



Quad's new S2 standmount 'speaker marries a ribbon tweeter to a conventional mid/bass driver to glorious effect, says Jon Myles.

Golden Ribbon

Mention Quad and loudspeakers to anyone with even a passing knowledge of hi-fi and the term electrostatics will invariably pop into their mind. After all, together with a legendary series of valve amplifiers, that is where the brand really forged its reputation.

Less well known, however, is that the company's first loudspeaker was something rather different. It was a single corner unit launched in the days of mono reproduction way back in 1949 whose main selling point was its use of a ribbon tweeter to bring extra extension to the high frequencies.

Unfortunately, I've never heard one – but it seems what goes around

comes around. That's because the main distinguishing feature of Quad's latest S series of loudspeakers is the use of a ribbon tweeter once again.

The range includes two small standmounts – the larger of which is the S2 on review here – a pair of floorstanders and a centre channel 'speaker for use in home A/V systems.

Looks-wise the S2 is distinguished by the aforementioned ribbon tweeter that sits above a 125mm woven Kevlar mid/bass driver. The 'speaker itself measures 330mm x 180mm x 260mm (H/W/D) and the cabinet uses a sandwich construction of alternate layers of MDF and high-density particleboard for maximum rigidity. Black or Sapele mahogany finishes are available, while hand-

lacquered piano white and piano black come as an extra-cost option. Rounded edges on the front and rear add an air of sophistication to the package.

Round the back are two pairs of loudspeaker binding posts to facilitate bi-wiring if required, and a small reflex port to squeeze some extra bass from the 8.15 litre cabinet.

In typical Quad style the S-2 is purposeful looking without being too flashy, and build quality is high for its £599.95 price tag.

SOUND QUALITY

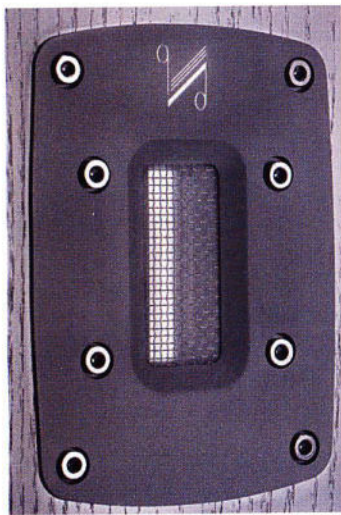
Quad's traditional box-style loudspeakers have always had a distinctive sound – smooth, sophisticated and (to some ears) a little laid-back.

The S2s do not veer from this too much, but the addition of a ribbon tweeter adds a welcome extra degree of sparkle to the top end without making the 'speaker sound brash or edgy.

Integrating a ribbon with a traditional cone mid/bass is not the easiest of tasks because of difficulties at the crossover frequency but the S2 seems to have got it just right.

There's no sense of listening to two different drive unit technologies at play – instead just a smooth, seamless sound that trades on detail and punch.

They do need a decent run-in, though, mainly to loosen up that Kevlar mid/bass unit. Out of the box



Quad's ribbon tweeter gives a welcome lift to high-frequencies – but is well-balanced and not too bright or edgy.

I thought they sounded a little bland and unexciting but after a week's use things really started to gel.

Used on the end of an Audioblab 8300A integrated amplifier (see review elsewhere in this issue) fed from a variety of sources, the S2s impressed me with a coherent, musically-engaging performance on all genres of music. They won't blow your socks off with earth-shattering bass or scorch your eardrums with searing treble but instead just sound remarkably assured.

Playing The Clash's 'Hitsville UK' (24/96) from 'Sandinista' there was great dynamic range on offer from such a relatively small loudspeaker. Paul Simonon's bass swung low with a rich tonality while the tinkling piano line had the sort of bite you just won't hear from a conventional tweeter.

It's not the most explicit ribbon

design I've ever heard, but that does mean it never sounds edgy or overly strident. It's a trait that plays well with well-recorded female vocals, Sinead O'Connor's voice on her 'Sean Nos Nua' collection of Irish ballads having spine-tingling air and space around it.

Imaging was also impressive, the Quads pushing instruments forward into the room with a good left/right spread that gave an expansive soundstage.

They'll also go loud with impressive ease (see Measured Performance for full details). Turning the Audioblab up on the English National Opera's recording of Britten's 'Peter Grimes', the massed ranks of the chorus stayed true and focussed as the volume level was pushed higher. In fact, closing my eyes it was easy to think I was listening to a much larger loudspeaker.

A little care with set-up and positioning also helps squeeze some extra performance from the S2s. Move them closer to a rear wall and bass becomes more fulsome without taking on a horribly boomy quality.

Also look to replace the metal links on the 'speaker binding posts if you are not bi-wiring. I substituted them for a pair of Tellurium Q Silver

Diamond jumpers which – at £480 a pair – may seem slight overkill but actually brought an extra degree of detail and openness to the overall sound.

Even without that tweak, though, the Quad S2s are a more than accomplished set of loudspeakers that are a richly enjoyable listen.

CONCLUSION

Quad has definitely hit the mark with the S2s. They have a smooth, vibrant sound that is refreshingly uncoloured and never less than engaging. Partner them with a similarly-priced amplifier and you'll have a fantastic set-up.



Twin sets of loudspeaker binding posts allow for bi-wiring if required while the rear-facing reflex port is tuned to 35Hz for additional bass boost – although near-wall placement is recommended.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The Quad S2 measures reasonably flat across the audio band our analysis shows. There's no dip in the crossover region around 3kHz so reproduction of detail will be strong; the reverse in fact output lifts a little in this region as the ribbon tweeter comes into play. There's also some lift at higher frequencies from the ribbon tweeter, in all making the S2 brightly balanced, and likely forthright in its sound.

The mid-band is smooth, suggesting low coloration, whilst bass frequencies fall away slowly to a lower limit of 40Hz – a common trait in bookshelf / standmount loudspeakers meant for near-wall placement. It provides compensation for the raised modal support this position invokes, driving a room well. The small port (red trace) is tuned quite low, to 35Hz, and offers broad acoustic damping our impedance trace shows by the width of its dip around this frequency. This suggests good bass quality, but the S2 is not bass heavy by any means; port output was low in SPL and acoustic power terms.

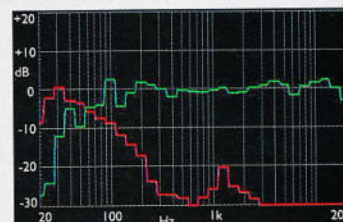
Sensitivity measured a high 87dB sound pressure level (at 1m) from one

nominal Watt of input (2.8V), allowing the S2s to play loud from 40 Watts or so. Nominal impedance measured 7 Ohms.

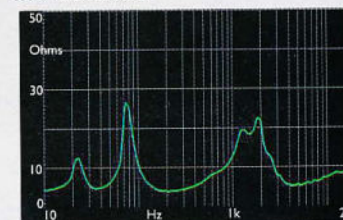
The S2 is a well balanced design measurement shows. It will have a relatively dry and forthright sound with restrained but good quality bass. It is balanced for use against a rear wall. **NK**

FREQUENCY RESPONSE

Green - driver output
Red - port output



IMPEDANCE



QUAD S2 £599.95



OUTSTANDING - amongst the best.

VALUE - keenly priced.

VERDICT

The ribbon tweeter-equipped Quad S2 is a sumptuous sounding loudspeaker that blends accuracy with sonic sparkle in a room-friendly package. Hard to beat at the price.

FOR

- detailed, open treble
- smooth mid-range
- rich bass
- appearance

AGAINST

- needs careful positioning

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