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# QUAD 12L

A lovely lacquered finish at a surprisingly low price

A famous British brand which can trace its origins back to the 1930s, Quad is now owned by Chinese interests, and forms part of the International Audio Group (IAG, alongside Wharfedale and TAG McLaren Audio). Although originally known for its amplifiers and other electronics, Quad is also famous for introducing a revolutionary full-range electrostatic loudspeaker way back in the 1950s. It still makes evolved versions of that legendary device today.

However, full-range electrostatics are unavoidably bulky, and costly to make and sell, so IAG has recently added some very attractive and much less expensive box loudspeakers to its product portfolio. While such speakers can never possess the exclusivity of the electrostatics, they have come up with an alternative exclusive, in the form of a lovely high-gloss lacquer finish at a surprisingly affordable price, thanks to Quad's Chinese manufacturing connections.

We've already reviewed the two floorstanders in the range, the 21L (HFC 263) and the 22L (HFC 257), with the smaller two-way 12L proving the outstanding model of the two. Now it's time to check out the 12L, which packages the same drivers as the 21L in a smaller stand-mount enclosure (which could well have an internal volume of around 12 litres).

The 18mm MDF enclosure is covered in a choice of black or three real wood veneers – rosewood in the case of our samples, plus maple or birds-eye maple alternatives – all of which are covered in a high-gloss finish created

by six separate layers of lacquer. The net effect looks very pretty indeed.

The tweeter uses a 25mm soft fabric dome diaphragm, and the main driver has a woven 120mm Kevlar cone mounted in a 165mm cast alloy chassis. A simple crossover network has audiophile-type components, including air-cored chokes and polypropylene capacitors, fed from twin terminal pairs that permit bi-wiring or bi-amping.

## SOUND QUALITY

Given that they share the same driver line-up, one would expect to find similarities between this standmount 12L and Quad's floorstanding 21L, and that did indeed prove to be the case. At the same time, the differences at the bass end are quite marked too, and these turn out to have significant implications for the overall balance.

Although deep bass weight and extension are not on the agenda here, the 12L does have sufficient bass to be placed on stands clear of walls. In fact, close-to-wall siting does result in almost too much mid-bass thump. However, some experimentation will be worthwhile here, as the free-space condition may well be too dry for some tastes.

Furthermore, put that restrained bass end alongside a treble that's impressively smooth, but also a little lacking in sparkle and air, and the consequence is a distinct tendency to emphasise the broad midband, somewhat at the expense of the frequency extremes.

The midband strength is certainly appealing, initially at least, and serves to highlight very decent dynamic vocal expression. But it also reveals a degree of boxy coloration which is less palatable. This adds something of a thickening texture and tonality through the lower midband region.

On the plus side, the presence band is beautifully coherent, giving a seamless and open transition from mid to treble alongside sufficient restraint to avoid any aggressive tendencies. In the final analysis, the 12L is a great-looking speaker with plenty of sonic charm too. Voice reproduction is its particular strength, but a little more bass muscle and weight would have been welcome. **HFC**

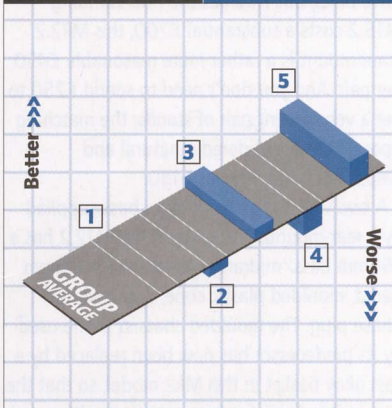


## LAB REPORT

Our sensitivity rating of 88dB is the same as the figure claimed by the manufacturer, and it's no surprise to find the whole measurement set showing close correspondence with those for Quad's floorstanding 21L. This is because the two share the same drivers – even down to a minor impedance glitch at 650Hz. The main difference lies in the port tuning – 55Hz for this standmount against 36Hz for the 21L. This certainly explains why the 12L rolls off rapidly below 50Hz, and might well be the reason why its output is rather too strong in the lower midband (120-300Hz), which in turn probably accounts for the boxy coloration that may be heard.

Above 300Hz, the frequency balance looks rather impressive – smoother than most and entirely seamless through the presence/crossover region. Another unusual characteristic is a gently falling treble output above 2kHz, rather than the high frequency recovery that's usually found.

## HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> 0%
- 2] Bass extension >> -10%
- 3] Ease of drive >> +10%
- 4] Overall frequency balance >> -20%
- 5] Response smoothness >> +20%

## SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	88dB	88dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	6/- ohms	6/4 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	45Hz	40Hz

## VERDICT

SOUND >> 77%

PRACTICALITY >> 82%

BUILD >> 90%

VALUE >> 82%

This beautifully finished standmount has good dynamic expression and fine voice-band coherence. But it also tends to emphasise the midband, lacks real bass weight and has some boxy coloration.

**HI-FI CHOICE**  
OVERALL SCORE **80%**

