



DYNAUDIO CONTOUR 30

LOUDSPEAKERS

Reviewer Scott Campbell

We do love teasing the dogs! When they tilt their head to one side, with that familiar quizzical look on their faces, ears raised and eyes wide, we know we've got them fooled. Although, after many years of audiophile tomfoolery, they're awake to our tricks and mostly just yawn and go back to dreaming of whatever dogs do. Not so, however, with the new Dynaudio Contour 30s...

CLEARLY SPEAKING

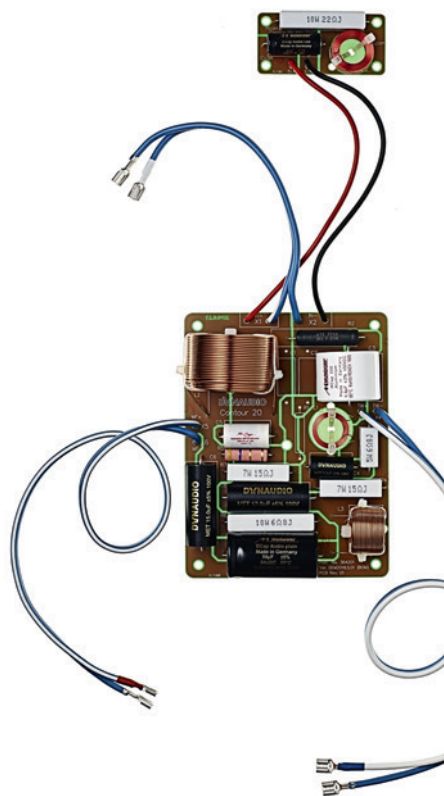
Dynaudio's latest offering in their long-running Contour range is part of a group of three, the Contour 30 being the smaller floorstander of the trio. There are the smaller Contour 20 bookshelf/standmounts, and the larger three-way floorstanding Contour 60. This Contour 30 is a 2.5-way, floorstanding speaker, 117cm tall, endowed with two 18cm MSP (Magnesium Silicate Polymer) drivers and the company's long running and very well-regarded Esotar² tweeter. Two rear-facing ports are adjustable via foam inserts, which themselves in turn can be adjusted by removal of the centre section of foam. Clever stuff.

Technically speaking, the Contour 30 is quite the upgrade from the previous series. The external appearance leaves no

doubt that the intention was to raise the aesthetic stakes, and this is carried through to the cabinets' internals, which are even more heavily braced. As well as the highly-acclaimed Esotar² tweeter, those two 18cm drivers feature an interesting characteristic. As Dynaudio itself puts it: "We've endowed Contour 30 with two 18cm MSP drivers, as well as doubling up the rear ports. What makes our drivers so special? Variable thickness across the diaphragm, for one thing.

"And aluminum voice-coils, for another. We can make them extremely light – but also bigger than the old-style copper units you'll find elsewhere. Lighter weight means larger diameters, which means we can use more windings, which means we have more control over the cone movement. And that translates to more control over the sound reproduction – especially at high frequencies and high volumes."

The variable diaphragm idea is an interesting one. Several vintage diaphragms have attempted this in the past, with some degree of success. And you can read elsewhere in this issue that Bowers & Wilkins may be tilting in this direction with its Aerofoil bass drivers on no less a design than the 800 D3. Put this variation together with the other advances visible and invisible here, and the audible sum becomes far more



△ EXCELLENT COMPONENT CHOICES IN THE CAREFULLY-ENGINEERED CONTOUR 30 CROSSOVERS.

than the parts would suggest. For instance, the two 18cm MSP Drivers now have considerably increased excursion, better cooling and lighter, larger magnets, allowing 24 percent greater coil winding height.

The all new crossovers feature Mundorf Caps, along with completely new wiring design. At 300 watts power handling and a (relatively) benign 87dB sensitivity and 4-ohm impedance, the Contour 30 does need a quality amplifier to do it justice, but it needn't be of the arc welder variety. A good, well-designed 50-watt solid-state or valve amplifier should do nicely. Less than that (although there are always exceptions) and you may get less than the optimal response that these speakers are capable of.

Single wiring is accomplished with two beautiful, finger-friendly, five-way binding posts. Finger-friendly because they require minimal torque to achieve a very tight connection while providing plenty of grip for bare wire or polished spade connectors.

The most immediately striking feature of the new Contour series is the machined aluminium front baffle. Blending smoothly with the side panels, this is the first thing that draws the eye. The finish on our review pair is known as "White Oak Satin". To my eye, it closely resembles a whitewash over woodgrain effect, and it's a standout finish that will age nicely and integrate well with most modern furnishings. But many other finish options are available, including Black Piano Lacquer, White Piano Lacquer and Walnut Light Satin.

The curved rear cabinet baffle enhances the slim forward view of the Contour 30, but don't be fooled; these are substantial speakers. Hence the standard fitment of small outrigger footers, with spike or rubber options, that stabilise the whole speaker and give these 34kg beauties a solid, steady grip on the floor. The pride of

▽ A MASSIVE MACHINED ALUMINIUM FRONT BAFFLE IS THE NON-RESONANT PLATFORM USED TO HOUSE THE DRIVER UNITS.



craftsmanship is evident in the construction, as well as from the literature that comes with the speaker. It's a good read and obviously the result of a passionate company culture.

HOW CLEAR IS 'CLEAR'?

Aren't all high-end speakers supposed to sound clear? Well yes, but it depends on the definition of clear. Clear as in "you can hear the singer's breathing" or, clear as in "I felt the singer was in the room with me"? Two very different definitions and an argument that will continue to divide enthusiasts for decades to come, I'm sure.

Not many speakers (or other audio equipment for that matter) can tread that line between musicality and realism as delicately and accurately as the Dynaudio Contour 30. This reviewer has heard speakers at several multiples of the price of these that fail to pull it off convincingly.

These deliver that simply 'correct' balance that brings about the temporary suspension of disbelief and fools the senses into believing the listener is right there with the performer. A lot of this comes from the Esotar² tweeter, to be sure. But the two 18cm aluminium voice coil lower drivers carry their share of the glory as well.

Following a long break-in period (Dynaudio's manual mentions weeks), the Contour 30s were duly wired up to our Gryphon Diablo for a thorough workout.

First off, these speakers have some hidden attributes that may not be immediately noticeable. While they perform all the usual tricks of soundstage depth, width and height, they also manage to vanish very convincingly. Not just 'audibly' vanish, but also visibly. Of course, we don't mean it in the literal sense! But, they don't make you feel like you have to "look around" them because they're visibly dominant. The Contour 30 manages to fade away a little bit (that light finish may help). So the performance is what comes to the fore, not the physical aspects of the speakers themselves. This is a rare trick for floorstanders in this reviewer's experience.

Despite this, the Contour 30s manage the the illusion of being much larger speakers than they actually are. This is most noticeable on big orchestral tracks, where the sense of scale is portrayed very convincingly. These are not a "front row of the theatre" speaker. These place you well back in the listening environment, where you can recline and appreciate the actual size of the performance.

In terms of what music suits these speakers, or what they do best, I'd say almost nothing seems to faze them. The Gryphon Diablo will



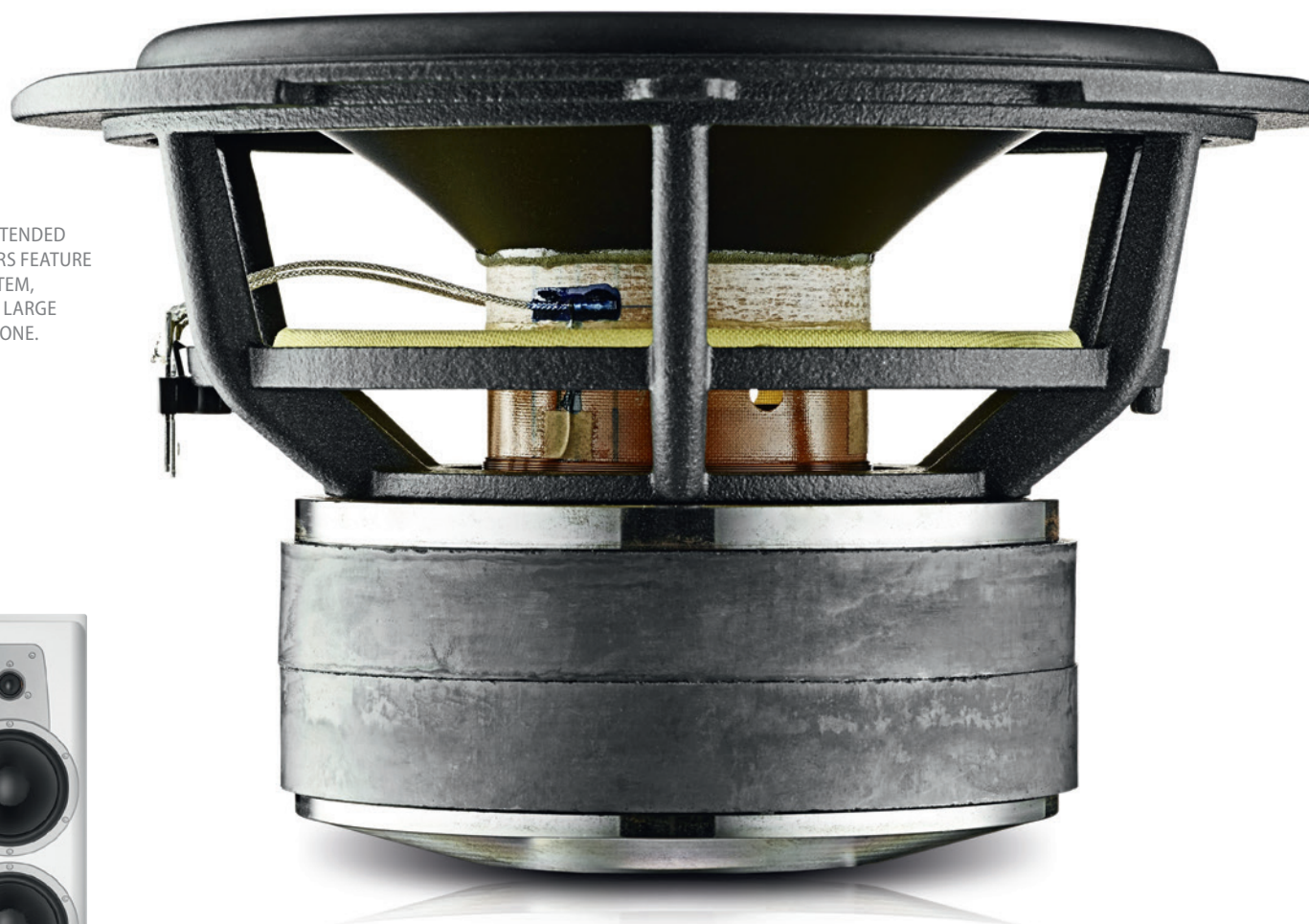
... a simply 'correct' balance that brings about the temporary suspension of disbelief and fools the senses into believing the listener is right there with the performer.

drive down to a 2-ohm load and outputs approximately 300 watts at 8 ohms. The Contour 30 simply revelled in the abundance of good clean power. As the review room is relatively small (6m x 4.4m), the bass ports were plugged to start with. This produced a leaner sound, as expected. Bass was somewhat truncated on Vas' "In The Garden Of Souls". easily remedied by the removal of the lower bass port foam plug. Bass then became more balanced and drum

and double bass notes were clean and dynamic. If you've listened to this track at length, you'll know just how much information is hidden in it. The Contour 30s proved adept at mining and exposing all this, bringing it to the surface in a very clean manner. More importantly, on a second playing later in the evening after removal of the bass plug, this reviewer found a real sense of enjoyment from this track and others of similar nature. I guess one would class it as an emotional connection? Although around here, it's just called "goofing off to the music."

One of the longterm listening treats here has been Hallie Lorens' rendition of the old classic "A Whiter Shade Of Pale". Amazing what a sultry, female voice can do to this tune. It's a great late

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SPECIFICATIONS

DYNAUDIO CONTOUR 30

SENSITIVITY: 87dB
(2.83V/1m)

IEC POWER HANDLING:
300 watts

NOMINAL IMPEDANCE:
4 ohms

FREQUENCY RESPONSE:
32Hz-23kHz (-3dB)

DRIVERS: 28mm soft dome,
18cm MSP cone woofers

BOX PRINCIPLE:

Rear ported bass reflex

CROSSOVER: 2.5-way

CROSSOVER FREQUENCY:
(300)/2200Hz

DIMENSIONS (WHD):
215 × 1170 × 360mm

WEIGHT: 34.4kg

WARRANTY: Five years

PRICE: \$11,999 (White Oak/
Walnut), \$13,799 (High Gloss
Black/White/Rosewood/
Grey Oak)

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night track and one the Contour 30s had no trouble with at all. More up-tempo, somewhat, is "Another New Year's Day" by Joe Stapp. This is a toe tapping, light-hearted rhythm that is a good test of those three important speaker characteristics – Pace, Rhythm and Timing, or P.R.A.T. for short. Many larger speakers have trouble in one or more of these areas, becoming bogged down, confused or just plain nasty when pushed hard.

It wasn't expected for a Dynaudio product to suffer any of these faults, and I was not disappointed. These speakers can really boogie and show very little signs of stress, even at higher volume levels. The most I noted was a slight compression in the bass and midrange.

What about those dogs? Well, as stated, our dogs were once easily fooled by hi-fi into believing there were animals or loud people in the house, but, as years passed, it was very rare for either animal to take any notice at all. So every once in a while, when a particular component (usually speakers) make them sit up and take notice, it's like a litmus test for realism.

In this case, it was a track that's been played here often with no effect whatsoever. However, when reproduced via the Dynaudio Contour 30s, it had two sets of ears pricked up, along

with a low, threatening growl from both throats. The track in question is from the much sonically-lauded Roger Waters *Amused To Death* album, and the opening track, "The Ballad Of Bill Hubbard". This old audiophile's listening favourite features a dog barking off in the distance – not loud, or even particularly noticeable in the overall sound. To us that is, but to the acute hearing of a couple of canines? A different story indeed. When transmitted through the Dynaudio Contour 30, both were absolutely convinced there was a strange dog in their territory and reacted accordingly.

CONCLUSION

The Dynaudio Contour 30 presents as a beautiful example of the speaker builders' craft, using tried and tested technologies, but with more than a passing nod to modern materials and techniques. Serious pride of construction and design is clearly evident throughout.

It's also a friendly speaker, room-wise, and yet with good amplification manages to present music with impact, scale, detail and verve. It's not upset by widely varying genres, nor by heavy-handed volume manipulation.

In fact, it would be an extremely easy speaker to live with long term. That is, unless you have a couple of alert pooches...