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Magico

Q5

Complex American is big on drive units and bigger on cabinet innovation

Anyone attending 2011's Consumer Electronics Show, (CES) Las Vegas will have had the opportunity to see a cut away model of Magico's Q5 and if they did, they will certainly have been struck by its astonishing complexity. This loudspeaker behemoth, which weighs in at an astonishing 420lbs (190kg) is a triumph of over engineering.

The frame, which defines various internal cavities, uses 50 parts: one of the side panels is perforated by nearly 100 threaded holes, and there are more than 350 fasteners of various kinds and ten tubular trusses to secure the baffle to the back panel. The enclosure is machined from aluminium and brass at Magico's US facility, where the trademark polishing and hard anodizing are applied.

The five-driver, four-way Q5 is the first Magico product to feature complete in-house control of all design and build variables. It takes nearly a week to assemble a single pair, so this is no high-volume design.

Drivers are fitted to the baffles from behind so there are no visible fixing screws to cause diffraction, and eventually loosen off. No magic here but this is typical of the kind of thinking that typifies this loudspeaker. The Q5 has a claimed 87dB sensitivity rating from its sealed (ie non-vented) enclosure, and there is some suggestion that it is a difficult electrical load, although we have not seen any direct evidence for this.

The picture, then, is of a loudspeaker that uses conventional-ish technology, which has been addressed in a particularly painstaking way using materials which are as close to ideal as can be contrived and with as few shortcuts as possible. Yet in many ways it is a reviewer's nightmare: it's incredible 190kg bulk meant we had to audition our sample at length in the UK distributor's listening rooms.

According to Magico, in the absence of computer-controlled machining such as they use here, the Q5 would cost a great deal more than it does, if it could be built at all. In this sense, the Q5 counts as a notable bargain. The driver compliment comprises Magico's new MBe-1 Beryllium tweeter plus Magico-designed Nano-Tec drivers for the midrange (six-inch), midbass (nine-inch) plus two nines for the bass. A technology called Bass Mechanical Resonance Cancellation (BMRC) has been applied which is said to allow the company to acoustically cancel break-up modes by precisely offsetting the bass drivers' acoustical centre and angle.

SOUND QUALITY

Given the limitations inherent in the review process, there are boundaries to what can be said about the Q5, but we gathered enough evidence to confirm that this speaker is a wholly remarkable offering in just about every sense.

The balance of the Q5 is essentially neutral and its demeanour is not as demonstrative as some. Levels of detail are unusually high and the Q5 qualifies as a high-resolution speaker by any standard. Loudspeakers based on a wood enclosures will almost inevitably have a residual boxiness, if only at low level, but the Magico is about as free of cabinet-related colouration artefacts as any loudspeaker this reviewer can recall.

The Q5 doesn't really have an obviously identifiable character of its own, whether played at high levels, or at very low levels – it has a consistent dynamic quality. At low levels, musical detail springs organically from a black background. With a recording of Elgar's cello concerto, the Q5 managed a palpable recreation of the lead instrument through the speakers with a strong sense of weight, and there was a similarly large scale, generous performance with Schoenberg, Mahler, Beethoven and others. A similar performance standard was available with well-recorded voice.

But in every case, the clarity of which the Q5 was so notable was combined with discipline and realism. Nothing was overcooked or exaggerated; everything was naturally expressed, but always with a proper sense of subtlety and passion, combined with considerable grace. The way the Q5 manages to avoid sounding boxy or coloured is remarkable, yet we can envisage some criticising this speaker because it just doesn't have the obvious qualities of many of

“This speaker is a wholly remarkable offering in just about every sense”

its peers. The qualities referred to here including heaviness, edginess or box-related effects.

The aim was essentially to design a loudspeaker that would be as smooth and as unobtrusive as could be contrived and in this, Magico has been very successful, a quality that this reviewer has noted previously with some of its earlier designs. You will need to be careful positioning the speakers: to avoid any edginess from the tweeter, for example, it is best to orient them so that you hear the treble from slightly off the main forward axis.

Subtle instrument sounds are expressed almost to perfection, irrespective of volume level with a three-dimensional soundstage that is deeply alluring. Indeed, it's hard not to fall in head over heels in love with this American giant.

Alvin **Gold**

