

King Klipsch



Jon Myles sits down with Klipsch's big, bold but affordable R-820F Reference loudspeakers.

Klipsch 'speakers are designed to be big, bold and go loud with very few Watts. They don't cost the earth and feature some interesting technology. Hence the fact that the brand has a loyal following both in its home country – the USA – and across Europe and the rest of the world.

The R-820F Reference floorstanders I am reviewing here are a case in point. They are large – standing over 107cms tall (3.5ft) with a depth of just under 43cms (17in) and weighing in at 28.35kg.

But their most interesting feature is the driver array. Klipsch use a horn loaded tweeter with 1" (2.54cm) titanium dome inside the assembly. It looks and is large, designed to give a wide dispersion area and project high frequencies well into the room.

This is allied to two 20cm (8in) woofer/mid-range units constructed from spun copper and – with the full-length magnetic grilles removed – look distinctive.

At the back there's a reflex port which looks large in outside area but further investigation reveals it's also flared and shallow at the interior of the cabinet, shaped for smoother airflow.

The supplied spikes for the base are of different lengths front and back to give a slight tilt upwards at front to aid driver alignment.

Construction-wise the Klipschs are well-built with no obvious flaws – but a solid rap on the cabinets with my knuckles revealed some hollowness. Not perfect but at £900 for a loudspeaker of this size arguably acceptable. The R-

Moving on to James Blake's 'Limit To Your Love' – one of my favourite test tracks for bass – subsonics were apparent. They had the ability to shake the room – without sounding boomy. Instead the Klipschs kept the track under control, the bass line underpinning Blake's keening vocals to produce an all-involving soundstage. What struck me most though was the sheer power of these loudspeakers. They have great presence and kick. When the lowest octaves kicked in I could physically feel them – making for a truly visceral experience.

"When the lowest octaves kicked in I could physically feel it, contributing to a truly visceral experience".

820Fs also look good – those twin copper-coloured woofers giving them a purposeful air.

SOUND QUALITY

With their sensitivity (see Measured Performance for full details) I started using the Klipschs with an Icon Audio Stereo 30SE - a valve amplifier with good detail and a smooth sound.

Playing Peter Schneider and The Stimulators cover of 'St James infirmary' from a Dali CD the vocals had a Tom Waits-like growl. The trumpet was also well to the fore and projected nicely into the room. The word atmospheric kept appearing on my listening notes as that was just how the track sounded.

Eleanor McEvoy's 'Yola' album (24/96) fed into the DAC of our Oppo UDP-205 player via an Astell&Kern AK-I20 digital audio player reinforced this capability. There's great frequency range on offer, McEvoy's voice sounding crystal clear plus high, wide and pristine. The backing section also had delicacy with a good sense of timing. Playing the song again with the volume turned higher the Klipschs didn't break a sweat. 'I've Got You To See Me Through' flowed into the room enveloping me in its superb production and excellent instrumentation. The midrange was also clean and rather refined having a sweet, even and refined air to it.

The only downside was a slight boxy sound at times, giving the impression I was hearing more of the cabinet than is ideal.

Experimenting, I pointed the 'speakers inward to fire towards the listening seat. It did not quite work. That horn tweeter demands to be pointed straight down the room to get the best out of it – unless you really enjoy extra-extended treble.

Positioned this way I swapped the Icon Audio amplifier for a Creek Evolution 100A integrated. This transistor amplifier proved an ideal match for the Klipschs – grabbing hold of those twin woofers to provide a tight, focussed sound.

The funk disco shimmy of Elvis Costello and The Imposter's 'Burnt Sugar Is So Bitter' from his latest 'Look Now' album rolled along with ideal pace. The rhythm section was taut with an excellent crack to the drums. Above, Costello's nasal vocals were anchored between the 'speakers and totally intelligible. Even better was the gentle ballad 'Don't Look Now' where the piano sparkled. Notes rose and decayed realistically with excellent timbre and body and no hint of harshness. Closing my eyes it was as if the band were playing right in front of me.

The entire presentation put me in mind of some loudspeakers costing significantly more than £900.

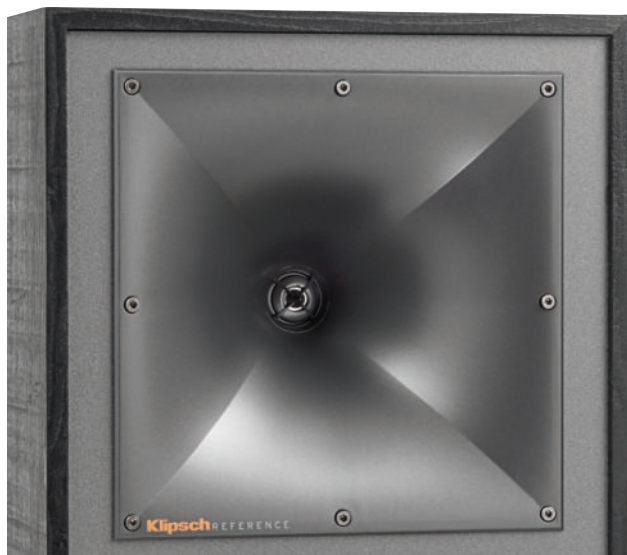


A Tractrix bass reflex port at the rear gives the R-820F Reference loudspeakers a highly-controlled low-end.

Another plus is that these 'speakers are not fussy about positioning. Even placed relatively close to a rear wall the low end definition remained stable and free of boominess.

With New Order's 'Bizarre Love Triangle' Peter Hook's descending bass line stayed firm and tuneful, providing an ideal foundation for the soaring electronic melody line that drives this track along. Yet again the upper registers were bright but not so much as to be overly intrusive or harsh.

Klipsch's engineers have balanced the R-820Fs well. Their deep bass is offset by an extended



The horn-loaded tweeter provides extended treble that pushes musical images way into the room.

high-frequency response that delivers strong detail above a fulsome, muscular sound. It's the sort of performance that makes you want to play track after track because of their toe-tapping ability to bring music alive.

There are some caveats, though. Those looking for a totally accurate sound might find them a tad bright up top. These loudspeakers are not for listeners who value a completely even presentation above

all else.

The Klipschs, instead, plough their own furrow. But it's a totally

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entertaining one that will enthrall and beguile many listeners. They have the ability to make some rivals sound rather bland and unexciting with their superb bass performance and sparkling treble. That horn-loaded tweeter really does throw images into the room like few others.

Not everyone will like them but I certainly did. They make music sound alive and punch out a tune with verve. Big, bold - but most importantly totally enjoyable. Give them an audition and I doubt you'll be disappointed.

CONCLUSION

In typical Klipsch fashion the R-820F Reference floorstanders are aimed at those who want to hear their music in all its glory. They'll go loud with minimal amplifier power so suit valve amplifiers, yet with our smooth Creek Evolution 100A I loved them. Give them an audition and you may well be seduced.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Our third-octave frequency response using pink noise shows the R-820F's big treble unit has obviously raised output, some +5dB or so above the bass/midrange units, when measured 20degrees off-axis. Moving the mic laterally didn't change things much as the horn flare gives broad dispersion. The speaker will sound obviously bright in balance as a result, but detailed and revealing. There is no dip at crossover and this will also reinforce detail retrieval.

Further down the frequency band output is reasonably even in basic balance, if not too smooth, suggesting small local resonances and minor colourations. But the big cabinet of the Klipsch comes into its own lower down, reaching a low 30Hz from forward radiation, the rear flared vent delivering extra output from 60Hz down to a low 20Hz, meaning the R-820F will deliver subsonics - audible in a room of 18ft-25ft long. Bass damping is good, avoiding boominess and enabling good note

definition, even positioned close to a rear wall.

Klipsch specialise in high sensitivity and the R-820F was no exception. It produced a massive 92.5dB Sound Pressure Level (SPL) of 92.5dB - very loud - from just one nominal Watt of input (2.8V). This means it needs very little power to go extremely loud and anything from 2W to 40W will do. The only caveat here is that Klipsch claim it is an 8 Ohm loudspeaker when it is not, measuring 5.4 Ohms overall with a music-like pink noise test signal. The DCR measured a low 3.2 Ohms and our impedance trace shows 4 Ohms at 10Hz and the port tuned to 40Hz (low bass). It is best viewed as a 4 Ohm loudspeaker that draws current to achieve high sensitivity. This is a common design approach where manufacturers strive for high voltage sensitivity, meaning high volume from a low volume control setting.

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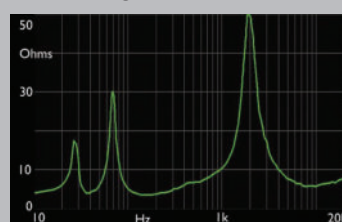
go very loud. It offers very deep but unemphasised bass that is well damped. Treble output however is very strong so the 'speaker will be bright. **NK**

FREQUENCY RESPONSE

Green - driver output
Red - port output



IMPEDANCE



KLIPSCH R-820F

£900



EXCELLENT - extremely capable.

VALUE - keenly priced.

VERDICT

A value-for-money floorstander with big, controlled bass and extended treble. Will suit those who like to play music loud.

FOR

- big bass
- excellent detail
- good midrange

AGAINST

- bright treble

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