

Audiovector QR1, 3, 5 SE loudspeakers

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So, we loved the Audiovector QR series first seen in 2018. The whole range – from the two-way QR 1 stand-mount to the big-boned QR 7 floorstander – gave people a glimpse of Audiovector’s best product line, but were more than good enough to be your forever loudspeaker. And Audiovector just improved the line with the new Special Edition models.

The move from original to Special Edition models is both the easiest and hardest thing for a company like Audiovector to achieve. It’s easy because there’s still a lot of performance that can be extracted out of the original design. It’s hard because get that balance wrong and you undermine what is one of the most poised ranges in audio today. Get it right and the QR SE models both stand on their own and act as a gateway to the company’s R-series. Get it wrong and you have either created a discount diffusion brand that adds no value to the Audiovector name or alternatively make products that put your top line in jeopardy. But if any brand can do it, Audiovector can.

What’s so different?

“If it ain’t broke don’t fix it!” is something many claim but few achieve, such is the desire to tinker with the products. However, Mads Klifoth, CEO and owner of the Copenhagen-based Audiovector and his father Ole Klifoth, the founder and still R&D manager of the company, are singularly pragmatic. So, from a surface view, you could look at the QR1 SE stand-mount, or QR3 SE and QR5 SE floorstanders, compare them to the OG versions and wonder what changed. They still have the same nicely rounded enclosures, a similar AMT tweeter, similar sandwich membrane midrange and bass drivers. The rear panel has changed slightly and the cabinet has a little ‘Special Edition’ badge on the bottom of the front baffle. What’s so different?

The changes are subtle, but important. The capacitors in the crossover network have been reworked using new in-house designs. These double cryogenic polypropylene tin-flash copper capacitors are especially useful in extracting the most out of that outstanding AMT folded Mylar and gold tweeter.





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» This double-cryogenic process is a closely guarded Audiovector proprietary technique (perhaps not *that* closely guarded; calling it 'double cryogenic' suggests a course of actions that rivals might not get if it was called 'Project Exogenesis' or 'Destiny-Grade Cryogenics', but as suggested earlier... Pragmatic!). Combining 'The Big Freeze' with very high precision components and in-house drivers gives Audiovector some distinct advantages over its peers. It means fewer components in the crossover while still maintaining a linear phase roll-off between drive units. It also improves the frequency characteristics of these crossovers. Although Audiovector strives to ensure crossover points are above and below the super-sensitive midrange, getting both the slopes of the crossover as accurate as possible and ensuring the whole frequency range is as linear as possible only serves to improve the sound of a loudspeaker. Better still, it improves it in the arguably more tangible range of 'greater clarity' than simply 'better frequency extremes'.

Reflex tweaking

Alongside improved high-frequency performance from the use of super-chilled capacitors, the reflect ports of all QR-

series loudspeakers have been subtly reworked. This, too, is no mean feat as the original had a higher degree of damping than most similarly-sized reflex designs, meaning the original was already tuned to deliver good bass without undermining the midrange. However, a few subtle reworkings and developments meant this already good performance could be improved upon.

Badge and rear-terminal plate aside, perhaps the biggest visual change (in the QR3 SE and QR5 SE) is the move from cones to small, armour-piercing spikes as feet. These allow a greater degree of levelling adjustment, and pierce carpet and floor alike. I'd recommend a set of floor protectors for those with stone or marbled floors.

AMT tweeters

On paper, these seem like small changes, and are more befitting of a 'Special Edition' than a full-on range change. But Audiovector have pulled off a bit of a coup here. They have taken one of the most fun speaker lines in audio, kept all of the fun, gave them more bass and made them more graceful and subtle in the process. I was more than willing to accept the bass was almost light and the slight 'rough around the edges' charm of the original QR series because »



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» of the energy and clarity they delivered. But with the SE, those limitations are pushed further away. The bass is more full and deep, and yet still extremely controlled and tight. Meanwhile the treble is smoother and cleaner, but no less direct and impressive. But perhaps most noticeable of all when comparing the three loudspeaker designs is just how consistent they are. The QR1 SE is a two-way, front-vented stand-mount designed for smaller rooms. The three-driver two-and-a-half way QR3 SE is excellent for small-to-medium sized rooms. Meanwhile the QR5 SE is a three-way design with four drivers that can fill a medium to large room. We haven't tried the QR7 SE, but I'd wager that one is ideal for filling a big space. The sensitivity, and impedance of the loudspeakers are similar enough that whichever amp you like for one, applies for all and aside from a slightly more fluid midrange from the three-way QR5 SE, all you get as you move up the range is more extension. That's how consistent they are!

More importantly given their price points, there's no need to be overly generous in your choice of amplifier. Yes, there is a natural affinity both toward Naim (Audiovector was once a distributor for the brand), Gryphon (many of Audiovector's products are designed on the company's electronics) and both Moon and Nordost (they are increasingly used together in demonstrations worldwide), but the QR SE models are diplomats and will work with practically anything that isn't a three-watt triode amp. Sure, they all benefit from good sources and amplification and the loudspeakers are detailed enough to show up the differences between cables or electronics, but not so hyper-resolving that they make music unplayable unless beautifully recorded. In short, all three loudspeakers are the perfect musical partners for the price. Just pick the right one for your room, position them as described in the manual... and you're done.

When Three Become One

I spent some time flipping between the three loudspeakers trying to find a hook for this review, when I suddenly realised it didn't matter. The QR3 SE effectively sums up the entire range perfectly, and given its balance of size, price and room requirements, it's probably the sweet-spot in the range. Looking at my listening notes, everything I said about the QR1 SE applied to the QR3 SE, just with more bass in the latter design. Also, except for slightly more midrange clarity and even more bass, what goes on in the QR5 SE also goes on in the QR3 SE. As I said, the consistency between models is excellent and shows the

quality of design at a very fundamental level. This is (these are?) exciting stuff, with a directness and immediacy that is as energetic and as exuberant as a three-month old puppy, but with more control and refinement thrown in. An acid test here is some of those over-produced 1980s pop songs packed with Yamaha DX-7 synth sounds. 'The Word Girl' by Scritti Politti [*Cupid & Psyche '85*, Virgin] is a perfect example; its chimey, reverberant synth sounds were made at a time where rolled-off soft dome tweeters were the norm, and many modern metal domes or ribbons end up sounding brash and uneven. Here, these sounds still had lot of high-frequency energy and excitement, but the hardness was confined to the synth sound, not any additions from cabinet or driver. That's a marked improvement over the original QR models and gets them more in line with the R-Series proper.

The added refinement also became clear on classical pieces, giving a sense of musical flow and grace to Vaughan Williams Sea Symphony on Chandos or the delightful Yo-Yo Ma renditions of Bach Trios on Nonesuch. The former lost none of its scale but had a forward presentation that drew you into the music. Yes, many old-school BBC-type listeners prefer a more relaxed approach and they would likely object to Vaughan Williams being played with any treble at all, but as an even-handed player of music, I think the direct approach works really well here.

Bass and space

The midranges of all three loudspeakers remain largely untouched between QR and QR SE, and that's fine. There wasn't anything to quibble over in the QR's midrange anyway; it was open and spacious and informative before the changes; it's just as open and spacious and informative now.

The bass, on the other hand. That gets a big change. Given this change seems to be predicated on minor changes to the ports, it shows just how much can be extracted from a good design. And no, this wasn't Audiovector hobbling the original model or 'keeping its powder dry' for the SE... This is what happens when you have a successful design and think 'OK, now what?' and look at improving parts of the whole. Sometimes they make huge differences.

In all three loudspeakers, bass takes on slightly greater depth, far greater precision and agility and in the process creates a fuller, 'creamier' bass. It sounds like a non-sequitur or possibly a contradiction, but the bass is best



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» described as 'taut, but rich'. There is more definition and 'shape' to individual bass notes, but those notes flow well into one another and form a great sense of rhythm when called for. Two very different albums define the bass performance perfectly; *The Raven That Refused to Sing*, by Steven Wilson (of Porcupine Tree fame, Kscope) and *Everything Is Everything* by Donny Hathaway [Atco]. In the first case, you have an almost orchestral progressive rock bass, all pomp and technical precision. In the second, you have either a big, soulful rhythm section or a deep, funky bass line. The QR was better at the funky bass than the deep or rich bottom end sounds, but now in the SE, the loudspeakers are equally at home with all three. Moving over to the powerful synth bass of 'Welcome to My World' [Depeche Mode, *Delta Machine*, Sony] or the fleeting pitter-pat of bass notes of 'The Ghost' by Anna B Savage [*inFLUX*, City Slang], the QR SE models portray bass depth, shape and speed with equal ease. In short, the Audiovectors managed to successfully improve on the QR range without undermining any aspects of the predecessors.

They also fit into the 'Audiovector-verse' supremely well. The previous line created a fairly large gap between the QR and R lines, that gap has closed considerably, making the QR SE models closer to what you buy if you can't afford the R, but still at a keen price.

One more thing. Do you need to upgrade? The SE models are significantly improved over their predecessors, but the original QRs had a high level of excellence anyway. If I had a pair of original QRs, I would either trade up in size to the next QR SE model in the range, or go for one of Audiovector's top models.

Hot contest

All three loudspeakers tested in the QR SE range are in an extremely hotly-contested market. There are a gazillion loudspeakers in this price band desperate to meet you. And yet this trio of Audiovector models stand out as some of the best you can get today. The company's original 2018 QR designs had all the excitement, detail, and forward-sounding soundstaging you could ask for at the price, but the QR SE adds so much more. It adds a great deal of refinement to the treble and clarity to the bass, building on those firm foundations to make all three loudspeakers some of the most musically alluring and fun sounding experiences you'll get. All three will put a smile on your face, and keep it there!

The joy of the QR SE range is the consistency. We concentrated on the QR3 SE, but the QR1 SE and QR5 SE have almost identical top-quality performance for smaller or larger rooms. The QR3 SE might be the sweet spot of the three we tested as it can be used in so many systems and rooms. But in reality all of these subtly revised speakers are outstanding. +

Technical specifications

QR1 SE

Type Two-way bass-reflex stand-mount loudspeaker

Drive units 1x gold leaf AMT folded ribbon tweeter with S-stop 'pop filter' equivalent, 1x 150mm aluminium, foam/fibre sandwich 'Pure Piston' mid-bass unit

Crossover points 3kHz

Frequency response 44Hz–45kHz

Tweeter upper limit 105kHz

Sensitivity 87dB (2.83V, 1m)

Impedance 4ohms

Power handling 160W (music)

Bass system front firing 'Q-port' reflex system

Connections five way loudspeaker terminals

Finish High gloss black or white

Dimensions (HxWxD) 32.5 × 19 × 23.2cm

Weight 15.4kg per loudspeaker

Price £1,350/\$1,725 per pair

QR3 SE

Type Three-driver, two-and-a-half way, bass-reflex floorstanding loudspeaker

Drive units 1x AMT folded ribbon tweeter 2x 150mm Pure Piston drivers used as bass and mid-bass units

Crossover points 400Hz, 3kHz

Frequency response 28Hz–45kHz

Tweeter upper limit 105kHz

Sensitivity 90dB (2.83V, 1m)

Impedance 4ohms

Power handling 220W (music)

Bass system Downward firing 'Q-port' reflex system

Connections five way loudspeaker terminals

Finish High gloss black or white

Dimensions (WxHxD) 19 × 94.2 × 23.2cm

Weight 15.4kg per loudspeaker

Price £2,350/\$3,000 per pair

QR5 SE

Type Three-way, four-driver, bass-reflex floorstanding loudspeaker

Driver complement 1x AMT ribbon tweeter; 1x 150mm. Pure Piston midrange driver; 2x 150mm Pure Piston bass drivers

Crossover frequencies 400Hz, 3kHz

Frequency response 24Hz–45kHz

Impedance 4 Ohms

Sensitivity 91dB/W/m

Dimensions (HxWxD) 1057 × 210 × 270mm

Weight 22.9kg/each

Finishes Black piano, dark walnut veneer, white silks

Price £ 3,750/\$4,650 per pair

Manufacturer Audiovector  www.audiovector.com

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