

Exclusive reviews of the latest kit

FIRST TESTS

THREE OF THE BEST



Onkyo TX-NR709
£800 **Page 12**
Punch, power and subtle detail in equal measure



Popcorn Hour PopBox 3D
£140 **Page 18**
A true Swiss Army Knife of media-streaming



Sony STR-DH820
£300 **Page 24**
A brilliant budget amp for a starter cinema setup

THREE OF THE REST



InFocus ScreenPlay 8604
£2500 **Page 25**
Classy pictures - at a price



Marshall Major
£100 **Page 17**
Hard-rockin' looks, but no easy-listening sound



TEAC SR-80iDAB
£150 **Page 14**
We love the design but the sound is a trifle harsh

EXCLUSIVE

Q Acoustics serves up a giant-killing performance

Q Acoustics Q7000 | Speaker package | £800

It's been rather a hectic five years for Q Acoustics. At the start of 2006 the company had yet to launch its first product; by the end of 2010 it had won multiple *What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision* Awards and established itself as a leading light in the budget speaker arena. So it's hardly surprising that Q Acoustics is now going toe-to-toe with some of the industry's biggest brands in one of the most competitive markets of all: style speakers.

Beautifully made and finished

There's certainly no doubting the Q7000's showroom appeal. The five identical, glossy (black or white) satellite speakers are cast from aluminium and are slim, sturdy and beautifully finished. Each has

Q Acoustics has hit the performance bull's-eye as comprehensively as it has with the design

integrated cable management, mildly fiddly speaker-cable binding posts and stands that can be swivelled to turn into wall brackets. Filling each enclosure to capacity is a pair of 75mm coated-paper mid/bass drivers, one either side of a 25mm ring radiator tweeter. The subwoofer is investigated in a little more detail over the page, so for now we'll restrict ourselves to saying it's a neat and compact design housing a 25cm paper cone and 250 watts of analogue amplification.

The market's not short of affordable, self-consciously 'stylish' speaker packages, though - what separates the men from the boys is performance. And here Q Acoustics has hit the bull's-eye almost as comprehensively as it has with the Q7000's looks.

We threw it in at the deep end with the DTS-HD Master Audio soundtrack to the Skynet Edition Blu-ray of *Terminator 2: Judgement Day*. This is a disc that's brought some seemingly promising speaker packages to their knees, but the Q7000 stands up to the provocation without flinching. Its soundstage is expansive, coherent and rigorously focused, effects are sited with absolute assurance and detail levels are sky-high. Tonally the Q7000 is neutral, but while it remains

relatively uncoloured it has no difficulty describing texture, and is as capable of delivering nuance as it is thundering along with the biggest bangs. High frequencies are crisp and attacking without spilling into hardness (unless you wind the volume around to antisocial levels), and the midrange is explicit and packed with character. Despite being identical to its four partners, the centre channel has no problem projecting dialogue ahead of the general tumult. ▶



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The Q7000 is available in gloss black or white finishes - and we think it looks great in either

Round the back... connections

This is a view of the Q7000 subwoofer you shouldn't get more than once. Its innovative design means the drive unit fires horizontally towards an internal sounding board (held in position by a single bolt). This means sound is evenly dispersed, the subwoofer is very flexible about position and can even be wall-mounted (the necessary bracket is already available), and that once you've connected power and input cables and bolted the sounding board into place, you're left with a glossy, discreet box that's a lot less intrusive than some competing designs.



1 Plenty of power
The 25cm paper cone is driven by an ample 250 watts of amplification

2 Multiple inputs
You've been given a choice between line-level or speaker-level inputs

3 Put it where you like
The subwoofer's positional flexibility means you might need a long mains lead

The handover between satellites and sub (which occurs at around the 120Hz mark) is smoothly realised, and the subwoofer itself is something of a star. Everything its fixed-boundary design seeks to achieve comes to pass: bass hits hard, digs deep, is tonally articulate and not remotely directional.

From the subtle underpinning of a basso profundo voice to the overt crash-bang-wallop of your average action movie, the Q7000's subwoofer is a fast, controlled and implacably punchy device.

Equally impressive with music

A switch to the equally, if entirely differently, testing DTS-HD Master Audio soundtrack to *Stop Making Sense* lets the Q Acoustics demonstrate another strength: the ability to play music in a convincing and, well, musical way.

Many rival speaker packages can deliver the meat of a musical performance, but the Q7000 serves up all the nuances - low frequencies start and stop promptly, the midrange information is packed with

detail and the entire frequency range is integrated with a casual unfussiness more commonly the preserve of much more expensive packages.

Timing, and the co-dependence of instruments on each other, is outstanding, with the result that the Q7000 organises and delivers music as naturally as any similarly priced package we've heard.

Fundamentally, then, the Q7000 is among the most accomplished style-orientated packages we've heard in a good while. And it's remarkably gregarious when it comes to partnering electronics, too.

That's not to say it's perfect, of course - little in life is. There's that tendency to harden a little when the going gets really loud, for example, and you're never going to fill a cinema-sized room with sound from five such modestly proportioned speakers.

But taken in context, the Q7000 is an outstanding offering from a young company that has yet to put a foot badly wrong, and something of a gauntlet to other, longer-established rivals.

TECH SPECS

Power Front: 100W, centre: 100W, rear: 100W • **Biwireable** No • **Sensitivity** Front: 85dB/W/m, centre: 85dB/W/m, rear: 85dB/W/m • **Impedance** Front: 6 ohms, centre: 6 ohms, rear: 6 ohms • **Dimensions (hwd)** Front: 24 x 10 x 16cm, centre: 12 x 21 x 16cm, rear: 24 x 10 x 16cm, subwoofer: 37 x 51 x 22cm • **Subwoofer power** 250W • **Subwoofer driver** 25cm • **Subwoofer cabinet type** Sealed • **Subwoofer drive unit orientation** Forward • **Subwoofer inputs** Line x 2, speaker x 2 • **Rear speaker type** Conventional • **Finishes** 2

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Well made; tidy finish; confident and well-integrated sound; impressively musical

AGAINST Fractionally short where out-and-out scale is concerned; treble can get glassy at extremely high volume levels

VERDICT The stylish, gutsy Q7000 is an authentic contender for head of the class

REVIEWER'S NOTES... 5 DAYS WITH THE Q ACOUSTICS Q7000

DAY 1 In typically 'can-do' fashion we try to move the stand's ball-joint into the 'wall-bracket position' without loosening the bolts either side first. No harm done, fortunately. Speaker cable eventually attached with only minor cuticle damage.

DAY 2 More adjustment-related hi-jinks, although this time emphatically Not Our Fault. Undoing the subwoofer's single bolt to get at the input board causes the sub to fall apart like a clown's car. We recommend putting it on something soft first.

DAY 3 A few days of running-in has knocked the jagged edges off the treble and the it's starting to sound like the real deal. The speakers are unfussy about position, which is useful in a product that can easily be bolted to a wall - even the sub.

DAY 4 The Q7000 really is remarkably composed when playing stereo music. Lots of packages fall to pieces here, but the Q Acoustics does a fair impression of a decent pair of budget speakers - once we've backed off the subwoofer just a touch.

DAY 5 It doesn't matter what you throw at it. Wordy art-house stuff, thunderous multiplex fare, pounding tunes, string quartets... the Q7000 rolls up its sleeves and gets stuck in. In terms of sheer adaptability alone, it's mightily impressive.