

QIn Prestige Three floorstanding speaker

by Jason Kennedy

Hi-fi brands come and go, or at least their profiles do in an ever more crowded marketplace. Some get bought and sold too, and one such is Swedish loudspeaker brand QIn which was founded in 1977 but sold to another company in 2003 before being bought back in 2012; designer/founder Mats Andersen must have realised that making loudspeakers is what life is all about after all. The range he makes is small and distinctly formed; it started with the QIn 1 in 1979, a speaker inspired by the LS3/5a but built in the distinctive truncated pyramid style that was apparently the first of its kind and has become a QIn signature. It followed the BBC design in its use of a stiff cabinet with heavy damping pads inside but Mats went for a sloping front baffle in order to time-align the driver centres. This is an approach used in many speakers today, and formed the pyramid shape in order to minimise baffle area.

The QIn Prestige 3 achieves this alignment by leaning backwards at fairly steep angle; so much so that it requires an outrigger base to compensate for any tendency to topple. The cabinet remains true to QIn's origins but takes a more sophisticated approach to resonance control with construction in Qboard. Qboard consists of two layers of high density board that sandwich a viscoelastic layer and damps any vibration in the wood. This is something I've seen in another speaker but given that Andersen copyrighted it in 1995, it's safe to say that this is the original. The Prestige Three has a not very large – but beautifully executed – cabinet that stands just under a metre high on its cones and pucks; the model supplied for review came in a special edition (a.k.a. 'premium') finish of a stunning book-matched walnut veneer with particularly nice figuring.

It sits on a base that consists of four heavy stainless steel bars which bolt onto the underside and come supplied with large Delrin engineering plastic cones and matching pucks. This is not a material you often see in speaker supports but it has a good reputation for low resonance and high damping and is used in turntable platters and equipment support feet.

The midbass driver in this two-way QIn is a 177mm (7 inch) Kevlar coned design that Andersen has been working with for over 30 years, so it's safe to say that he knows it and he likes it. Its appeal is that Kevlar is extremely neutral and has very little sonic character; it is also self-damping but doesn't sound dark ▶



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► or dull. Mats also likes the fact that you can tune the break up characteristics. Presumably Bowers & Wilkins felt the same way. Here, it's powered by a fairly small 19mm hexagonal voice coil with a long gap that's enhanced by copper rings for greater control and linearity. Oddly enough, no mention is made of the dustcap which appears to be made of paper pulp and is distinctly uneven, presumably this provides some of the tuning alluded to.

The tweeter is one of the ScanSpeak Illuminator models with a large roll surround and a textile dome that's said to provide high frequencies up to and above 30kHz. It's set in a felt surround presumably to damp early reflections from the baffle. Qln is quite specific about the cable inside the Prestige Three, which was designed in-house and consists of individually insulated solid core copper wires wrapped around a polypropylene core, all of which is “baked in a damped rubber like acoustic isolation body” to reduce vibration and friction and insulated in pure polypropylene. Which is not a material you often find in this situation, clearly Andersen has spent more than a little time on this speaker. The crossover is designed to achieve constant impedance for ease of drive and uses flat foil coils and non-inductive components that are soft glued in place to minimise resonance. It's consists of two parts, one to achieve the desired response and the other to provide an even load for the amplifier, which means that despite an average sensitivity of 87.5dB, the Prestige Three can be used with amps offering no more than 25 Watts, like valve amps. Connecting up the speaker you find a delicious pair of WBT rhodium plated terminals in a panel beneath the rear firing reflex port.

In the hardbound manual that Qln supply they suggest that the Prestige Three be placed three to four metres apart and at least 50cm from the rear wall. Given that my room is on the bass light side I started with them at closer to 30cm and found the bass to be prodigious, a little too much so, so moved them out a bit further to what seemed like a better balance. However it wasn't until I put Qln's suggestion into practice did everything come together, the bass remained uncannily powerful for the size of speaker but was cleaner than a closer placement, and the mid and treble were better balanced against it. This is a calm sounding loudspeaker, it's extensive use of damping and resonance control mean that there is little in the way of additive distortions that can be discerned, instead you hear the quality of the recording and ultimately of the music, loud and clear.

The Grateful Dead's live version of 'He's Gone' [Europe '72, Warner Bros] came through with beautiful openness and a ►



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► lovely easy groove, it reminded me once again that when it comes to timing two-way speakers are very hard to beat. Yo Miles! take on electric era Miles is an excellent SACD recording that contains bass which genuinely seems to growl beneath the guitar, trumpet and drums on ‘Go Ahead John’ [*Upriver*, Cuneiform]. Wadada Leo Smith’s trumpet sears across the void of space and time between recording and replay, as alive as if it were yesterday and Henry Kaiser’s Strat abuse is borderline visceral; John McLaughlin never sounded like this. I’ve seen Jeff Beck play live a couple of times but he never sounded as good as he does on *Performing this week... Live at Ronnie Scott’s* [Eagle], the version of ‘Goodbye Pork Pie Hat’ on this is both powerful, full bodied and intimate in only the way you get in a small venue and the Prestige Threes bring a lot of that goodness into the listening room at the appropriate volume.

Maria Kanegaard is a pianist with a powerful left hand and the track *Godrot* [*Sand I En Vik*, Jazzland] exemplifies this, the Qlns delivering its muscularity in a full depth soundstage with all the vitality that this decent recording can muster. At one point she appears to be hitting the strings under the lid of the piano behind a double bass solo, not something that has been apparent before, usually the power of the groove is a real distraction. Here you get both the engagement of the rhythm with the subtleties that go into creating it, suggesting that Andersen’s efforts at minimising vibration in the Prestige Three really pay off. By contrast, Fiona Boyes’ ‘I Can’t Stay Here No More’ [*Professin’ the Blues*, Reference] comes through with the scale of the studio behind her in full effect; the kick drum being powerful and deep and complemented by percussion that nails down the beat. Her voice is a little recessed but it’s full of gravel to go with the spit and sawdust.

One evening I put a few records on and while the sound quality of each was obvious what really struck home was that even the less appealing tracks that vinyl encourages you to listen to sounded more interesting than usual. Side two of Thiago Nassif’s *Mente* [Gearbox] has always been the weaker half but that wasn’t quite so apparent with the Qlns; it’s as if they pull off the theoretically impossible trick of improving the music. Clearly they do something or avoid something that other speakers don’t and this opens up the channels for intrinsic qualities to come through. Whatever it is it’s rather effective, especially if you get up to look for another record and find your feet moving involuntarily to the beat (dancing?). I was also able to give the Qlns a spin with the new Rogers E20a/ii valve amplifier, which as the name suggests has a mere 20W output yet delivered a controlled and compelling result. The bass wasn’t as taut as with the 150W transistor amp used for most of the listening but the sense of flow and musicality was spot on.

The Qln Prestige Three is a compact yet highly capable floorstander with very high build quality and even higher powers of musical engagement, they aren’t typical of a hi-fi loudspeaker but in many respects they are better than most. +

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Type: Two-way, two-driver, floorstanding speaker with reflex loaded enclosure

Driver complement: One 25mm wide surround, AirCirc magnet and soft dome tweeter; one 177mm Kevlar cone mid/bass driver

Crossover frequency: Not specified

Frequency response: 28Hz–30kHz

Impedance: 8 Ohms

Sensitivity: 87.5dB/W/m

Dimensions (H×W×D): 900 × 210 × 420mm
Weight: 27kg/each

Finishes: Walnut Piano, Burr Walnut Piano, Piano Black, Walnut matt, White satin

Price: £8,995/pair

Manufacturer: Qln

URL: qln.se

UK Distributor: Fi Audio

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