale of a venue and locate the performers and audience inside with an uncanny sense of place and solidity. Nor do you have to sit bang in the middle of the speakers to get good stereo. In fact, you quickly forget about them when the music starts, which has to be a good sign.

As mentioned earlier, tonal balance is nudged delicately onto the warm side of the neutral median but top-to-bottom integration is flawless, and both tonality and structure keep it together heroically if you lean even quite heavily on the Chord TToby's penchant for playing loud, accurately conveying the little power amp's outrageous confidence and composure for a 50 watter. As it was at the beginning of the listening session, natural and unforced is the order of the day for the Quad Z-1 – the decibel fix is up to you.

Conclusion

Most standmount speakers in the Quad Z-1's price range have an

agenda that seeks to capitalise on the inherent strengths conferred by a compact, rigid enclosure and simple two-way driver configuration. This usually manifests as fine midband clarity and imaging, rhythmic surety, crisp timing and fast, tuneful bass that lacks weight and extension. The Z-1 ticks all the basics in some style but, crucially, goes further by adding true high-end midband and treble quality to the mix allied to a sumptuously deep bass performance guaranteed to quash floorstander envy. As such, its sonic talent exceeds its price point by the same wide margin as its build and finish. Hotly recommended ●

Hi-FiChoice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY



VALUE FOR MONEY



BUILD QUALITY



EASE OF DRIVE



OVERALL



LIKE: Sounds, looks and feels absurdly good for the money

DISLIKE: Overly euphonic front ends need not apply

WE SAY: The classiest standmount in its sector and a sonic star

Q&A

Peter Comeau

Director of acoustic design, IAG



DV: This is a large ribbon tweeter for a small speaker. Presumably its extra bandwidth makes driver integration less problematic for a two-way design?

PC: Yes, the large ribbon is beneficial in reaching down further into the midrange and allows superior integration with the bass/midrange unit. In addition, the power response of the ribbon in-room is a good match to that of the bass/midrange unit in its upper frequency range.

The Z-1's build quality and standard of finish seems almost ridiculously good for the price. How has this been achieved?

Here at Quad, we've always been determined to deliver high-end performance and build quality at affordable prices, and the Z Series is no exception. We can do this because we are serving an international market, so production quantities are higher than one would normally associate with high-end products. Also, our purpose-built factory manufactures 99 percent of the parts inhouse, which enables us to keep costs under control as well as using craftsman to hand finish our speakers. The Z Series' gorgeous gloss finish is achieved through the application of multiple layers of lacquer, each layer polished by hand before the next is applied.

Could you go into a little more depth about the advantages of a double-roll surround between the Kevlar-weave cone and basket?

The common problem with a single, large-roll surround is that it deforms spectacularly under high excursion, affecting the distortion characteristics. Also there is a reflection effect from the abrupt rising edge of the surround, which shows up in the midrange. The double-roll surround, when calculated and designed correctly, avoids both these issues. The challenge is that it is very difficult to design for good linearity!