

Review QLN Prestige Three

Composed Floor Action

With the also neat P3:s, Mats Andersen introduced a high quality floor standing alternative to the classic Signature speaker.

Quite a lot have happened since speaker designer **Mats Andersen** bought back the rights to **QLN** in 2013. The restart began with letting old QLN Signature owners buy a thoroughly listened and well designed upgrade kit, with all new drivers, crossover and connectors. And just a little bit later, a brand new model – Signature 3 (see test in H&M no 9/2013).

The floor stander Prestige Three on test here, to a large extent builds on the Signature 3 speaker, which in turn was replaced with an improved Prestige One late 2021, most probably to bring order back to the QLN hierarchy, in which the Signature speaker always must be found on the top. In other words: The development of an all new Signature speaker is under way, as we speak...

But let's not get carried away, let's take it from the beginning! Mats Andersen was *not* a co-founder of QLN back in 1977. Those where the gentlemen **Quicklund**, **Lars och Liljeroth**, **Nils**, that contributed to the three letter name (with one L each, nota bene...).

Bengt Svenning joined the company in 1980 as an accountant, but didn't stay for long until he left for new jobs in economics.

Besides a big know-how in speaker design, Mats Andersen brought a crucial component to the company when he joined some years into the 80's: a brand new viscoelastic glue, that put in between two wooden boards (MDF), came into the crucial QLN component Qboard. The glue itself went on to make success under the name Noise Killer, widely known in the car audio community, for damping whole cars but especially car doors. From 1986 Mats became a 50/50 owner of QLN together with the now deceased Nils Liljeroth.

From 2003 until 2012 QLN was owned and managed by the JWS company group in Falkenberg, without any help or input from Mats Andersen or any of the co-founders.

Through out the years, Mats have been deeply involved in developing the Swedish high-end store Hificonsults QRS branded speakers, but most of the time until he could buy back QLN, he was very busy making the Swedish west coast car audio specialist DLS into a hi-fi brand to take seriously. From the start with "normal speakers", but in the end exclusively with what the company became best known for: the on-wall Flatbox speakers but also flat on-wall subwoofers. In recent time he's been helping the German car audio brand Ground Zero to bring really good speakers, basses and kit systems, to the market.

As a consultant there have also been assignments for new companies that want to enter the speaker market. For example he can put new, exciting diaphragm materials into a working driver environment, to be able to compare with already existing materials and models.

Just before my visit to Hificonslut some months ago (see H&M no 12/2021), the owner Ingemar Carlsson had been amusing himself in making a list with all of the products Mats to this day have been involved in. Depending a little on how the count is made, the total number is never the less, with big margin, 3-digits. In short, quite a bit more products than 100, including also electronics.

In an interview in Hifi & Musik no 9/2004, Mats Andersen states that he always starts with the midrange when he is developing a new speaker. Not specifically a midrange driver of course, since most of his speakers are clean 2-way systems, sometimes 2,5-ways, but more generally the midrange area, between the highest treble and the lowest bass tones.

If the tonality is right in the midrange, it is much easier to continue the work upwards and downwards in the frequency spectrum. And this is where one of the strongest principles of his work can be found: homogeneity and cohesion.

But if the correctly controlled tones don't reach your ear in the exact right time, the cohesion don't matter all that much, and that brings us to his second, equally strong principle: a time aligned reproduction of the music and the classic, inclined QLN baffle, to make the tones from the tweeter and bass/midrange, reach our ears at the exact same time.

In the case of P3 and like the Signature models, the box shrinks towards the top to minimize so called edge diffraction/distorsion and standing waves inside the speakers. Like always with QLN speakers, a damping piece of blanket cloth surrounds the tweeter.

The box itself is of course made out of Qboard, that is to say, two pieces of MDF joined together with visco elastic glue into a very dead whole. And with very nice walnut veneer as icing on the cake.

A crossover of very high quality, is a large and important part of nearly all speaker designs. No to "loose connection to air" and hence limit the dynamics, the tweeter is crossed over at relatively high 3.800 hertz, with a not too steep 12 dB per octave. The slope towards the bass unit, is a modified 6–12 dB/octave. The Q value is less than 0,5, that is to say without ringing in the impulse response.

As a whole, the crossover is of a constant impedance type, an old QLN thing, as Mats puts it, which means the crossover itself sees a straight impedance and frequency, which in turn gives a more even impedance between 200 and 20.000

hertz. The small peak at the top, comes from the not so steep crossover of the tweeter.

The crossover is hard wired without circuit board and with non-inductive capacitors to the tweeter and oil filled capacitors to the bass, and flat wired inductors to the most critical parts. All parts are attached with dampening glue at the same time as all the rest of the coils are baked, to avoid resonances.

On the driver part of things, Mats Andersen continues to work intimately with Danish Scan-Speak. The bass/midrange driver has a coated Kevlar cone and copper rings in the magnet structure and a throw of 19 millimeters, that should enable the speakers to play powerful bass beneath 30 hertz.

The tweeter is Scan-Speaks best soft dome, with a large suspension, AirCirc magnet structure and rear chamber to eliminate reflections and resonances.

The internal wire has been assessed and listened carefully to by Mats himself, and then manufactured by Swedish Supra for QLN. The connectors are the best possible NextGEN from German WBT.

A last reminder: all of today's QLN speakers, and not least the P3's, have one thing in common, and that is a non-resonant behavior, from the speaker terminals over the crossover, cables, speaker box and finally the strong, extended aluminum bars that ends up with the damped rubber feet. With a lower noise floor, more silence between the notes and higher dynamics as an end result.

And that QLN speakers of today are a very Swedish, at least Scandinavian story, where the boxes come from Swedish west coast suppliers; cross over soldering and final assembly is done in QLN's own facilities in Gothenburg.

Build quality and over all finish is of a very high class, in everything from the wood work to the nicely recessed drivers, speaker terminals and connectors and the backwards firing, rounded bass reflex port, fastened with five (!) screws.

The QLN P3's came to play with a wide variety of electronics, to start with, all things considered, the quite modest power amplifier C 298 from NAD Electronics, but also the big, steady, integrated Bladelius Oden amp, before a complete AVM system took over the listening room (test of the AVM combo will appear during late spring). The NAD power amplifier got variable signal from the Hifi Rose RS150B that we tested in our latest issue; Oden set level from the same player.

QLN and NAD forms a combination that plays seemingly naturally and homogeneously correct, without further ado. With the speakers placed quite far apart and slightly toed in towards the listening position, I was impressed by a well-sized and attractive sound stage.

The speakers really made an impression, with surprisingly good low end support, but most of all, contour, accuracy and a quite obviously time correct and hence rhythmical musical reproduction.

Not to any ones surprise, there is more to be found, so after a few days, the Oden amplifier was set up into the system, and I started with playing my favorite marked song list from Tidal, containing over the years star marked material, like the extravagant and heavy pumping *Back to Work*, but also the finely tuned, atmospheric and magnificent *Gudene vet*.

The P3's have a rare ability to play the music extremely controlled and correct, but at the same time musically captivating, detailed and last but not least: suggestively grand and open! Many normally conflicting qualities in that sentence, but I honestly can't say if I ever, "at close range", experienced a pair of speakers that is able to manage all of this in an almost 100% perfect way.

The bass reproduction is extremely dry and tight, smooth and flexible as few others, but taken the small size of the box and cone area, also surprisingly deep bass. Okay, they might not be able to reproduce maximum power and SPL, we don't deal with PA speakers here, but still: there is not much of criticism that can be made for the smoothness and bass depth.

I don't really like the catch phrase presence, but these speakers do feel very much present, with their almost perfect balance and homogeneity. But literally speaking, they are completely absent, because they almost completely disappear from the sound stage, like the very best of stand mount speakers.

At the top end they have a perfectly balanced energy, not too much nor too little, but the exact right amount of tweeter information, that makes all the details pop up where ever they should, without leaving you thinking "tweeter". In my book, the best possible treble reproduction there is.

The timing, that is to say, the ability to play correctly in the time domain, without small differences in time, is handled in the best possible way. Everything feels right, down to the smallest detail, and the speakers delivers exactly *where* and *when* they should.

The P3's indeed enjoys the company of Oden, that really let the speakers talk for themselves and show off from the very best side. A more outgoing amplifier of course makes the P3's more lively and loose. Within reason, that is, but for sure they benefit from quantity as well as quality, but most of all quality on the amplifier side of things.

The P3's are like a magnifying glasses and really shows off the electronics it's handed in the best possible way, if not totally forgiving, at least truthfully and without restrictions.

After yet some time, it's finally it's time for the last switch in electronics, and besides the complete AVM solution CS 8.3 and the power amplifier SA 6.3, we also change the power- and speaker cable setup to American Transparent. And an overall very different turnout!

We are presented with a good bottom end with a fair dose of warmth and an overall safe and tucked in reproduction. The music is still controlled, but in a more laid back fashion. Calm, safe and tucked in are terms that are most frequently used in my notepad.

The music is still very detailed, in a pleasant way, without pushing the information directly up my face as a listener. A large and intriguing sound picture is painted before me, still when I later on move the speakers a bit closer to each other.

The difference in character is obvious after the shift in electronics, but the P3's just keeps doing their job, what ever music or gear they are fed (as long as the quality is high enough). In the case of AVM and Transparent, the reproduction is clearly calmer and in many ways more pleasant, with just the right amount of warmth added to the sound.

I can finally ascertain that Mats Andersens goal with the P3's is reached to the fullest, since I probably never before have heard a pair of speakers playing this homogeneous and composed, large in scale and at the same time musically intriguing!

Control and commitment. Homogeneity

and wide dispersion. Normally two pairs of qualities not so often tied to each other, but equally important for a speaker, or any hi-fi product for that matter.

Top of the class, no more, no less.

"literally speaking, they are completely absent"

+

Homogeneous and composed

Big sound stage and musicality

3 fast facts

- Qboard
- Time aligned baffle
- Mild crossover slope

Frequency picture comments:

QLN have a very smooth and cohesive frequency in all three angles (0, 30 and 60 degrees). A very small deviation can't be spotted until over 3 kHz, and mostly as a loss in level at 60 degrees. (red).

Impedance picture comments:

QLN have a nice impedance (green), seldom lower than 5,5 Ohms. Nor the phase (red) should cause any problems, and the shifts in phase in the bass area, are softened by high impedance.

Info:

QLN Prestige Three

Price 95.000 SEK/pair

Sensitivity 87,5 dB/2,83V/1 m

Nominal impedance 8 Ohm

Cross over 3.800 Hz, 6-12/12 dB

Drivers 1-tums diskant, 7-tums bas/mellanregister

Connections 1 uppsättning

Finish Off and high-gloss walnut, off-white

Measures (BxHxD) 21x90x42 cm

Weight 27 kg/each

Info qln.se

Peripherals

Player/pre amplifier Hifi Rose RS150B, AVM CS 8.3

Amplifiers Bladelius Oden, NAD C 298, AVM SA 6.3

Cables Jorma Statement, Transparent Ultra