



Ruby anniversary

Dynaudio turned 40 last year and decided to give itself and us a present to mark the event. **David Vivian** starts the celebrations

In 2017, Danish loudspeaker brand Dynaudio hit the big four-O. The clue's in the name, of course: Special Forty. Cue the special one – the Jose Mourinho of two-way, standmounts. A speaker that's unconcerned with the strictures of convention and conformity, maybe. How about a rule-bending maverick winging it on a surfeit of chutzpa and charisma?

We'll start at the top. Dynaudio places great store by its 28mm Esotar²-coated soft-dome tweeter, as used in the more expensive Contour

It boasts a serene sense of flow, perspective and dynamic freedom

range and the very much more expensive Confidence C1. For the Special Forty it has undergone further refinement. The even more powerful Neodymium magnet assembly, for instance, has a new pressure conduit – a specially shaped vent that allows a more spacious rear chamber and controls how the air moves from the back of the diaphragm into that space. The chamber itself is lined with more damping material and, in conjunction with the pressure conduit, is claimed to reduce back-pressure on the rear of the tweeter diaphragm. In addition, an aero-coupled pressure-release outlet equalises the pressure immediately under the voice-coil with that outside to reduce any air pockets that could stop the coil moving as it should, thus reducing resonance and distortion and improving detail retrieval.

For the Special Forty, the Esotar tweeter's frequency response has been tweaked to reach down to around 1kHz – well into the midrange – for still smoother integration with

what Dynaudio describes as its “best-ever 170mm woofer”. Its basis is the long-running 17W75 driver of C1 and C2 fame, which uses the company's MSP (Magnesium Silicate Polymer) cone material – favoured because of its rigidity, damping and stability over time – but debuts an improved ‘Nomex’ spider and ‘optimised excursion-symmetry’. This mid/bass unit is a one-piece design, the large centre dome being part of the playing surface and, with the aluminium voice coil's glass fibre former bonded directly to the back of the ring where Dynaudio's trademark Balance Ribs sit at the perimeter of the dome, the claimed frequency response extends to 4kHz. Its grip of the lowest notes is said to be improved as well, thanks to the motor's inner magnet ring being made from the same high-grade Neodymium used in the tweeter. Such a hybrid arrangement is rare in a woofer due to the expense at the size.

A key element of the Special Forty game plan, Dynaudio says that the 3kHz overlap between tweeter and

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Dynaudio Special Forty
ORIGIN
Denmark
TYPE
2-way standmount loudspeaker
WEIGHT
8.1kg
DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
198 x 360 x 307mm
FEATURES
• 28mm soft-dome tweeter
• 170mm mid/bass driver
• Quoted sensitivity: 86dB/1W/1m (6ohm)
DISTRIBUTOR
Dynaudio UK
TELEPHONE
01638 742427
WEBSITE
dynaudio.com

mid/bass driver removes the need for steep filters and complex circuitry in the crossover to make the units' contributions mesh together seamlessly. As such, the requirement is for fine tuning rather than major manipulation and a relatively simple first-order crossover does the job, as it has in Dynaudio designs over many years.

The Special Forty's isn't one of Dynaudio's more unusual cabinet designs. The company is happy to come clean about this: it preferred to put the money into the drivers and overall sonic performance, for which a stiffly braced traditional box with a rear-firing reflex port (all right, it has tapered side panels – see Q&A) is perfectly fine. That said, it is a beautifully dressed traditional box, the review sample sporting an incredibly glossy red birch finish, though personally I think I'd go for the equally glossy grey birch option. Dynaudio points out that these wood finishes have never been used before and are ‘man-made veneers’ as opposed to the ‘naturally grown veneer’, last seen gracing the Contour 20 in HFC 421. Inside the cabinets, oxygen-free van den Hul cable is used throughout and the single, low-mounted binding posts shout quality without being unnecessarily chunky.

Sound quality

Sometimes, when listening to a hi-fi system, it's the hardware's ability to deconstruct and analyse that can impose itself on what you're hearing. It isn't always a negative. Sure, it should all be about the music pure and simple, but often I catch myself listening to and deriving unambiguous pleasure from the electro-mechanical means of its reproduction: the grip an ▶

The Esotar² tweeter has been tweaked for the Special Forty



Q&A

Roland Hoffmann
Dynaudio Academy



DV: How have you set such a high sonic standard for the money?

RH: In Dynaudio's history there have been many outstanding monitor speakers, always using the very best Dynaudio woofers and tweeters in a compact cabinet. When we started the Special Forty project, we wanted to repeat that strong sonic statement and demonstrate how good a standmount could be if you were to put all your know-how and experience into the drive units. So that's what we did. As you can't stop engineers from coming up with good ideas, we may have even gone a bit too far considering the price. But then we thought: "It's a birthday, the cake deserves to be sumptuous!"

Why gently tapered (non-parallel) cabinet sides rather than curved panels or even a boat-back design?

We wanted a more classic cabinet design. Paying homage to many Dynaudio classics, it gave us the freedom to spend more money on the very special, never used before red birch or grey birch veneer. The advantages of curved panels or boat back designs are more apparent in larger cabinets with a greater internal volume, while with a speaker of this size it is perfectly rigid and keeps any resonance under control.

What makes the drives so special?

Every Dynaudio woofer is different. For the Special Forty woofer we use a higher-grade neodymium in the magnet, a new spider suspension material, plus a new symmetrical design – which improves power handling and control in the bass. In the tweeter we also use a higher grade neodymium magnet and more importantly, improved airflow and sound absorption behind our coated soft dome. This performs perfectly down to 900Hz, which is magnificent and allows an absolutely seamless crossover to the mid/bass driver, which handles up to 4kHz with no problem. The integration and balance of the tweeter and woofer in the upper midrange/lower treble is an important area to the human ear and one of the most outstanding and audible features of the Special Forty.

IN SIGHT



- 1 28mm soft-dome tweeter
- 2 Rear-firing bass reflex port
- 3 Binding posts
- 4 170mm mid/bass driver

amp is exerting over speakers; the leading edge attack of a rim shot; the width, depth and height of the soundstage rather than what's going on within it. The excuse I make is that it's my job. These are just descriptors we use to help shape a review.

But the truth is some hi-fi sucks you into this circuit board-level mindset. The sound can be simultaneously impressive and impressively distracting, capable of fixating listeners with a specialised, asymmetric skillset that ultimately prescribes what works and the kind of music they therefore buy.

The Dynaudio Special Forty is the rare product that somehow manages to reconcile all the important hi-fi performance metrics – transparency and tenacity have no quarrel – yet doesn't hype or hinder the music, however broad the church. It's a quality that's hard to describe, but unmistakable when you hear it in the flesh – a serene sense of flow, perspective, order and dynamic freedom. Deep coherence. Richly textured tonality. Openness and air. A warm balance, yes. But listen to the achingly plaintive massed strings and horns on *Brothers* from Randy Newman's *Dark Matter* album and you wouldn't have it any other way.

This overarching sense of naturalness is realised not so much as play-it-safe neutrality and smoothness as stunning midband resolution and aerobic capacity. Michael McDonald's quirkily pastoral *Honest Emotion* from his *Wide Open* album bristles and breathes in open space. It's the subtle realism that convinces – the earthiness and emotion in his voice delivered without edge or hardness. Unerring listenability is born of fascinating detail, a dynamic compass that chimes true, great bass and a

tonal palette barely distinguishable from reality. Not bland tailoring.

My regular standmount references – ATC's SCM11 and Russell K's Red 50 (HFC 422) – are more than a grand less than the Dynaudio and could teach it a thing or two in specific areas. The ATC is more neutral and has a tauter bass. The Russell K is faster and more rhythmically explicit. But neither eclipses the Special Forty for sheer, listen-into-the-late-hours musicality. A classic in the making? No, it's there already.

Conclusion

Whatever its accountants might say, Dynaudio has done itself no harm at all in giving the Special Forty the full weight of its expertise and experience to play off against a cheekily understated appearance. Just occasionally – and what better time could there be than your birthday – it's all right to show off. And the result, in this case, is simply joyous. The Special Forty is an exceptionally fine standmount speaker by any standard and, at £2,500, a conspicuous bargain ●

HOW IT COMPARES

Unlike its larger and more expensive stable mate, the Contour 20 (HFC 421), the Special Forty is a much more easy-going proposition and less fussy about positioning, if just as demanding of the front-end electronics, thanks to its stunning transparency. If it can't quite muster the scale and bass power of the Contour 20, it's comfortably its equal, and possibly even better when it comes to midrange resolution, treble quality and core musicality. And it's these qualities that give the Special Forty's price peers such a hard time, though for studio-fresh clarity, dynamic reach and tonal accuracy, ATC's £2,150 SCM19 (HFC 390) still takes a lot of beating.

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★	LIKE: Thrilling musicality and transparency; build and finish
VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★	DISLIKE: Red birch gloss finish may divide opinion
BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★	WE SAY: A true high-end standmount for real-world money
EASE OF DRIVE ★★★★★	

OVERALL

