

LIVING WITH IT

With the grilles on, the Q300s look anonymous. But take them off and the reflex port makes them look a bit slack-jawed

TOP TIP

You'll need to budget for a bit more cables than you might imagine: the KEFs do their best work when biwired



KEF Q300

£450 ★★★★★

Last month's First Test of KEF's Q300 standmounters fluctuated between 'enthusiastic' and 'effusive'. As the latest rooster in the £400-ish henhouse, they pretty much demanded that this *Group Test* occur, which is why they find themselves under the spotlight for the second month in a row. This time, they're lined up against a couple of established five-star favourites and one very promising newcomer.

Thrillingly detailed and dynamic

In terms of finish, the KEFs have more in common with the B&W 685s than the other two pairs in this test - they're wrapped in recycled wood-fibre rather than veneer, while the 685s are clad in vinyl. There's nothing wrong with the way the Q300s are put together, of course, and the chromed strip above the port strikes a note of individuality, but those who want luxurious tactility from their speakers won't be wowed.

Those who want detail, dynamic thrust and eloquent midrange from their speakers, however, will be in hog heaven here. Thrown in at the deep end with a recording of *Carmina Burana* by

Berliner Philharmoniker under Sir Simon Rattle, the KEFs deliver a vivid, pacy and open sound. Soundstaging is accomplished enough to make all the individual elements of a full-size symphony orchestra simple to follow, while simultaneously integrating the numerous instruments into a cohesive, consistent whole. They exhibit the sort of linear dynamic response that makes the shift from near-silence

In just a short time, the KEF Q300s have become the ones everyone needs to beat. These are profoundly impressive

to full-throttle attack sound effortless. The KEFs' ability to abruptly offer huge increases in volume without noticeably hardening or corrupting the sound is one of their most endearing traits.

It's not the only endearing thing, though. The Q300s are just as happy to deal with low-brow dancefloor pleasures, punching into and out of the low frequency stuff with straight-edged precision. Tempos and rhythms are handled naturally, even when they're overtly computer-generated, and when voices occasionally surface the KEFs exhibit rare midrange articulation.

Where vocal expression, character and intimacy are concerned, the Q300s are arguably the most accomplished speakers in this group. Add to this a winningly natural and convincing way with timing and an impressively wide sweet-spot from which the listener can enjoy the Q300s' fine stereo focus, and it seems they're holding a nap hand.

If we can find fault, though, we will - and while it's a minor shortcoming in the context of everything the KEFs do well, there is a note of caution to be sounded regarding treble. It's pretty lean, tonally, and reed instruments especially can become a little brash - take care when matching the Q300s to an amplifier, though, and this should never become problematic.

After just a couple of months, then, the KEF Q300s have become the ones everyone needs to beat. They're profoundly impressive speakers.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Intriguing configuration; smooth finish; detailed, articulate, dynamic sound

AGAINST Some latent treble trouble - system-matching is imperative

VERDICT The outstanding KEF Q300s have soared right off the middle of the bat - they're £450 very well spent

TEST VERDICT**THE WINNER****KEF Q300**

£450 ★★★★★

All four of these speakers have huge merit - and all will do an outstanding job for the right buyer. For their all-round abilities, though, it's the **KEF Q300** duo that have to take the laurels in this test: they are consistently superb performers



Well, that was every bit as tough as we suspected it might be. At no point did the discussion degenerate into a scuffle (though it looked like it might for a couple of moments), but picking a winner here wasn't easy. All four of these pairs of speakers make a strong case for themselves - but if you know what you want from your speakers, we can steer you in the right direction.

Decide on your priorities

If you want your speakers to impress with their build and finish, and the lavishness of their materials, Castle's Knight 2s are an entirely valid choice. And on top of their lush tactility, they are capable of very agreeable sound too.

The biggest problem for the Castles are the Monitor Audio RX1s. They're almost as indulgently finished as the Castles, but, crucially, a more adaptable listen. If your taste is towards an analytical sound, they're a must-hear.

If your inclination is more towards a wide-eyed, up-and-at-'em sound, though, the B&W 685s remain a persuasive option. Their ability to combine subtlety and insight with a peppy attitude has plenty of mileage.

The KEF Q300s have the most potent combination of talents: detail retrieval, soundstaging, timing, and sheer brio to name four

Overall, though, and by the shortest of heads, we've picked KEF's Q300 as our winners. They're the most expensive, they're big boxes and they don't have a nice real-wood finish. But they've the most potent combination of talents: timing, soundstaging, detail retrieval and sheer brio to name four.

And if you want some you'll be interested to know we've got 10 pairs to give away in our competition - see p98.

SYSTEM BUILDER

System synergy is all, and the trio below will bring out all the best qualities in the impressive new KEF speakers



Rotel RA 04 SE

£300 ★★★★★



Marantz CD6003

£300 ★★★★★



Partington Ansa 60

£110 ★★★★★



For a full list of specifications and other useful info visit whathifi.com

Facts & figures**B&W 685**

£380

★★★★★

Type Standmount • Sensitivity (db/w/m) 88 • Impedance (ohms) 8 • Max power handling 100W • Biwirable Yes • Finishes 4 • Dimensions (hwd) 34 x 20 x 33cm

**CASTLE KNIGHT 2**

£400

★★★★★

Type Standmount • Sensitivity (db/w/m) 90 • Impedance (ohms) 8 • Max power handling 125W • Biwirable Yes • Finishes 8 • Dimensions (hwd) 38 x 20 x 34cm

**KEF Q300**

£450

★★★★★

Type Standmount • Sensitivity (db/w/m) 87 • Impedance (ohms) 8 • Max power handling 120W • Biwirable Yes • Finishes 3 • Dimensions (hwd) 36 x 21 x 30cm

**MONITOR AUDIO SILVER RX1**

£400

★★★★★

Type Standmount • Sensitivity (db/w/m) 89 • Impedance (ohms) 6 • Max power handling 80W • Biwirable Yes • Finishes 6 • Dimensions (hwd) 31 x 19 x 24cm