



## KEF

### Reference 207/2 Stereo Speakers

**T**he Rolls-Royce Phantom Drophead Coupé, a two-door convertible, is 18½ feet long. Its mighty V-12 engine propels the massive 5,776-pound vehicle from 0 to 60 mph in just 5.7 seconds. Opening the suicide doors, you are greeted by an opulent world of chrome and leather. The iconic Spirit of Ecstasy rises automatically from inside the radiator grille when you start the engine. A solid-gold Spirit is also available. At \$412,000, the Phantom Coupé is certainly one of the world's finest motor cars.

After your drive, you'll no doubt want to relax to music played over your Model 207/2 loudspeakers — KEF's newest flagship speaker in its flagship Reference line. Designed to provide the highest visual and aural experience KEF can deliver, the 207/2 is as aerodynamic as a rocket.

Each floor-standing cabinet houses five drivers. Starting at the bottom, two 10-inch woofers are independently placed in 70-liter bass-reflex enclosures. Their response is rated down to 26 Hz (at -6 dB) — lower than that of many subwoofers in home theaters. Placed above the woofers is another 10-inch driver, this one dedicated to the

midbass range, and each tower is topped by a teardrop module that holds one of KEF's signature Uni-Q driver arrays. The outer 6½-inch cone reproduces midrange frequencies, and the coincidentally mounted 1-inch elliptical dome tweeter at the cone's hub reproduces highs to a claimed 60 kHz. The midrange driver has a flattened cone profile, so it serves as a waveguide for the tweeter. The crossover divides the speaker's response at 120, 350, and 2,300 Hz.

It's not an exaggeration to say that, at a cost of \$10,000 each, the 207/2 embodies the culmination of KEF's 46 years of engineering experience, and it affords a perfect opportunity to focus on some serious 2-channel music listening.

#### SETUP

Find that DVD transfer of the birth of your first child and erase it, because you'll need the space to record the christening of your 207/2s. They reveal themselves regally from inside massive cartons. With proper ceremony, open the beautiful wooden box that accompanies each 207/2 pair; it contains a set of beautiful chrome-plated spikes, accessories, and tools.

I carefully positioned the grand 145-pound cabinets in my room's sacred places. Each cabinet has a discreet, built-in bubble level to make sure it stands straight. There are three pairs of binding posts, one each for low, mid, and high frequencies. I tri-wired the speakers with 500 watts per side. Later, for movies, I switched to biamping with 200 watts and 500 watts per side. Some basic EQ circuitry allows a bit of control of low- and high-frequency levels: bass at -2 dB or flat, treble at -1.5, -0.75, flat, or +0.75 dB. These compensate for proximity to walls and for room absorption.

I ended up placing the speakers about 3 feet from my wall and, after experimentation, set the LF control to -2 dB and the HF control to -0.75 dB. I also decreased my usual toe-in to a very slight angle; this further attenuated the high end and warmed it up a bit. And although the black cloth grilles were mighty attractive, I listened with them removed.

#### MUSIC PERFORMANCE

I began my audition with some CDs I know well, and it was immediately clear that the 207/2s could take music reproduction to another level. On Mark Knopfler's *Sailing to Philadelphia*, the vocals and Stratocaster solos sounded like a live feed from the studio's mixing console; it's hard to fully describe the immediacy of the sound. Percussion was precisely enun-

## The Short Form

### Snapshot

At \$20,000 a pair, these superlative speakers celebrate the rich heritage of British loudspeaker manufacturing and deliver everything they promise.

### Plus

- ❖ Impeccable sound quality.
- ❖ Drop-dead gorgeous cabinets.
- ❖ Built-in equalization.

### Minus

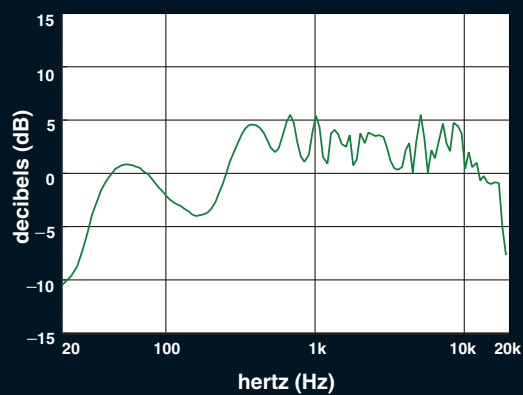
- ❖ If you have to ask the price, you can't afford them.

**Price** \$10,000 each

PHOTO BY TOMY CORROZZA

### Test Bench

Full lab results at [soundandvisionmag.com/kef207](http://soundandvisionmag.com/kef207)



L/R ■ 33 Hz to 17.5 kHz ±4.7 dB

The 207/2 has unusually extended low-end response and dynamic capability for a tower. It performs about as well as a small 10-inch sub, delivering 94 dB average SPL from 25 to 62 Hz and 102 dB max SPL at 50 Hz. The overall response shows a 3-dB wideband elevation above 300 Hz along with small, narrow irregularities through the rest of its operating range. There's also a 4-dB floor-bounce notch at 160 Hz, and frequency response above 10 kHz fades quickly. — Tom Nousaine

ciated, without any sense of artificiality. Instead of a speaker reproducing a hi-hat, it was, to my ear, the sound of a hi-hat.

The dynamics of Robert Randolph & the Family Band's *Colorblind* really kicked on the 207/2s. The pedal steel guitar was absolutely clean throughout its broad midrange region — a particularly tricky area because of the interplay of three different speaker drivers. But they integrated perfectly to create the sound of one steel guitar.

Thanks to the KEF's wonderful woofers, I've never heard Santana's *Supernatural* sound quite so good. On songs like "Migra," I was getting tuneful bass from a real music speaker, not the one-note bass I hear from many standalone subs. Furthermore, the bass levels were much louder than that of many subs. A lot of subs self-destruct when trying to play the bottom half-octave at even modest levels. In contrast, these woofers — flat down to "only" perhaps 40 Hz — could more easily play loud and clean.

Other good speakers convey sonic detail (such as fingers dragging across guitar strings), but the 207/2s went beyond detail, truly lifting a veil from the music. Each instrument occupied its own acoustic space, as opposed to the ensemble smear created by many speakers. I was particularly impressed by the clarity of the rhythm guitar and the floor toms; the large midbass driver was a revelation here. In a world of sats and subs, that crucial transition between the two frequency ranges is too often deficient. Here, with

a 10-inch driver dedicated to that region, the transition was seamless.

To conclude my music audition, I listened to Act III of Wagner's *Die Walküre*, in a performance conducted by James Levine. This is an excellent stereo recording of one of the most beautiful pieces ever written. At the end of the opera, waves of sound washed over me — and I am not ashamed to say that this music, both tender and heroic, brought tears to my eyes.

Reviewers spill a lot of ink describing the sound of a particular speaker. The ideal speaker has no sound of its own at all. It's transparent and neither adds nor subtracts from the music. It removes itself from the equation. The highest compliment you can pay to a loudspeaker is to say that you can't hear it. That was largely the case with the 207/2s. Throughout my audition, I found myself listening to music, not speakers.

#### MOVIE PERFORMANCE

Even without a center or surrounds, an awesome 2.0 setup like this can still provide excellent accompaniment to images. The Philip Glass score sounded superb on the DVD of *The Illusionist*. The quiet violin parts can seem distant on some other speakers, while the forceful violin parts can sound harsh. But all was well; there's something magical about natural-sounding strings, and these speakers positively sparkled with it. Similarly, the score to the Ray Charles biopic *Ray* was top-drawer. Piano and vocals were simply pristine.

Turning to action fare, I checked out *Superman Returns*, wondering how the subsonic fest in the Space Shuttle scene would sound without a dedicated subwoofer. Answer: very good. As I suspected they might, the 207/2's dual woofers driven by a large power amp can at least equal the output and sound quality of many small subs; they handled the rocket-engine blasts, explosions, ambient rumble, and other assorted long wavelengths with aplomb. The rock-solid cabinets were free of resonances, the ports were free of chuffing (except when driven to the very loudest levels), and the lower octave was powerful enough to rattle the bric-a-brac.

Of course, if you were lucky enough to own a pair of 207/2s, you'd still want to add KEF's Reference center-channel speaker and surrounds to complement movie playback. KEF has just begun shipping a matching subwoofer as well, but I don't know that I'd need to bother with the bottom half-octave it might deliver beyond the towers' four 10-inch woofers. Trust me: They move plenty of air, provided you have the upstream amp to drive them.

#### BOTTOM LINE

"I am not worthy, I am not worthy." That's what I thought when I first started listening to these speakers. But not surprisingly, I quickly grew accustomed to their luxurious sound, and I soon realized I could get very used to this level of fidelity. Clearly, at \$20,000 a pair, I expect speakers to sound good. Fortunately, these KEF's did not disappoint in any way. Their level of transparency was simply marvelous. If your ears are sufficiently sophisticated, you'll be amazed to hear what other speakers have been concealing in your disc collection all these years. What more can I say? With the 207/2, KEF has earned its place as the Rolls-Royce of speaker builders. **5&V**

### Key Features

#### Model 207/2

:: 6½-in Uni-Q midrange with 1-in titanium tweeter; 10-in low/mid; (2) 10-in woofers; 48¾ in high; 145 lb

:: Finishes: piano black, cherry, American walnut, satin sycamore

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