

Who says Quads have to be Electrostats?

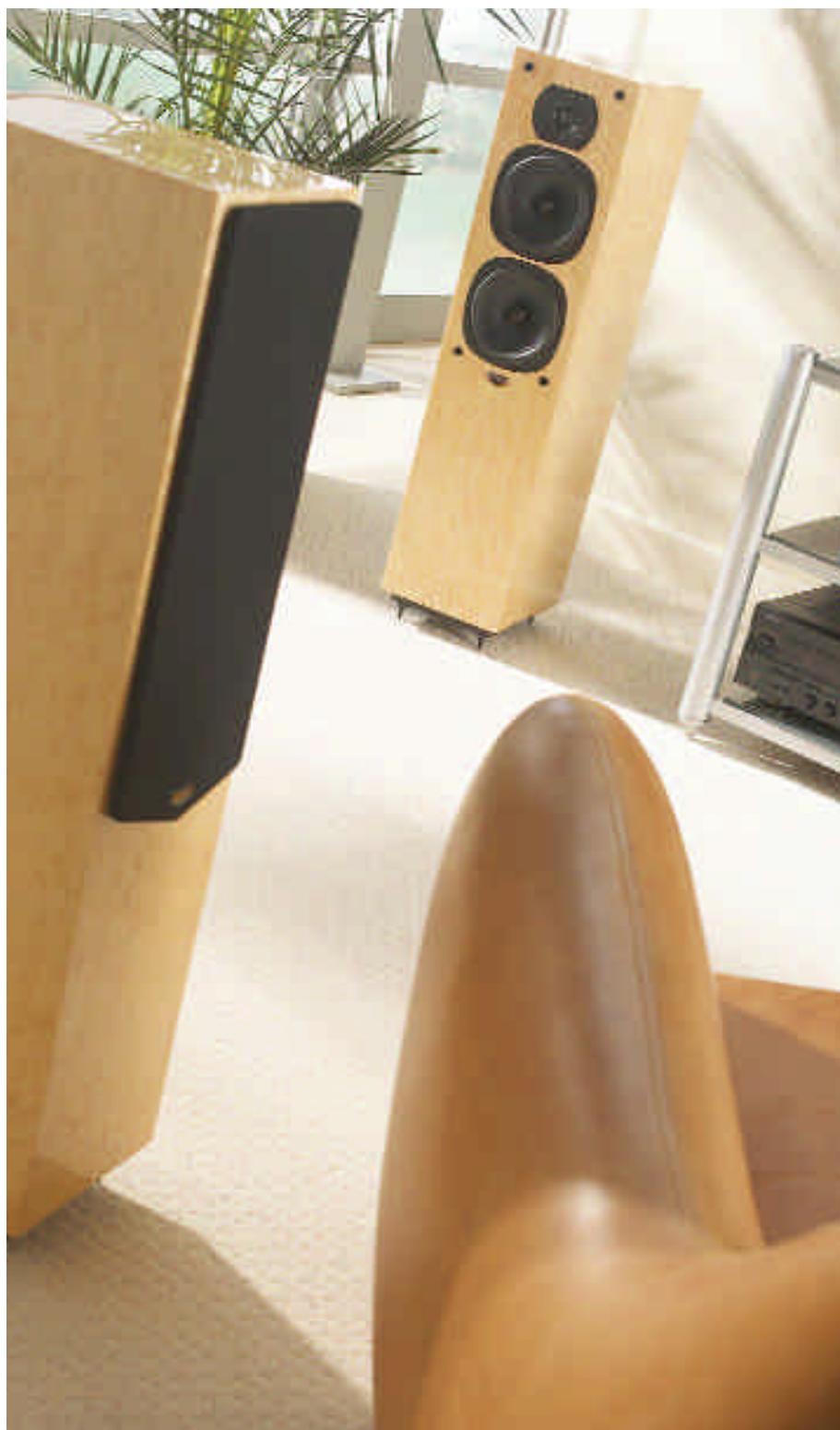
Quad 22L Loudspeaker and L-series Subwoofer

When I first heard that Quad was introducing a new line of dynamic loudspeakers, designed and manufactured entirely in-house, I wondered whether they would be worthy of the Quad name. Like many audiophiles, I've reserved a special place in my heart for Quad electrostats, having owned several stock and highly modified pairs over the years. Thus far, nobody else's modestly priced dynamic speakers have been able to rival my reference,

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tricked-out Quad electrostats when it comes to musicality, naturalness, coherence, low level detail, microdynamics, and transient quickness. But could these new moving coil entries from Quad itself close the gap?

To get right to the point, the new floorstanding Quad 22Ls come closer to some of the best sonic attributes of my beloved electrostats than any other full-range speakers with dynamic drivers I've heard under \$2K—and they do a better job than some costing much more. Not only do the L-series floorstanders maintain a lot of the "house sound" for which Quad loudspeakers are famous, but they also are quite dynamic, go down to 30Hz (which Quad's electrostats do not), have



absolutely stunning looks, and are priced within reach of more music and home theater enthusiasts. Quad has pulled off an undoubtedly tough, and somewhat risky, balancing act.

The 22Ls approach some of the phenomenal aspects of their electrostatic siblings in three areas. First, there is a musical "rightness" about them, such as their ability to reproduce the timbre of instruments and voices naturally. Far too many mid-priced (and higher-priced) speakers fail to do this, which is one of the primary reasons I keep returning to Quad's stats. The 22Ls don't obscure or homogenize the subtle sonic cues that differentiate the very best instruments from their more mundane counterparts. Listen to the timbre of the pre-war 10-10 clarinet on the Musical Fidelity recording of

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Mozart's *Clarinet Concerto* on these Quads, and you'll see what I mean. At times, the musicality and sonic realism of the 22Ls fooled me into thinking I was listening to their electrostatic siblings!

Second, the soundstaging of the 22Ls is very good, rivaling speakers costing much more. Admittedly, some lower-priced speakers I've reviewed recently, such as the Wharfedale 9.6s, PSB T45s, and Snell K-7s, have very good lateral imaging between the speakers. The Quads excel here, too, but their soundstage has more depth and width that extends beyond the boundaries of the speakers at the front of the stage. Listening to the wonderful opera recording of Verdi's *Aida* [Decca/Speakers Corner], the expansive soundstage helped pull me into the

music. While this may be an artifact of the recording process, it is a lot of fun to "see" performers moving about the stage.

Third, the Quad 22Ls have low distortion and are quite coherent for full range speakers with multiple dynamic drivers, particularly in this price class. When listening to instruments with broad frequency ranges, such as pianos, transitions from one driver to another are nearly seamless. The 22L's proprietary drivers have been designed by Quad's Steve Hewlett from scratch to work well together and minimize distortion. One agile Kevlar woofer interfaces with the quick fabric dome tweeter in the critical midrange area, while the other identical, long-throw woofer handles deeper bass only. Other manufacturers like Wharfedale, another IAG company, and PSB use similar high-woofer/low-woofer arrangements to increase coherency, and I do like this approach. With their powerful magnets, the Quad drivers are able to start and stop quickly, which gives them transient quickness without excessive overhang across their frequency ranges, enhancing coherence.

The 22Ls offer some real advantages over my more costly, modified, original Quads. While I still prefer the Quad stats overall for two-channel audio, my call goes to the floorstanders for other applications. Let's face it, the 22Ls are much more practical for multi-channel audio and home theater, offering far greater placement and seating flexibility, and a higher dynamic ceiling. I kept expecting them to poop out on large scale dynamic peaks, but they hung right in there on all kinds of music. The bass is so extended and satisfying that a subwoofer is not really required. Listen to Debussy's *Images pour Orchestre* [Decca/Speakers Corner] on the 22Ls and you'll hear bass that is deep and rich.

These Quads fit in more easily with room décor and have the most beautiful cabinet work I've seen in any mid-priced speaker. You can choose from four real wood veneers at no extra charge. My speakers came in bird's eye maple and had an exquisite high-gloss





Quad L subwoofer

finish, reminding me of the one on my Grotrian Steinway grand piano.

Applying seven coats of lacquer, as Quad does on the L-series speakers, is labor and time intensive, but well worth the results. I haven't found this level of quality and polish at the \$1600/pair price point, or, for that matter, in many speakers costing \$3K/pair!

The Quads come with other nice touches that make you feel like you're buying expensive speakers. They arrive wrapped in a cloth-like bag and include a set of white gloves to keep fingerprints from marring their high gloss surfaces. The speakers have a double set of gold-plated binding posts, and I found that bi-wiring added a bit more purity to the midrange. While the posts at first appear to limit you to using bare speaker wire or one prong of a spade connector, you can happily use banana connectors if you pop out the plastic red and black covers on the terminals. Lastly the shipping containers have multiple layers of protection, including foam inserts, which protect the speakers from shipping mishaps. It's a good thing, too, because the review samples arrived with a deep gouge in their outer box. Fortunately, the gorgeous speakers were unscathed.

The Quad L-series Subwoofer

Frankly, Quad's new L-series subwoofer is so good in its own right that it really merits a full review, but I'll try to do it justice in a few paragraphs. Last

night, I attended a performance of the San Francisco Ballet, and they used a full orchestra for a Tchaikovsky selection. On dynamic peaks, I could feel the pressure of the sound waves against my chest, particularly from the double bass, brass and tympani. The addition of the Quad sub gives me a similar feeling, as this baby moves a lot of air. It adds to the

realism of an already fine system and makes it more dynamic, extended, holographic, and thrilling.

Although a lot of subwoofers can move air, the Quad is also quick, controlled, and musical. It doesn't intrude on the purity of the midrange and is fast enough to keep up with the smaller bass drivers of the 22Ls. At times, I thought I had failed to turn on the subwoofer when suddenly, powerful deep tones emerged that sent chills down my spine.

The overall performance of this downward firing 12" subwoofer is the best I've heard at anywhere near its price. It comes with a remote to control the sub's volume, low-pass crossover points (from 35-85Hz in ten Hertz increments, or you can by-pass it altogether), and phase (0 or 180 degrees) from the listening position. It is highly useful, and I can't see going back to a subwoofer without this capability. Thankfully, the L-series sub has the same luxurious high gloss finish as the 22Ls. With its speed, power and control, this Quad subwoofer should mate successfully with a wide range of loudspeakers (including, I suspect, my reference Quad electrostats).

Conclusion

The Quad 22Ls bear a strong sonic resemblance to the company's pricier electrostatics and are among the most musically satisfying and attractive full-range, dynamic-driver speakers I've heard under \$3K. If you value natural

musical timbre, low distortion, coherence, and a wide, deep, and precise soundstage, you should be quite taken by these Quads. Those looking for an outstanding subwoofer for both music and home theater, should definitely audition Quad's new L-series sub, as it puts many far costlier units to shame. Both of these products are truly worthy of wearing the Quad badge. I think the late Peter Walker, Quad's founder, would have agreed.

SPECIFICATIONS

Quad 22L Loudspeaker

Price: \$1,600 (pair)

Frequency response: 30-24kHz

Power handling: 30 to 300 watts

Nominal impedance: 6 ohms

Sensitivity: 89 dB

Driver complement: 1 x 1", 2 x 6.5"

Dimensions: 34" x 8" x 11"

Weight: 36 lbs.

Warranty (parts and labor): Five years

Quad L Subwoofer

Price: \$1500

Frequency response: 25-300Hz

(bypass mode); 25-95Hz (crossover controlled)

Integral amplifier power: 300Watts

Driver complement: one 12"

Dimensions: 21" x 13.5" x 18.5"

Weight: 72 lbs.

Warranty (parts and labor): Five years (driver and cabinet); 1 year (electronics)

IMPORTER INFORMATION

IAG AMERICA

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Walpole, Massachusetts 02081
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www.iagamerica.com/quad/

ASSOCIATED EQUIPMENT

MFA Venusian preamp (modified); VPI Aries (updated); Graham tonearm; Koetsu Black cartridge; Musical Fidelity Tri-Vista 21 DAC; Edge G-4 power amplifier; Precision Fidelity M-7A power amplifier (modified); Hyperion HPS-938 loudspeakers; Quad ESL-57s (PK modified); Virtual Dynamics "David" interconnects, speaker cables, and power cords; Flexygy speaker cable, etc.