

Dynaudio Contour 20i stand-mount loudspeakers

Chris Kelly

The last pair of Dynaudios to grace the Kelly living room was a pair of the company's Special Forty stand-mounts (tested in issue 153). I thoroughly enjoyed them once I had run them in, which took a good few weeks. Thus when the brand's

UK Sales Manager offered me the chance to hear the Contour 20i, with the promise that the running had already been done, I was more than willing to host them. The Contour range has been a mainstay of Dynaudio's model line up for a good few years now, but the "i" versions have enjoyed some significant improvements over the well-regarded 2016 previous generation of Contours. The announcement of a brand new finish, Nordic Silver, also caught my eye. I have only seen it in photographs, but it looks very handsome, as a demo pair has not yet reached these shores, I asked to review whatever was at hand.

On arrival, each in a separate box, the first thing that struck me was their weight. Each enclosure tips the scales at 14kg, which, given that the physical dimensions are 215 mm x 440 mm x 360 mm (WHD), gives an immediate sense of their solidity – I have had floor-standing loudspeakers here, which weigh less! The external fit and finish was exemplary, with a very handsome walnut veneer blending well with a chamfered black aluminium baffle housing the Esotar 2i tweeter assembly and Magnesium Silicate Polymer woofer. We shall return to the technology within the rather sleek cabinet in due course.

You little Beauty!

Beauty of course is subjective, but to my eye this is a handsome loudspeaker and for almost the entire duration of their time in my system I played them without the magnetically-attached black grilles in place. While I am sure it would be possible to match the Contour 20i with a good third party stand, I think it makes very good aesthetic and audio sense to use the dedicated stands as supplied for this review pair. The loudspeaker is attached to the top plate using four chunky bolts, which gives the combined unit a >>





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» real sense of solidity, and acoustically obviates the need to experiment with different materials between the two surfaces. As far as any stand-mount loudspeaker can be so described, the Contour 20is on their stands look elegant, and got the all-important approval of Mrs. K, who is very tolerant of the ever-changing look at the far end of her lounge.

The sides of the cabinet are slightly elliptical, tapering slightly towards the rear. The veneer wraps right around including the rear, which is delightfully uncluttered. Towards the top is a circular port and towards the bottom sit a pair of high quality multiway binding posts on a square aluminium plate that designates the model. All the real goodness of the design however, lies out of sight within the aforementioned cabinet.

Starting at the top, the 28mm Esotar tweeter has received significant engineering invested in it to give it the “i” status. The rear chamber has been enlarged to improve damping and the Hexis inner dome has been brought over from the more expensive Confidence range. The design goal was to flatten the frequency response and further reduce unwanted resonances, leading to a cleaner, smoother treble. The 180mm woofer was also subjected to some reworking too.

Aramid spiders

The lightweight aluminium voice coil and vented dual-ferrite magnet system are carried forward from the previous iteration, but the spider suspension was improved by using aramid fibres (no, I didn't know either until I Googled it – a fascinating read it was too but best left for you to explore for yourselves). The ribs are of varying width which gives even better control of the speaker cone's excursion. To support these changes the crossover has been tweaked and actually simplified, since it was found that there was no longer a need for extra impedance-correction circuitry. This leads to a shorter signal path and cleaner sound.

The technical specification of the Contour 20is quotes a sensitivity of 86dB@2.83V/1m, with 40hm impedance and an IEC power handling capability of 180 Watts. The crossover frequency is 2200Hz.

I set up the loudspeakers in the spot I found to be the best starting point for placement, gently toed in towards the listening seat so that the imaginary line from each tweeter intersected slightly behind the listener's head. Based on previous experience with rear-ported designs I allowed 54cm from the corner of the cabinet closest to the rear

wall. At the time of the installation I had in place for review an NAD C3050 amplifier/DAC, so I hooked the Contours up to it with AudioQuest Robin Hood loudspeaker cable. The sources that I used were my modified Linn Sondek LP12, with a Dynavector XX2 cartridge fitted to the Linn Ittok arm, amplified by a Gold Note PH5/PSU phono stage plugged into the one pair of analogue inputs on the C3050. My AURALiC ARIES MINI streamer was connected to the digital coaxial input and my Panasonic television into the optical input.

Fire up the playlist!

I fired up one of playlists in Qobuz on the ARIES MINI and left all the units to warm up while I returned to my study to crack on with some other reviews. After about an hour I was intrigued enough to venture back into the lounge, in a pause between tracks. As luck would have it the first track to play was One Of These Days, from Pink Floyd's *Meddle* [Harvest]. Oh my goodness. That insistent bass riff came thundering through, and as the band joined in I turned up the volume and was engulfed into the music. Nick Mason's distorted voice was chillingly conveyed. “One of these days I'm going to cut you into little pieces”. As the track ended I decided to take control of proceedings and switched to the analogue input on the C3050, and slipped my original copy of *Meddle* onto the LP12's platter.

The soundstage created by the Contour 20is, aided and abetted by an amplifier which was really supposed to be from a lower league was extraordinary and I played both sides of the album. ‘Echoes’ was magnificent. The ASDIC/SONAR beeps, the ethereal vocals, the squalls of guitar made the 20 minutes or so of the song seem to pass in a flash. As I was supposed to be trying to listen critically I swapped out *Meddle* and cued up my original early release of *Dark Side Of The Moon* [Harvest]. The cash register opening of ‘Money’ was extraordinary and as the song sequence unfolded I noted “sounds far bigger than the stand-mounts in front of me”.

Switching to one of my favourite jazz records, *Bass On Top* by the Paul Chambers Quartet [Blue Note], the band leader's double bass, recorded by Rudy Van Gelder back in July 1957, had an incredibly realistic timbre, whether being bowed or plucked. The resonance from within that large wooden body was perfectly portrayed, but so were the piano, guitar and drums of the other fine band members. The whole album was recorded in one day – a rare day off from Chambers' main gig, playing with Miles Davis. I have »



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» to credit the C3050 for some of the magic I heard then and throughout the time it was paired with the Contours 20is.

It's time for Love

I have a few tracks and indeed albums which form the core of my critical listening for a review. One of them is the 1967 masterpiece by Love, *Forever Changes [Elektra]*. It was widely overlooked here in the UK in its release year but a friend of mine had a copy and we played it so often on his Dansette that it was probably ruined, but we 16 year olds listened to it in awe. I cued up side 1 and the opening notes of Bryan Maclean's lovely 'Alone Again Or' washed over me. The late Arthur Lee, leader of the band, produced with the help of Bruce Botnick, who was the Elektra record label's go-to control room wizard (he also worked on every studio album by Love's label-mates The Doors) and between them they conjured up an extraordinary melange of folk, rock and even managed to work in mariachi trumpets.

Through the Contours the music seemed truly three-dimensional, allowing me to hear deep into the production. I have played the same album through some very highly regarded floor standing loudspeakers in the same room, and this two way stand-mount device gave as full-blooded rendition of this album as I have ever heard. Timing was exquisite, the delicacy of the quiet reflective passages and the full throated noise of a band giving it some serious wellie were both handled superbly. I hardly left the room during the next few days as I selected albums pretty much at random for the sheer joy of hearing what this system could achieve.

Because my music system co-exists with television in the same room, I use the hi-fi for television sound. All the characteristics which marked it out as a special music maker with the Contour 20is in play carried over into



our televisual experience. Dialogue came through with wonderful clarity, as did small sounds off camera which sometimes get lost, and when the going got explosive, the Dynaudios never failed to deliver a really visceral experience. Not for one moment did it occur to me to bring my REL305SE sub-woofer into play. Although equipped with a rear bass port I think I had initially sited the 20is in an optimal position, because at no time during music or movie play back did I detect a hint of the irritating chuffing noise that can be the bane of such layout. I put my hand across one of the bass ports when playing another perennial favourite here, Colosseum's 1969 masterwork *Valentyne Suite*

[Vertigo]. I was surprised at just how much air was being driven through the port, because in the listening area there was no hint of bloated or flabby bass.

Corrective faff

In due course, the NAD's time with me came to a close, and I replaced it with my own Lyngdorf TDAI3400, which is equipped with Lyngdorf's proprietary room correction software called RoomPerfect. The NAD has Dirac built in but I was so impressed with the sound without Dirac that I never got around to setting up – a task which I find a bit of a faff to be honest. (There's a reason why a number of Dirac Set-up Specialists find themselves in quite high demand!). RoomPerfect is a much less complicated tool to set up so I did it with the Contour 20is. After I had finished I streamed some music from Qobuz again and switched on the fly between the Bypass, Focus and Global options on the Lyngdorf. To my surprise there was very little to chose between them, meaning that the frequency response of the 20is in a reasonably acoustically benign room is pretty much spot on. Bravo Dynaudio.



EQUIPMENT REVIEW
Dynaudio Contour 20i



» Sometimes I am asked about which loudspeakers are good for this genre of music, or that genre. The Contour 20is simply do not care what you play through them, because they will faithfully yet dynamically turn whatever signal they are fed into the best version of itself. I played everything from the Allman Brothers Band to ZZ Top, I played classical, choral, baroque, romantic, modern, easy listening, blues, jazz and avant-garde music that has bordered on the unlistenable through other loudspeakers, and it all sounded terrific. If my room was bigger I might have tried one of the floor-standing Contour models. In my 15 x 12 x 8 modern living room the 20is were just perfect.

Final Thoughts

Dynaudio is a long established loudspeaker manufacturer that has concentrated its efforts, certainly here in the UK,

on a small, select group of dealers who appreciate the unique qualities that the whole range of Dynaudio models bring to the party, and who have a clientele sufficiently discerning to enjoy their effortless musicality. It is possible therefore that they do not make it on to potential buyers' audition lists as often as they should, which is a great shame. They are a company with a fanatical commitment to quality, which means that far more of their key components are developed and manufactured in house. The word passionate is bandied about far too often these days, and has therefore become somewhat devalued. However, I believe the design engineers, product marketers, sales and manufacturing specialists are as passionate about their loudspeakers as they can be. Details matter to them, and that shines through in their products. But all that would count for nothing unless they sounded fantastic, and these Contour 20is tick that box with a golden tick.

I have heard a pair of the range topping Confidence loudspeakers on a very high end Naim system, and they were sublime. The Contour 20is which lived here for a few weeks sounded not far short of that when partnered with rather less exotic electronics. When I was in the retail end of the audio world we used to encourage customers to allocate about 30% of their budget to loudspeakers, and the same to amplification and sources, with the 10% left going on cables, and that is probably still true today. If you were to do that with a pair of Contour 20is you would have a system that will see you right for many years come. Make sure when you arrange an audition that the dealer has done justice to the loudspeakers by giving them a lot of playing time before you hear them – they do need to be run in. That done, they can be as exciting or as relaxing as your musical choices demand, and however long your listening session lasts you will find yourself utterly engrossed, just as I was. +

Technical specifications

Type Two-way, bass-reflex rear-ported stand-mount loudspeaker

Drive units 28mm Esotar 2i with Hexis tweeter, 18 cm MSP mid/woofer

Frequency Response 39Hz–23kHz ±3dB

Sensitivity 86dB @ 2.83V/1m

Rated Impedance 4Ω

Crossover frequency 2.2kHz

Finishes Black High Gloss, Walnut, Nordic Silver

Dimensions (W×H×D) 21.5 × 44 × 36cm

Weight 14kg

Price £4,500/\$5,750 per pair

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