

EQUIPMENT REVIEW

Magico Mini II standmount loudspeakers

by Alan Sircom

There's a question that hangs around all kinds of branches of consumer electronics like a bad smell in a camper van – "Yes, but what's the best?" It's a nebulous question when you think it through, because it comes without qualification. An Aston Martin might be the best car ever made for posing round the Côte d'Azur, but it's almost pointless when taking the wife and kids out for a long weekend. A glass of Château Pétrus isn't going to make the grade when it's Château d'Yquem time. So, what's the best? It depends!

However, when it comes to standmount loudspeakers, the Magico Mini II makes a strong case for being the 'best'. You just have to think 'best' in everything it touches to make it so.

First, to get the best from the best, you need the best in amplification. The Magico Mini II is a power hog. The 87dB sensitivity and nominal impedance of four ohms is deceptive, as is Magico's claim that amplifiers between 50-250W fit the bill. The reality is you are going to need an amplifier at the top end of that scale as an entry point. The amp doesn't need to be disturbingly expensive, but it does need to deliver a lot of power well. Of course, the reality is if you are partnering a £35,000 loudspeaker, the chances are you won't be using it with a £350 amplifier. The amplifier (or at least the power amplifier) also needs to be solid-state – no anti-valve bias here at all on my part, but you'll struggle to get flub-free bass with hollow-state tech no matter how much you spend.

The room too needs to be the best. There's a misconception that standmount loudspeakers are designed for smaller rooms than floorstanders. This is patent nonsense and the Mini II is the perfect buster for that myth. The Mini II needs a really big room to come to life. Think 6x4.5m as a starting place. You'll need a good metre from the rear and side walls too. And it needs to be a ground floor room, because weighing in at 90kilos per side, if you try to put these upstairs in some homes, you are just inviting entropy and slipped discs.

Rolling out that 90 kilogramme per side statistic highlights why the Mini II are among the 'best' in standmount loudspeakers. The reason for that crazy weight comes down to the cabinet construction. The 'tree' part is made from 16 horizontal layers of inch-thick, 17-ply Baltic birch plywood. This is heavily cross-braced internally, but that's just the start. The 'metal' parts (the front and rear panels) are made from inch and a half thick aircraft-grade aluminium panels, anodized and curved to reduce diffraction. The drive units are connected to the 'metal' part and there is no mechanical coupling between 'metal' and ▶



▶ 'tree' at all. With such an uncompromising (read: bloody heavy) loudspeaker cabinet construction, the stand needs to be more than just some light, rigid affair. You could make a high-mass stand out of steel, but what's the point of using a stiff metal material that has great resistance to ringing and low energy storage like aluminium in the loudspeaker, only to use a material that has none of those properties for the stand? So, the backbone of the stand is aluminium, which contributes heavily to the stand's 54kg weight. The speaker is further decoupled from this mighty stand using ball bearings, and contributes a 2.7 degree backtilt to help time-align the loudspeaker drivers.



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That loudspeaker is a two-way, sealed box design, featuring the 25mm Scanspeak Revelator ‘ring radiator’ textile dome tweeter with a phase plug (commonly considered to be the best – and certainly the most expensive – dome tweeter money can buy). This is coupled to Magico’s own super light, super stiff woven carbon-fibre sandwich basted with carbon nano-tube Nano-Tec 178mm mid-bass unit. Both drive units sport neodymium magnets; not uncommon in tweeters, grotesquely expensive in a bass unit. Nothing is left to chance, nothing is compromised in any way; even the voice coil is made out of titanium wire. And the crossover uses Magico’s Elliptical Symmetry Crossover (ESXO) design, which includes things like silly-money Mundorf capacitors the size of a man’s fist.

Going back to the ‘best’ claim, from the sheer roll-call of parts alone, it fits the bill because everything else looks compromised by comparison. This is a loudspeaker built by people who have never heard the phrase ‘built to a price’. That obsession rubs off on the purchaser; there are no finish options apart from the end-on ply and black aluminium sections. If it doesn’t match your room, change your room. No quarter given, or expected.

That also means the Magico Mini II makes huge demands on all the equipment that feeds it. Once again, this doesn’t spell ultra-expensive equipment, just intelligent partnering. The better the partners, the better the performance. And you will want the best performance out of the Magico Mini II; even if you start out with a good system, you’ll upgrade to get the best out

of that system because the Mini II demands it. It’s when you discover why the ‘Mini’ part of the name is significant, because you might end up spending as much as a Mini Cooper on the CD player, the same again on the preamp and as much as the house in Kensington that goes with the Mini Cooper on the power amps. No quarter, remember.

So, what does the ‘best’ standmount sound like? Nothing like a standmount. It sounds a whole lot bigger and deeper than any standmount you’ve heard up to this point. It’s got all the sublime ‘hairs raising on the back of the neck’ powers of Magico floorstanders, that remarkable ability to stop you in your tracks and force you to listen to any piece of music you might think about playing through the speakers. But this time with the sort of musical simplicity that only a sealed two-way box can produce. Put simply, it makes the sort of sound that gives you all the pace and energy of classic sealed box Brit-fi rhythm kings like Linn Kans with all the accuracy of good monitors and all the finesse of the a great high-end speaker. That’s a hard combination to beat. ▶

▶ Casting my ears back to the Magico V3 is perhaps a more relevant comparison. The Mini II is the better imager, but the V3 has more bass depth. Neither is a substantial trade. Interestingly though, I believe the Mini II also edges ahead in terms of dynamic range. This is a harder thing to compare, because you are comparing the range across different bandwidths, but I suspect the awesome dynamics of the V3 get an extra layer of awesomeness in the Mini II and that is something truly aw... impressive.

You can't help but throw music at the Mini II and it can't help but throw remarkably enjoyable sounds back. The musical generation process here is second to none, making light work of even the heaviest orchestral piece in a manner most two-way standmounts would panic at.

What criticism exists is largely philosophical in nature. The Mini II is potentially a loudspeaker in search of a perfect amplifier. You and it will never be satisfied with 'just so', even if that should read 'just so much money that my bank account needs stitches'. This invites an interesting question; can a product be compromised by being uncompromising? I think your reaction to this question defines the Mini II for you. If you think 'yes' then there are a hundred loudspeakers that cost a fraction of the Mini II's asking price that will be almost as good and save you tens of thousands of pounds in the selection process. If not, you just opened yourself up to a world without compromise.

There's a spiritual heir to the Mini II – the Sonus Faber Extrema. Even if the two are completely unlike on every level, they share that headlong charge into uncharted territory approach that makes them at once exciting and a bit terrifying to be with. And, like the Extrema, the Mini II will be the sort of product that still commands high prices and hushed tones years and years after they go to the Great Listening Room in the Sky. There is, of course, the five figure elephant in the room. Can any standmount loudspeaker – no matter how remarkable – really command and justify so high a price? If you look at the Magico Mini II as a loudspeaker, instead of a standmount loudspeaker, it delivers a sound that is

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every bit as good as its price suggests. Most people will struggle to make that intellectual jump, but if you are an uncompromising soul with an accommodating bank balance and an equally accommodating listening room, this might just be the 'best' after all. +

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Magico Mini II
Two-way standmount loudspeaker
Infinite baffle design
Driver Complement: 25.4mm ring radiator Revelator tweeter
178mm Nano-Tec mid-woofer
Frequency Response: 40Hz-40KHz
Sensitivity: 87dB
Impedance: 4 ohms
Recommended Power: 50-250 Watts
Dimensions (WxHxD, inc stand): 38x106x45cm
Weight: 90kg

Price per pair: £35,000

Manufacturer:
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