



Modern legend

Andrew Simpson discovers why the lure of Dynaudio's updated Contour standmount is more than skin deep

Once in a while a product line becomes so well established its reputation takes on a life of its own, think Linn with its legendary LP12 or Audiolab's 8000 amplifier range. Dynaudio's equivalent is its Contour speakers, with a 30-year history that's spawned many models while growing a loyal fan base along the way. Representing the latest chapter in the Contour story, the S 1.4 LE replaces the standard S 1.4, despite its 'Limited Edition' moniker. Adding an LE designation typically comes hand in hand with a healthy price hike, however at £2,750 the S 1.4 LE works out cheaper than the outgoing model. There's also a new LE version of the floorstanding S 3.4 at £4,750, but that's not to imply that the 1.4 LE is in anyway small scale in comparison,

The speaker can make music sound grand but graceful within the same note

as with its 13-litre internal volume, it's of relatively substantial proportions. Aside from the heft and 12.6kg weight, the other aspect of this speaker that grabs my attention is its gorgeous cabinets. As is the Dynaudio way, typically its wood veneers are finished to a high standard, while being perhaps more understated compared with rival brands. But this isn't the case with the LEs, as the test model looks stunning in bubinga piano lacquer, and if that's not to your taste you can also choose from oiled walnut, piano lacquer black or mocca. The LE's updates are more than veneer deep, however, with upgraded internal wiring taken from the Confidence Platinum and Evidence Platinum ranges alongside higher-spec crossover components. The main

cabinets are formed from 20mm MDF and are internally braced and damped with bituminous panels. Continuing the latest Contour approach, the speaker also features an upside-down driver array, with the mid/bass unit cited above the tweeter at ear level (when seated), which allows for better time alignment says Dynaudio, with the faster higher frequencies having to travel that little bit further than the lower ones.

The driver complement begins with an inhouse 170mm mid/bass cone formed from a single piece of Dynaudio's MSP (magnesium silicate polymer), which removes the need for a separate central dust cap and glued joints. Visible slots around the central dome highlight where the 75mm diameter aluminium wire voice-coil is bonded to the cone, which decouples the central dome, allowing it to act like a separate midrange driver and making the woofer behave like a true mid/bass unit. Below this sits an upgraded inhouse 28mm Esotec soft-dome tweeter, which claims finer precision coating than its predecessor. Both drive units are mounted to a 5mm-thick stainless steel black baffle that's bonded to the front of the cabinet via a damping panel. Towards the bottom of the cabinet's interior resides the crossover, which is mounted on a copper-reinforced fibreglass PCB and employs ceramic resistors alongside audiophile-grade capacitors. Finally, a steel-framed front cover with magnetic fixings completes the package.

Sound quality

What strikes me straight away about the sound of this speaker is its sheer sense of presence. While many high-end standmounts can drive generously sized listening rooms such as mine at 4.5m square without too much hassle, few can do this while

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Dynaudio Contour S 1.4 LE

ORIGIN
Denmark

TYPE
2-way standmount loudspeaker

WEIGHT
12.6kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
188 x 404 x 360mm

FEATURES

- 28mm precision coated soft-dome tweeter
- 170mm single-piece MSP mid/bass driver
- Quoted sensitivity: 85dB/1W/1m (4ohm)

DISTRIBUTOR
Dynaudio UK

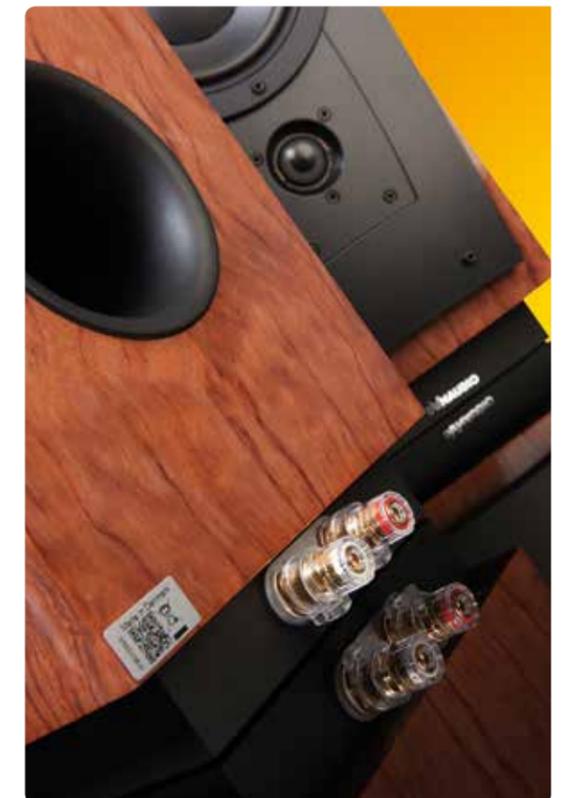
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also making music sound so convincingly real and evenly proportioned as the 1.4. Sat atop a pair of Dynaudio's model 6 stands (£350) and driven by my Musical Fidelity M6PRE/PRX amplifiers (HFC 340), streaming a 16-bit/44kHz ALAC rip of Nick Cave's *Abattoir Blues* from a Cambridge Audio Stream Magic 6 V2 (HFC 393), shows just how capable the 1.4 is. The mighty piano slams kick in with unflinching authority, while the resonating ring in the sustain also highlights the delicate subtle tones of the instrument, showcasing how the speaker can make the music sound grand but graceful within the same note. This sense of bringing out the scale of the music without compromising its finer detail is also etched into the percussion, which sounds crisp, punchy and nicely imaged while being possessed with such density that I'm pinned to my listening seat, completely enraptured in the performance.

In some ways, the sound of how the tweeter and bass units interact with one another is more akin to a top-quality full-range driver than a two-way speaker design in how they've been configured to present the music as a very convincing whole. Tim Buckley's vocal performance on *Driftin'* from his *Lorca LP* served up

The 1.4 has enough grunt to drive large rooms with ease



Q&A

Roland Hoffmann
Senior manager, Dynaudio



AS: How did you decide on which improvements to apply to the LE models?

RH: The new wood finishes were chosen from the finest veneers available to warrant a Limited Edition moniker, and our engineers couldn't resist also improving the speaker's internals. The changes we've made retain the Contour's excellent performance while also making the speaker sound just that little bit more refined and open.

What challenges did you face in engineering an 'upside-down' speaker configuration and how did you overcome them?

From an acoustical point of view putting a tweeter near the top of the cabinet is more of an 'upside-down' approach, as it gives almost every loudspeaker adopting this layout a slight downwards tilt in the upper mids, below the listening axis. Positioning the tweeter below the bass driver is easier to engineer in many ways, as it creates a slight upwards tilt. If you sit in front of a pair of Contour speakers, the time alignment and sound radiation at the listening position is spot on.

What are you most proud of in what you've achieved with this speaker?

When combined with a good amplifier the Contour sounds so 'right' and effortless that it makes you forget about the speakers. That our engineers can make the loudspeaker 'disappear' and let the music draw you in, is maybe the most rewarding thing about the Contour LE.

Are there plans to apply your active technology to the Contour range as we've seen with the Focus range?

That's a really good question, because our active technology allows us to extract the best performance out of our own loudspeaker designs, and therefore end up with a better speaker. And yet there is a fascination about certain amplifiers, or loudspeaker-amplifier combinations, that turns a hi-fi system into something special. Dynaudio will always have loudspeakers that follow both schools of thought.

IN SIGHT



- 1 170mm MSP mid/bass drive unit
- 2 70mm bass port
- 3 WBT gold-plated speaker terminals
- 4 28mm soft-dome tweeter

from the platter of my VPI Scout 1.1 deck illustrates this point perfectly, with Buckley putting his wide vocal range to full effect which can leave many two-ways sounding blurry around the crossover point. With the 1.4 steering the ship, Buckley's vocal gymnastics are seamless, allowing the speakers to get out of the way and let the music do the talking.

As with previous generations of Dynaudio's no-compromise speakers, in general terms the more refined power you can throw at the Contours the more you'll reap the rewards, a trait I've found less common with Dynaudio's more affordable and amp-friendly Excite models. Streaming a 16-bit/44kHz FLAC rip of Counting Crows' *Colorblind* from my Cambridge Audio Minx Xi (HFC 379) all-in-one player and with less than 60W on tap into 4ohm (claimed) gives more mixed results, as despite the music being way more insightful than what my usual partnering bookshelf speakers can deliver, the Dyns seem a little lacking in energy while demanding more volume. Back in my main system with over 300W into 4ohm (claimed) available from my M6PRX power amp and Adam Duritz's vocal performance combined with the accompanying piano is hairs on the back of the neck stuff, such is the depth and clarity of the musical image that's conjured.

Placing the 1.4's woofer above the tweeter means that while the generous bass on offer sounds deep and forceful, it's also lithe and highly potent, giving me the impression that little is being transmitted and lost through unwanted resonance reaching my sprung wooden floor.

Streaming a 24-bit/88kHz download of Daft Punk's *Game Of Love* reveals how the 1.4 revels in digging deep without any unwanted boom, despite the speakers' bass ports being only 20cm or so from a rear wall. In this respect the 1.4 is able to deliver genuine levels of deep and refined bass with a vice-like grip, highlighting why high-end standmounts can be so captivating when done right.

Conclusion

Thanks to a few carefully thought-out revisions, Dynaudio has taken the Contour 1.4 to the next level in LE guise, both in terms of the luxurious build and sonic appeal, while also retaining much of the original's character. While the standard of finish is what you expect of a loudspeaker in this price bracket, it's in the sound stakes that it really makes its mark. With an exceptionally dynamic and full bodied performance that retains a smooth and controlled nature, Dynaudio has crafted a standmount loudspeaker of class-leading quality ●

HOW IT COMPARES

In this price bracket you're competing with some of the best standmount speakers out there. At £4,500 Bowers & Wilkins' 805 D3 sports a diamond dome tweeter positioned on top of its main cabinet within an aluminium chamber, plus a new Continuum 165mm mid/bass cone fitted to the main cabinet above a front-firing port. While presenting an easier load, I'd also expect this speaker to shine slightly brighter in its performance. At £2,075, PMC's twenty.22 standmount (HFC 359) adopts a more traditional tweeter over bass driver approach, while using a sloping-back cabinet to address time-alignment issues that makes for a sound full of attack.

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY



LIKE: Superbly built; dynamic sound; bass and imaging

VALUE FOR MONEY



DISLIKE: Needs healthy levels of power to sound its best

BUILD QUALITY



WE SAY: One of the most refined standmounts in its class that will have your senses truly captivated

EASE OF DRIVE



OVERALL

