

# EQUIPMENT REVIEW

## Guru QM10two

By Jason Kennedy

Three years back, I wrote about the original Guru QM10 in fairly glowing terms. It was a charming and stylish speaker of a distinctly different hue to the average aspirational standmount. The only real shortcoming that I found with it was limited power handling; it worked well in normal UK living rooms but not in larger ones, because the tweeter was not up to the job of moving that much air. It would seem that I was not alone in this finding as the new version of the QM10, aptly named QM10two, has a more conventional soft dome tweeter that allows the whole speaker to work in spaces both large and small.

The QM10two retains its predecessor's squat MDF cabinet, a box whose post formed corners and the radius on the slot shaped port are CNC machined in order to produce the pleasingly modern shape. It's still uncommonly wide for its height and sits on cylindrical foam feet; these are intended to float the speaker on its stand and represent the opposite approach to spikes, or even Blu-tack. This decoupling was used in order to reduce resonances in the speaker, and the speaker's designer Ingvar Öhman considers spikes introduce excess mechanical tension into the cabinet, which cause distortion and induce resonance in the supporting stand and floor.

There is now a dedicated Atacama built stand for the QM10 with outriggers and wells for the foam feet, alternatively you can use a stand with a large top plate or an intermediary wooden plate as was the case with the old QM10.

The new tweeter is still smaller than usual at 20.5mm and is horn loaded to aid efficiency, but looks rather more capable than the tiny driver it replaced. Between tweeter and mid/bass is a small hole that hides a LED. This indicates the speaker is being driven into overload between 30Hz and 5kHz, a range covered by both drive units. I've not managed to push it hard enough to see this in action but can imagine that it might have its benefits in some situations.

It's coupled with a 100mm bass cone made of mineral fibre that is coated and textured so that it looks like a weave. The crossover is arranged so that both tweeter and woofer overlap from two to five kilohertz, a very unusual arrangement that explains some of this speaker's sonic character. Both drivers are set in an aluminium mounting that ties them together aesthetically, it's horizontal brush marks providing a contrast with the very shiny finish of the woodwork. This is of a piano finish that can be black, white or even red if you're of a brave persuasion. Or a Ferrari nut.

Another aluminium plate is inset into the top of the box where it provides extra stiffness and a more robust finish for the many items that such a useful flat space might invite in the home. It's not quite LP sized, but it's close enough. The top plate is brand marked with the company logo, but there is absolutely no indication of the model name anywhere on the speaker. The back panel is another piece of brushed and anodised aluminium with one pair of terminals for 4mm plugs only.

Guru offers unusually specific set up notes for the QM10two, stating that it should be close to the wall and toed in so that you can just see the outside edges of each cabinet. However, it also says that you should sit 1.2x the distance between the speakers away from them, which is less easily accommodated. Guru also encourages you to use plenty of damping in the room in order to cut down on reflections, it also sticks with its original suggestion of placing a coffee in front of the listener, for sonic as well as beverage and foot support purposes.

The QM10two shares many qualities with its predecessor, not least being a very strong sense of pace; whether the tempo is fast or slow, this characteristic is always evident. It has the effect of making pretty much everything you play more thrilling and



▶ engaging. Naturally the more upbeat pieces provoke the greatest excitement but even in mellow numbers, it's a joy to appreciate the beat. Samuel Yirga's *Habasha Sessions* feature radiant piano playing from this young Ethiopian, he uses variations in tempo and dynamics to bring the music to life and you can fully appreciate how finely he has honed his skill with the QM10two.

It's not the most tonally neutral of speakers, but its colorations are not extreme and don't take long to accommodate, largely because of an effusiveness that is contagious. The way that these speakers can throw out a voluminous and expansive soundstage, one that is richly populated with juicy sounding instruments, makes it very hard to remain neutral yourself. The bass is deeper than expected – if not totally even – and the midrange has some audible peaks, but these don't get in the way of the music. The quality of communication is extremely high, thanks to good dynamics and the aforementioned timing skills. This, combined with above average transparency, delivers the sort of sound that I can listen to for hours without tiring.

Sensitivity is specified as 87dB and this coupled with an impedance that doesn't drop below 4.5 ohms, which means that the QM10two isn't particularly power hungry. It worked well with a 50 watt, Class A set of Velvet A3.5 monoblocks, but also proved to be a good match with a Leema Tucana integrated that has considerably more power on tap. The latter naturally let the speaker produce the tightest bass, which translated into greater pace, but the Class A's finesse was equally evident and worked very well with acoustic music. This pairing revelled in the bodacious production of Massive Attack's *Heligoland*, delivering a full-figured and dynamic soundstage that, while not perhaps as precise as more neutral speakers, is very true to the spirit of the music – energy being the key quality on this occasion; that and dark rumbling bass. This band are nothing if not shoe-gazers of the cup half empty persuasion. They do a great line in low frequency pulsing and this compact

speaker's apparent hump in the low bass does this wub-wub-wubbiness more justice than you might expect.

Next to B&W's comparatively priced PM1 standmount, the QM10two's tonal idiosyncrasies are more obvious... but so is their speed. Naim's recent 24/192 remaster of Antonio Forcione's *Meeting in London* has some very nimble fingerwork. At one point in the song 'Take 5', where one guitar solos while another provides rhythm, it's easy to appreciate the fluidity and precision of the playing from both instruments. This album's saving grace however is the contribution of Sabina Sciubba, whose delicious voice brings light and fun to the music, leavening guitar-work which is not always sufficient diversion from one's troubles and cares.

For a bit of fun I also hooked these speakers up to a Shindo Labs *Apetite* integrated valve amplifier. This is neither a powerhouse nor a particularly neutral 6V6 push-pull device, but it shares many of the same qualities as the Guru. The combination delivers even greater deviation from the tonal norm; female voice is strangely aerated, but the effect on the music is to introduce a tight but loose quality that's strangely appealing. There's plenty of punch ▶

▶ to kick drums and a great sense of pace, Meshell Ndegeocello's bass playing oozing from the speakers like hot liquorice. It's the sort of sound that puts one in mind of hoppy bitter or full bodied claret, rich and chewy if not particularly healthy. However if you want to enjoy the music rather than try and establish precisely what type of plectrum the guitar player is using, it's a combo I can recommend.

All too often we can get carried away with wringing the last ounce of resolution out of the system and this process takes us away from the purpose of the pursuit which is surely the appreciation of music. One reason for hi-fi's demise in the public consciousness is that enthusiasts and manufacturers emphasise the technical over the pleasure. The key quality that good audio hardware brings to our lives is that it maintains our interest in music, something that many seem to lose as they get older. With products like the Guru QM10two, which not only brings the music to life but looks good enough for the style conscious to put in their living rooms, there is the potential to bring those who think that home entertainment has to be on a screen back to the higher plane of music. In other words this is an inspiring speaker, check it out. +

### TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

**Size HxWxD:** 232x300x252mm

**Weight:** 6kg

**Treble driver:** 20.5mm soft dome tweeter

**Bass driver:** 102mm mineral fibre cone

**Sensitivity:** 87dB

**Impedance:** 5 ohms

**Finishes:** black, white & red piano lacquer

**Price:** £1,795 per pair

**Distributed by:** Tom Tom Audio

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