

# Dynaudio Contour 20 BE

40 years young, Dynaudio's Contour series is raised to a new level in this 'Black Edition' standmount, featuring improvements to every component. Welcome to the dark side!  
Review: **Jamie Biesemans Lab: Paul Miller**

**T** rue to form, Dynaudio showed a slew of products at last year's High End Show in Munich [*HFN* Jul '24] – including a new loudspeaker styled by Tokyo's Keiji Ashizawa Design studio, plus a turntable built by Thorens. Also shown was this Contour 20 Black Edition standmount, now finally in production. This is a range of one – an elegant two-way with no floorstanding partner – but it serves a useful purpose, offering Dynaudio fans an option to bridge the £4500 Contour 20i and the premium £9600 Confidence 20. Okay, at nearly £6000 a pair, it's not exactly midway in price, but does represent a tempting step up.

There are upsides and downsides to the name 'Black Edition'. It has the advantage of clarity, as it's clear which colour is available. To which I should add that the speaker's nicely finished high-gloss lacquer contrasts rather smartly with the matt black baffle hosting a soft dome tweeter and bass/mid driver. In fact, every single surface of the Contour 20 Black Edition is finished in black, including the single set of WBT binding posts on its rear. The only exception to the rule is the shiny Dynaudio logo on the front.

## MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

Because this is a standmount with a greater than usual depth (400mm) and height (440mm), there's a generous paint job to admire [see pic, p59]. That said, viewed from the front, the slender profile and curved edges of the Contour 20 BE make for a modern-looking speaker. It's hefty at 15kg, though, so requires a stand befitting its station. Dynaudio offers its Stand 20 at £475 per pair, and these were pressed into service for our review.

The Danish manufacturer has a history of introducing lavish finishes from time to time, freshening up existing speakers without altering the underlying design – examples include the exquisite Nordic Silver finish launched for the existing

Contour i models at the tail end of 2023, and a switch to new colours for the Special 40 bookshelf. Yet there's more to this 'Black Edition' than its monochrome moniker might suggest, with its hardware updated over and above that fitted to the regular Contour 20i.

## DOUBLE DOME

For example, the speaker's solid, braced cabinet is carried over from the Contour 20i but the flared port has been enlarged to accommodate the improved range and sensitivity of the speaker's upgraded (NeoTec version) 180mm bass/mid driver. MSP (Magnesium Silicate Polymer) is still used for the cone, but the motor system now has a more powerful neodymium magnet, alongside 'tweaks' to the former and voice-coil. The crossover frequency has been shifted too, up from 2.2kHz to 3.6kHz. The Black Edition also sees the Contour

20i's Esotar 2i tweeter swapped out for the 28mm Esotar 3, the same tweeter found on the upscale Confidence speakers [*HFN* Jan '25]. It's a Hexis model, meaning there's a second inner dome – you can observe this if you shine a bright light at the outer soft dome. The patterned, porous Hexis dome is designed to regulate the rearward air flow and this, together with 'a labyrinth of conduits and shaped vents', plus a larger chamber, help optimise the forward response of the main tweeter. It's tempting to see parallels

**RIGHT:** Offered in shades of black only, the curved and braced cabinet is further reinforced by a black-anodised alloy baffle hosting both drive units. The 28mm Esotar 3 soft dome tweeter includes a secondary 'dimpled' dome behind

here with the Meta Absorption Material (MAT) from KEF [*HFN* Mar '25] and Bowers & Wilkins' tube-loading [*HFN* Feb '24].

Key to the development of this Black Edition model is the time spent in Dynaudio's huge 'Jupiter' room in its Skanderborg facility. It is here that the company's speakers are hoisted high in the air to be measured by a massive, moving array of some 31 microphones. This focus on R&D is very much part of Dynaudio's



## CONTOUR CULTURE

Dynaudio's Contour is almost a brand within a brand. The very first Contour loudspeaker, aptly named the Contour 1, was launched way back in 1986, appearing nine years after the founding of Dynaudio itself. Since then, the Contour dynasty has grown – the 1980s and '90s witnessing the launch of the now-iconic Contour 1.1 and the 1.3 (which also appeared in MK II and SE editions), still fondly remembered today. Multiple models followed, including Contour 3 and Contour 4 generations, but from 2016 onward the generational label was dropped, with new ranges simply badged 'Contour'. Possibly creating some confusion, Dynaudio's new model is the Contour 20 Black Edition – taking the name of the previous generation launched in 2016 – rather than Contour 20i Black Edition, the 'i' being added for the previous model introduced in 2020. And with the 40th anniversary of the name coming up in 2026, all eyes (and ears) are on Dynaudio to see if it launches something by way of celebration.

DNA, as it is with other 'household hi-fi' names, but very few other brands have operations on the same scale.

## A DARK STAR

The impressive size of the Contour 20 Black Edition helps it become a real presence in the room, providing electronic music and orchestral works in particular with a rock-solid foundation. There's a wealth of controlled bass emanating from this speaker, which adds emotion to listening sessions – it's not overbearing in this regard, instead seeming to get the balance just right.

Dynaudio has a sizeable presence in the professional music market, and its adjacent consumer hi-fi models have always felt very inspired by what happens in the mastering studio. And true to this philosophy, the Contour 20 Black Edition is voiced relatively 'flat'. It opts for a smooth and even-handed approach that's relaxing to listen to over many hours, a sound signature that should not be called lacklustre, but in an over-damped hi-fi shop, auditioned next to treble-boosted competitors, might appear a bit 'safe'.

Yet it's worth looking past that, as the Contour 20 BE comes across as well-behaved and in control, but with enough high-frequency poise to add spaciousness and depth. To my mind, this makes it something

of a 'universal' model when it comes to different genres and source material.

Similar to the regular Contour 20i, the Black Edition is a fine speaker with which to enjoy contemporary music, even when it's glossily produced or very bass oriented. Not that Everything Is Recorded's album



*Richard Russell Is Temporary* [XL Recordings XL1490LPE; 44.1kHz/24-bit] quite fits that description, as it's a sophisticated production with a clever mix of guest appearances and sampling. Driven by a Primare PRE35 [*HFN* Dec '19] with DM36 DAC upgrade, and the A35.8 power amp [*HFN* May '22] in bridged stereo mode, the intro to 'Ether' had me paying attention, as a full-bodied bassline propelled the music, underpinning an airy, ambient treble.

## SOULFUL SOUNDS

The vocals from Maddy Prior, of Steeleye Span fame, were deftly portrayed, while an acoustic guitar was slightly recessed. Excellent vocal qualities were again on show during the slow, soulful 'My And Me', with both the male voice of Sampha singing the melody and Laura Groves' backing vocals. These are tracks that sound focused and compact, so while building up a huge soundscape is not a real strength of this Dynaudio speaker, putting the listener 'into' the recording space certainly is.

There's a palpable tension to 'In Ár Groithe Go Deo', the opening track of *Skinty Fia* from Irish band Fontaines D.C. [Partisan Records PTKF3016-3], which the Contour 20 BE pair brought effectively into the room. When playing this piece on quite a few more affordable speakers, I've typically heard Grian Chatten's distinct, sharp vocals begin to grate, while the rest of the band seems relegated to a minor role. Here, spinning the vinyl release on an ELAC Miracord 90 Anniversary turntable [*HFN* Jul '17] through Musical Fidelity's M8x Vinyl [*HFN* Mar '25], it was a far more complete and involving portrayal. As the song grew, the stage kept expanding, with bass guitar arriving halfway to drive it along, and a chance for the Contour 20 BE to demonstrate its ability to portray music in the way it was intended – not *too* airy, not *too* dense.

Post-punk might not be the most audiophile of

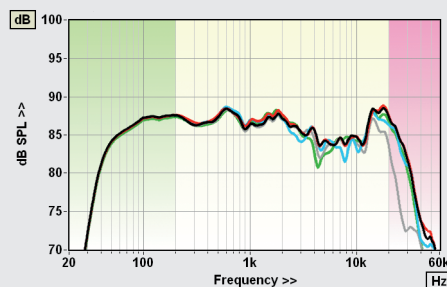
**LEFT:** The bass/mid driver has a one-piece MSP (Magnesium Silicate Polymer) cone, as before, but now includes a more powerful rare-earth magnet for improved sensitivity

## LAB REPORT

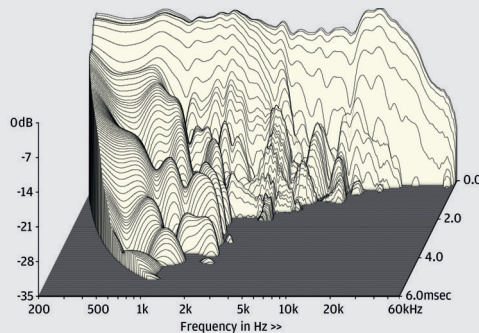
### DYNAUDIO CONTOUR 20 BLACK ED

Measured on the 28mm Esotar 3 tweeter's axis, the Contour 20 Black Edition shows a gentle decline in output from 1kHz to the 3.6kHz crossover all the way up to 12kHz above which the treble recovers its 'bite' [see Graph 1]. These features largely account for the very acceptable  $\pm 2.45\text{dB}$  and  $\pm 2.6\text{dB}$  response errors (re. 200Hz-20kHz), although there's a further 2.2dB modification in response with the grille in place [blue trace, Graph 1]. There's also a steady decline in treble extension from 33.9kHz, on axis, to 24.1kHz at  $\pm 15^\circ$  off-axis [-6dB re. 10kHz, grey trace, Graph 1]. Furthermore, as the average seated height will, in all likelihood, place the listener slightly above the top of the cabinet, this coincides with a further -3dB notch in output at 4.4kHz [green trace, Graph 1]. So, ideally, you'll want to keep the Contour 20 BE's aimed at the listening position, sans grilles.

Pair matching is a very tight 0.5dB (200Hz-20kHz), improving to 0.35dB from 3kHz-20kHz, while sensitivity is higher than the rated 86dB at 86.8dB/1kHz (or 86.2dB from 500Hz-8kHz). Moreover, and despite the modest sensitivity, bass distortion is a low 0.2% (re. 90dB SPL/1m) while an increase in odd harmonics lies behind a (still very fine) 0.45% through the midrange. Bass extension is generous too, the 68Hz (-6dB) roll-off of the 180mm MSP woofer supplemented by the 44Hz port tuning to deliver 41Hz (-6dB re. 200Hz), albeit with a fairly strong quarterwave mode exposed at 612Hz. Neither is this two-way an especially tough load - the 'high' 4.8ohm/188Hz minimum impedance joined by  $\pm 55^\circ$  swings in phase angle through the bass to create a very 'driveable' 2.16ohm minimum EPDR at 125Hz. PM



ABOVE: Resp. including nearfield summed driver/port [green], freefield corrected to 1m at 2.83V [yellow], ultrasonic [pink]. L, black; R, red; grille, blue;  $\pm 15^\circ$ , grey



ABOVE: Some resonances associated with quarterwave mode above 600Hz but only low-level modes in treble

### HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Sensitivity (SPL/1m/2.83V - 1kHz/Mean/IEC)	86.8dB / 86.2dB / 84.8dB
Impedance modulus: minimum & maximum (20Hz-20kHz)	4.75ohm @ 188Hz 40ohm @ 74Hz
Impedance phase: minimum & maximum (20Hz-20kHz)	-57° @ 92Hz +54° @ 24Hz
Pair matching/Resp. error (200Hz-20kHz)	0.5dB / $\pm 2.45\text{dB}$ / $\pm 2.6\text{dB}$
LF/HF extension (-6dB ref 200Hz/10kHz)	41Hz / 33.9kHz/34.0kHz
THD 100Hz/1kHz/10kHz (for 90dB SPL/1m)	0.18% / 0.45% / 0.25%
Dimensions (HWD) / Weight (each)	440x215x400mm / 14.6kg



**LEFT:** The bass/mid driver is reflex-loaded via a substantial 'dual-flared' port. Minimalist second-order crossover is terminated in a single set of WBT's popular nextgen 4mm sockets

first female kora player from a griot or djali family (the clans of West African musicians and storytellers which play an important social

role), she's been

turning heads during a recent European tour. Her 2022 release *Badinyaa Kumoo* [AGBK22-2] sounded atmospheric and lively through the Contour 20 Black Editions, which not only evoked the richness of the five-stringed kora, but also Jobarteh's breathtakingly dexterous playing on tracks like 'Musolou' or 'Ballaké'.

### BLACK BEAUTY

I really appreciated how these speakers kept it all together during passages with frenetic African percussion and stringed instruments rapidly spitting out notes. Holding the reins comes easily to the Contour 20 BE, but it can also expose the little details. 'The best of both worlds' is a bit of a cliché, but it's absolutely warranted here. 🎧

### HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

Brandishing authenticity, control and a very smooth sound, there's a lot to love about this special version of the Contour 20i. While some may rue the single colour option, considering the wood finishes available on other Dynaudio models, there's no denying the Black Edition displays masterful build quality and lush looks. When auditioning these new standmounts it's the artist's intent you hear, not the speaker.

Sound Quality: 88%



genres, but the Contour 20 BE made the most of it by not being over-demanding of the source material. It's nice to encounter a speaker that offers refinement when required, without seeming overly picky, so I got to be carried away by the up-tempo rhythm section and Chatten's gear-shifting singing. It was a blast to listen to, and that's what matters.

### SEASON'S GREETINGS

Not that this loudspeaker can't step up when fed a good recording. The Contour 20is share a lot of the qualities of the Black Edition, but the switch to the Esotar 3 tweeter adds upper-band resolution that made the bells on the first track of Aimee Mann's *Mental Illness* [SuperEgo digital download; 44.1kHz/24-bit] jingle sweetly, totally detached from the speaker enclosures.

With spring in the air, it was strange to hear the Christmas vibes of 'Goose Snow Cone', but Mann's voice was portrayed so beautifully by the Contour 20 BEs it was worth a bit of cognitive dissonance. As a whole this song came together very organically, without a trace of stress. Moreover, the intimate nature of the album, which despite the title doesn't feel depressing at all, was successfully conveyed.

English-born but residing in Gambia, Sona Jobarteh is not (yet) as well-known as her cousin, the late Toumani Diabaté. But as the