

Dynaudio Contour 20 Black Edition stand-mount loudspeaker

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Don't be fooled by the traditional appearance of the Dynaudio Contour 20 Black Edition. Yes, it belongs to the Contour line, and the physical similarities to the Contour 20/Contour 20i it is based on are obvious. But that's like seeing a race-prepped Rallycross car and thinking it's the same as your VW Polo. This is not your father's Dynaudio.

From the outside, aside from the all-black appearance, the Contour 20 Black Edition features an Esotar3 soft-dome tweeter and a new 180mm MSP woofer, which is not present in the standard Contour 20i. However, at a casual glance, you might not notice these differences. Using these new drivers requires a reworking of the crossover network. Similarly, at a glance, you might assume the cabinets are identical.

A good platform

In fairness to the Contour 20i, it's a sturdy platform that can handle further development. It features an 18mm thick MDF boat-tailed cabinet, with a dual 18mm front baffle and a deceptively thick aluminium front baffle plate on top. Following the established engineering principle of 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it,' the main modification to the cabinet is in the port. The rear-firing port is significantly larger and extends deeper inside the loudspeaker. Staying with the Rallycross/Polo analogy, this is like a big bore exhaust—an essential way of releasing extra horsepower in a highly tuned car, but of dubious (read: zero) benefit when fitted to a boy racer's modified supermini.

In other words, simply enlarging a port on the Contour 20i with the original drivers would, at best, do nothing, and more likely harm performance. This larger port is not intended to produce 'more' bass, but 'better' bass, when used together with that new mid-bass unit.

Comparing the original and Black Edition mid-bass drivers, you might initially be surprised to see that the magnet is larger on the Contour 20i drive unit. However,

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EQUIPMENT REVIEW
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» while the older model uses a ferrite magnet, the new driver employs Neodymium. The aim was to redesign the drive unit, but the ferrite magnet grew so large that it distorted the rear air excursion. Although Neodymium is more expensive—hence its common use in tweeters, where the magnet size is smaller—it offers a much stronger magnetic flux than ferrite could ever provide.

Dynaudio invests a considerable part of its research budget in developing clever variations on the theme of 'drive unit,' so the bass unit in the Black Edition might not be surprising. However, its performance is truly impressive.

The Esotar3 is equally surprising, but in a different way. It's the tweeter used in Dynaudio's flagship models, and this is one of the most affordable loudspeakers that features it. It may look externally identical to the Esotar2 used in the Contour 20i (mainly because the Esotar3 is derived from the Esotar2). However, it employs improved airflow to deliver an even more accurate (and costly to manufacture) tweeter. Meanwhile, the crossover is simpler than the Contour 20i

but remains a second-order crossover. That sentence does a lot of heavy lifting. It's a second-order crossover without the need for phase correction and has a trio of Mundorf resistors across the tweeter to fine-tune the value. Dynaudio makes the impossible possible by using two spaced first-order crossovers to function as a second-order crossover.

This results in a second-order crossover with improved phase response and dispersion characteristics, enabling both drivers to remain in positive polarity. To most of us, that elicits a mild 'huh', but to anyone with the smallest amount of speaker smarts, it's tantalisingly close to the Rosetta Stone of loudspeaker design.

The listening tells all

This is evident in the listening experience. The classic Dynaudio honest sound remains fully intact. It's still a loudspeaker with excellent linearity and dispersion qualities. That broadcast heritage (enter most modern production suites, and it's a pair of Dynaudios – not LS3/5As – staring »



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» back at you) is crucial. This loudspeaker is exceptionally detailed and has no unpleasant lumps or bumps in its frequency response or impedance curve. All of which means that, when paired with a good amplifier and set up correctly, it will deliver all the accuracy and fidelity that make the Contour 20 an enduring loudspeaker.

So far, so Dynaudio. But that's just the Black Edition clearing its throat. This loudspeaker introduces a level of speed and musical immediacy that catches the listener by surprise. There's an English saying: Don't throw the baby out with the bathwater. It means 'don't accidentally ruin the good while trying to eliminate the bad.' This was a key consideration in the design of the Dynaudio Contour 20 Black Edition. It retains all that was good about the original Contour 20i, while introducing something new, precise and enjoyable.

Musicology binge

It's a little difficult to convey the performance of the Dynaudio Contour 20 Black Edition in context because the existing Contour 20i is not a poorly sounding loudspeaker. Quite the opposite, but just a few seconds in front of the Black Edition, the original seems to slow down transients and blur beats. This isn't limited to anything with a strict rhythm; it managed to play Eric Dolphy and Monteverdi's madrigals consecutively as if it were a musicologist on a binge.

The dynamic range and bass response of this loudspeaker appears to surpass the 50Hz lower limit suggested by the company. In fact, more precisely, it exactly reaches that lower limit but does so with such energy and accuracy that other loudspeakers in the Black Edition's class find it hard to match. Usually, at this size and performance level, you can have either deep bass or fast bass. The Black Edition convincingly offers both.

It's not all about that bass, though. It's coupled with one of (if not 'the') best tweeters in the business, and it shows. Music is clean and extended well into the bat-eared regions, and the level of detail and stress-free listening it creates – without the slightest sign of 'peakiness' – is striking.

This could easily be an excellent tweeter looking for a bass driver, a fantastic bass driver seeking a tweeter, or even a great pair of drivers in need of a good crossover and cabinet. But it isn't. Instead, it all comes together here in a truly sublime way.

The Black Editions can deliver good sound at low, medium, high, and 'The Who Live At Leeds' sound levels. However, with a sensitivity of 86dB and a solid four-ohm

load, they need some oomph from the amplifier to truly unleash their potential. But boy, is it worth connecting them to something powerful!

The only drawback of this loudspeaker is that it should be used with the dedicated stand. Other stands will fit, but the loudspeaker and stand have been designed to work closely together. If you have a pair of existing stands, consider selling them.

The clue is in the name

There's also a caveat; the clue is in the name. The Black Edition isn't available in rosewood, white, or a 1990s Memphis-style abstract geometry finish. Just black. Don't be that person. Don't be the 'does it come in piano zebrano' type. Embrace the 'none more black' noir essence of its deep, inky, stygian nature. In other words, if you find black loudspeakers too loud, you might want to give this one a miss. I suspect the Contour 20 Black Edition is simply a precursor to the next wave of Dynaudio products, so you may not have to wait too long.

The Dynaudio Contour 20 Black Edition has no right to be this good. While it benefits from Dynaudio's full credentials, it's a well-crafted loudspeaker prioritising performance over price. However, it feels like something has shifted—and for the better. Recently, Dynaudio has revisited its classics, marking a new direction for the company. It's not a revival, but something destined to become a classic. +

Technical specifications

Type: Two-way bass reflex stand-mount loudspeaker

Drive Units: 1x 28mm Esotar 3 with Hexis tweeter, 1x 18cm MSP with neodymium magnet mid/woofer

Crossover: 2nd order, 3.6kHz crossover frequency

Frequency Response: 50Hz-23kHz ±3dB

Sensitivity: 86dB

Rated Impedance: 4Ω

Dimensions (WxHxD, excl stand): 21.5x44x40cm

Weight: 14.6kg

Price: £5,960, €6,998, \$8,000 per pair

Stands: £475, €550, \$598

Manufacturer Dynaudio A/S

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