

AUDIOVECTOR QR1

NEIL GADER

Irresistible Refinement from Denmark

THE QR1 by Audiovector of Denmark is a two-way compact loudspeaker. In fact, it's the smallest loudspeaker in Audiovector's entry-level QR Series—a versatile, six-speaker lineup that's positioned a rung down from the company's elite R Series. Usable as either a bookshelf or a stand-mount, this mini-monitor is just under 13 inches tall. The enclosure is solidly braced and made from high-density fiberboard (HDF). It has a narrow, rectangular, forward-firing port, which controls the airstream and permits more placement options than rear-firing designs, particularly in smaller rooms where proximity to backwalls or the confines of a bookshelf give front-firing ports the advantage. Visually, the QR1 look and build are premium, just as I expected from the Danes. From any angle, back to front, the speaker just screams *expensive*, but at \$2300 per pair it most assuredly is not. I admired its tight seams, handsome accents, nicely integrated hex bolts for the drivers, and fashionable aluminum trim rings contrasting against the black cabinet. The lacquer finish was flawless and as smooth as glass. The QR1 is available in a choice of three colors: white silk, dark walnut, and piano black. Magnetically attached cloth grilles are included.

The QR1 deploys two transducers to cover a wide 45Hz–45kHz bandwidth. Its 6" mid/woofer has a smooth, dustcap-free diaphragm derived from the light, non-resonant membranes in Audiovector's SR and R Series speakers. The result is a three-layer sandwich cone that combines the strength of two layers of aluminum bonded with a light, foamy glue. From Audiovector's standpoint this combination offers "piston-like performance throughout its range, with a very controlled roll-off and without the distortion normally found in aluminum/diamond drive units."

The jewel in the QR1 crown however is its AMT tweeter, short for Air Motion Transformer. Invented by Dr. Oskar Heil, it's neither a planar nor a true ribbon. Rather the AMT employs an ultra-thin pleated diaphragm that squeezes air between the pleats in an accordion-like fashion. It's extremely low mass, highly responsive, and has a large radiating surface. The fascia plate is precision machined from a single piece of aerospace-grade aluminum, then glass-blasted, brushed, and anodized in an attractive tungsten/titanium-grey color. It features a rose-gold-plated dispersion mesh, which works as an S-Stop filter, geared to reduce sibilance, much like the screens placed in front of vocal microphones in recording studios. Audiovector crosses over the QR1 drivers at 3kHz.

At 86dB sensitivity, the QR1 was not especially demanding to drive, but nonetheless the nominal 4-ohm QR1 appreciates moderate amounts of smooth clean power. Choose your amplifier wisely; the AMT tweeter doesn't appreciate electronic grain, often found in early transistor designs. I asked Audiovector's CEO Mads Klifoth to weigh in regarding the crossover and other matters. "As always, the crossover is as simple as possible. This simplicity can only be achieved because the drivers behave so well. The result is a crossover with one high-quality component in series with each driver. The QR1 is easy to drive due to its fine efficiency and gentle impedance curve. This means that it can be driven by almost any (good-sounding) amplifier with ease."

Setup was particularly easy with the QR1. In my small listening room, it sat on a 24"-high Target stand about three feet out from the rear wall. Bass response was so smooth and extended that I didn't have to move them any closer to the wall.

As attractive as the QR1 is from the outside, this speaker's beauty ran far more than skin deep. What made the QR so musically and sonically credible was its rich and compelling tonal balance. I don't give small speakers a pass on this. I listen for the same sonic characteristics in a compact that I do in a floorstander. In all cases, my bias is clear: For a speaker to have a chance to make a positive impression on me, it must possess a sense of the body of music and not just create a surface impression. There should be a chestiness to singers, dark resonances from celli, and if not the full heft of a grand piano, then at least a legitimate suggestion of the physical weight of the instrument and the sustain of its soundboard.

Contrast this to the stock-in-trade of many foot-tall compacts, which typically offer detail and *more* detail, top-end extension, and microdynamics. Their

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calling cards are intimacy, nuance, and speed. And there is nothing wrong with that. But often, the tradeoff is insubstantial bass and thin lower-midrange response—a threadbare power range and a tweeter with a treble tilt.

The Audiovector's QR1's sonic performance was anything but typical of a small compact. The speaker was excellent through the midrange and nicely resolved from well into the harmonic range. It struck a reasonable (not perfect) balance between detail and midrange and midbass density. Most importantly it didn't push me away with excessive treble energy. While there was a hint of layback in the upper mids, the QR1 was no wallflower, either.

Driver integration was smooth, and the mid/bass cone was nicely matched in speed with the AMT tweeter. The driver integration issue was key, particularly if you listen to a lot of vocals, as I do. Singers shine through the QR1, especially female vocalists like Holly Cole on her gutsy cover of "I Can See Clearly" [*Temptation*] or the angelic Allison Krauss—her version of Lennon/McCartney's "I Will" features a glorious banjo and dobro duet that brings this marvelous tune to life in an unexpected, rootsy, and refreshing way. Male vocalists fared nearly as well, although without all the lower-midrange chestiness and power that define baritone singers. The QR1 plainly fell into its comfort zone during the brilliant tracks from Charlie Haden and Pat Metheny's tasteful *Beyond the Missouri Sky*. Its sound was fluid, relaxed, but fast on the transient attack whenever the mood changed.

As in the GoldenEar Technology BRX, which competes in this segment, the AMT tweeter was a real beaut—effortlessly refined, microdynamically alive, and easy to listen to for long stretches without fatigue. Its delicacy and sensitivity on cymbals, openness on brass, and air on violin, solo or ensemble, were a pleasure to experience. It elevated the overall experience of the QR1 beyond its price and class. The sense of venue the QR1 recreates with its solid power range and upper-bass resolution also paid dividends in terms of scale—meaning the speaker didn't play small. Symphony orchestras didn't get miniaturized, as if being observed within a terrarium.

I also found that I didn't need to coddle the QR1. Bass response was excellent for this spec, reaching down into the 50Hz range. The port was expertly controlled and virtually inaudible. Thanks to its long-throw-woofer design, I could toss symphonies and rock material its way at volume levels that would

make the compacts of yesteryear sprint for the exits. Fact is, and I've been writing about this for some time, you can no longer dismiss or excuse the performance of small speakers for a lack of energy or dynamics. The QR1 rocks. Whether it was Dire Straits' "Telegraph Road" or The Cars' "Just What I Needed," no one will ever accuse the QR1 of a lack of guts.

Of course, you need to abide by *some* limits—after all you didn't buy Audiovector's dual-woofer three-way QR5, so you can't let expectations get ahead of reality. The QR1 lays back ever so slightly in the upper mids and lower treble, which somewhat reduces the sense of presence. A single six-incher is limited by its modest cone area and pistonic throw—a featherweight boxer can't outpunch a heavyweight, no matter how hard he tries. So, ultimately, the dynamics and decay of the deepest bass become more about suggesting the low-frequency fundamental via the harmonic of that fundamental note.

The QR1 is part of the new breed of affordable compacts that asks, no *demands*, to be taken seriously. It doesn't just offer a taste of the high end in small portions. Without question, the Audiovector QR1 ups the ante for any competitor that hopes to compete in the \$2k segment. Its allure lies in the way it minimizes the limitations of the compact breed, while magnifying the strengths. It's gorgeous, refined, wildly musical. It's no exaggeration for me to say that the QR1 provided about as much satisfaction and sheer enjoyment as I have ever experienced in a small speaker of this specification. Enthusiastically recommended. **tas**

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SPECS & PRICING

TYPE: Two-way, bass-reflex compact
DRIVERS: Gold Leaf AMT tweeter, 6" mid/bass
FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 45Hz–45kHz
IMPEDANCE: 4 ohms
SENSITIVITY: 86dB
DIMENSIONS: 7.5" x 12.8" x 9.1"
WEIGHT: 16 lbs.
PRICE: \$2300

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