



KEF XQ40 £2,000

KEF's XQ40 loudspeakers sit at the top of their recently revised XQ range, which slots in between the affordable Q series and the high end Reference models. The revisions involved increasing the number of models in the range, making improvements to the cabinets and optimising the drivers.

In terms of the XQ40, the result is a three-way loudspeaker that utilises KEF's Uni-Q driver; in this case a 6.5in (165mm) design, with a 0.75in (19mm) aluminium dome at its centre. This operates above 2.5kHz and is loaded by KEF's new 'tangerine' waveguide to optimise the tweeter's output and reduce adverse effects of the natural horn loading provided by the bass/mid cone.

The twin bass drivers are also 6.5in (165mm) designs, paper-coned and sited in their own dedicated, port-loaded enclosures, augmenting the Uni-Q driver below 400Hz. All units are linked by a new crossover that uses high quality components

from the Reference series, and two pairs of terminals permit bi-wiring or bi-amping.

Cabinet finish is superb and available in high gloss Piano Black, Birdseye Maple and Khaya Mahogany, although I personally find the styling a little dumpy. Vital statistics are 1020x231x302mm (HxWxD) and 24.3kg. Both stylish rounded feet and basic spikes are provided for the rounded-bottom cabinet but, to level the speaker using the spikes, the front pair had to be screwed fully in and the rears barely engaged in the thread which did not make for a secure support.

SOUND QUALITY

The KEFs offer a

pleasingly even handed performance across the board. Most notable is that they image in a stunning manner, and maintain this solidity as you move around over a surprisingly wide area. It may have taken time to perfect, but KEF really do have their Uni-Q drive unit superbly sorted in this respect.

Instrumental and vocal detail was highly impressive, and the XQ40s' top end is a tidy yet spry affair, making high frequencies ring out into the listening area with alacrity. Far less patchy than some older KEFs I can recall, the XQ40s maintain their even-handed nature across a wide range of music, and only start to become a little flustered when the music becomes densely recorded. In this situation, they never sound distorted or muddled, but just give a slight sense that everything is crowding out of the drive units at once; in these situations it becomes a little hard to pick each individual item out.

At the low end, which has been something of an area for reservation for me with some other KEF designs such as the iQ9, the XQ40s performed with flying colours. Bass lines were weighty, solid, tuneful and blessed of fine timbre and pace. The only small gripe I had was that a little more grunt wouldn't have gone amiss with certain dance tracks, but the XQ40s are not lightweight and never sounded boomy or uncomfortable. All in all, their low end is very well judged and blends well with the rest of the frequency range.

VERDICT

The obvious choice for imagery fans, the XQ40s are a well balanced and enjoyable pair of loudspeakers.

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KEF

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FOR

- fabulous imagery
- overall integration
- fine bass detail and pace

AGAINST

- can become jumbled
- poor spike arrangement

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

KEF's new XQ40 loudspeakers show just how much development the company has put into its Uni-Q drive unit and turn in a fine measured performance as a result. The overall frequency response trend is flat and even with only a couple of undulations towards the top end as a result of the horn-loading effect of the main drive cone on the tweeter at its centre. These drops are very narrow however, and much smaller than older Uni-Q designs, so the resulting sound should be good.

It was also noticeable during measurement that the microphone could be moved quite a distance vertically and horizontally away from the main axis with little effect - the XQ40s thus have excellent off-axis performance, making positioning easier.

At the bottom, bass rolls off below 70Hz and is augmented by the ports to around 35Hz, so the XQ40s will have a solid low end.

Impedance-wise, the XQ40s have a flat electrical response and an average measured impedance of 5 Ohms, dropping to 4 Ohms in places. Their

sensitivity was good however, at 90dB meaning that they should be happy with 40 Watts or more from a matching amplifier. AS

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



Green - driver output
Red - port output

IMPEDANCE

