

Guru Junior

By Jason Kennedy

At the Bristol show in February the Guru distributor had pictures of a girl 'chillaxing' with a pair of Guru Junior speakers under the slogan 'Swedes have more fun'. I guess if Ingmar Bergman had had these speakers at home he might have made less miserable movies; somebody should get some for Lars von Trier and see if that helps! However the Swedes at Guru clearly do have more fun if these little boxes of audio dynamite are anything to go by, because they sounded good in the room at Bristol and a whole lot better in my room.

The original Guru QM10 and current QM10two are extremely appealing and entertaining speakers that combine remarkable bandwidth, image scale and timing in a way that few other standmount speakers match. But the QM10 requires a special stand or top plate to support its widely spaced foam feet and it sounds best with carefully selected amplifiers and source components, and the current QM10two is also out of reach for music lovers who have a limited budget. The Guru Junior offers a lot of what the QM10 does in a considerably more affordable and easier to accommodate package. It also has more classically Scandinavian style than its big brother; the combination of clean, straight lines with gloss lacquer or real wood veneer and anodised aluminium place it in a very select group of aesthetically desirable contemporary stand mounts.

Junior has a reflex port that is slot shaped on the front much like the QM10two. This efficient use of space means that you can fit two drivers and a port on the front baffle which allows the speaker to sit close to the wall, in fact



that's the way it's intended to be used. The drivers are very similar to those of the QM10two, in fact the tweeter is the same 20.5mm unit soft dome but the main mid/bass unit is the one used on the original QM10 with a coated paper cone.

Controversially Guru recommends that you try to decouple the speaker from the stand; the polar opposite of what most speaker makers suggest, which is usually spikes or Blu-tack. The Junior is supplied with foam feet that you stick onto the base of the cabinet for this specific purpose. However this does mean you need a stand with a bigger support area than average (Junior's footprint is 18cm by 23cm). But having separate feet means you can attach them to the top of a stand that's smaller than the speaker and achieve the same decoupled result, so that's what I did.

The cabinet is extremely well finished, I had a white lacquered example with white anodised aluminium on front and rear baffles that went down very well with visitors and co-habitees alike. There are no grilles with this speaker, it's pretty enough not to need them but the parents among us may find this less relaxing! Cable connections are via 4mm plugs only because the rear panel features a pair of sockets only so no bare wire or spade connectors. Junior is also available in black with gun metal grey metalwork and the same thing with walnut veneer. Somewhere between Junior's pre-production debut last autumn and the finished thing the silver aluminium and walnut option has been dropped which is a pity.

Sound quality

I set up the Juniors close to the rear wall and toed them in so that the outside edges of both were just visible from the listening position, this makes for a tighter toe-in than many speakers but it works for Gurus.

Despite the smaller size and smaller price, there are a lot of similarities between Junior and QM10two; this presumably is how it got its name! I started out listening with a Naim SuperUniti amplifier/streamer and a UnitiServe media server, a combo which while a little OTT gives any speaker a good chance of showing what it can do. And what Junior does is deliver a remarkable sense of scale and bottom end welly for such a compact design. In my experience, the latter is harder for small speakers than the former. But it's lovely to have both, especially in the context of a great sense of timing, this is achieved because it's fast, there is no discernible time smear to blur the leading edges. In some speakers this means a forward or lean balance, but when you have bottom end to back it up like Junior does it produces a tremendous sense of engagement and a whole heap of fun.

You can't help loving a speaker that lets you hear the playing and songwriting skills of your favourite artists as well as the Junior does. The more you listen the more it gets under your skin, I got totally carried away with one album even though there was work to do and deadlines to meet. But sometimes such details have to be cast aside so that you can get back to what living is all about.

This stylish little speaker is good enough to let you realise that this is the best way of spending your leisure time, that all other pursuits are mere diversions. But I may be getting carried away, that's the problem with good products, you stop listening to the speaker and get distracted by the music. Being a professional however I knuckled down and tried a different amp, the Rega Brio-R to be specific. This has less muscle than the SuperUniti but very similar skills in the timing and engagement departments to the Junior. The

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result wasn't quite so well articulated in the bass but there is still plenty of weight. In fact, the imaging is palpably solid in the room, instruments and musicians are placed in the soundstage in a remarkably realistic fashion. This is not merely a musical speaker it's also a precise and particularly coherent one.

In an attempt to produce a well rounded review, and an excuse to listen to the speaker some more I pulled out a third amplifier option in the Leema Tucana. This is the most powerful of the three and delivered the most low frequency weight, surprising amounts of it to be honest. Junior made me double take more than once by producing bass that was way too low for its size, I played a CD single of Massive Attack's 'Teardrop' which has a Mad Professor mix on it and discovered that this speaker is truly dubworthy. You have to hear it to believe it, but I ain't making it up; the scale that all that reverb produces is astonishing, and this from a wall mount speaker.

I also tried more subtle material including Andras Schiff's take on Schubert's 'The Impromptus' (*Moments Musicaux*, Decca). This is a slightly thin recording which doesn't play to the speaker's strengths, but the music is a delight because the timing is so good. ▶



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Dimensions (H x W x D): 290 x 180 x 230mm

Weight: 4kg

Crossover: 2-7kHz non-textbook function

Sensitivity 87 dB (@2.83V, 1m)

Nominal impedance: 8 ohms

Enclosure material: MDF / aluminium

HF driver: 20.5 mm soft dome

LF driver: 102 mm coated paper cone

Finish: anodised aluminium with black lacquer, white lacquer or oiled walnut

Price: £799

Distributor: Guru Audio UK

Tel: 01727 858989

URL: www.guruaudio.co.uk

Manufacturer: Guru Audio

URL: guruaudio.com

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There is a slight emphasis on the voice band which makes lyrics more intelligible than usual and plucks out details that are not always obvious, this combined with the prodigious bass quality makes for a result that stirs both the loins and the soul. It’s just not natural!

Matters only get more engaging when vinyl is brought into the picture, I hooked up a Rega RP6 turntable with Dynavector DV-20X2H cartridge and a P75 MkIII phono stage and plugged it into the Leema. Playing Leo Kottke’s ‘Great Big Boy’ proved a wholly involving and revealing experience despite the repeat playing that I give this LP. The zing of the new strings and the subtle fretless bass work were presented with clarity and cohesion but it is the timing that keeps you welded to the listening seat.

There must be something in these foam feet; I’ve heard a lot of compact two-ways in my time, but none that have this much low-end power and scale. The wall mounting plays its part to be sure, but the fact that this is a similar result to that achieved with highly isolating equipment supports like the Townshend Seismic Stand makes me think that I should try these feet under other speaker to see what happens.

To get back to the subject in question however it occurs to me that what makes the Guru Junior impossible to resist is its musical honesty, some speakers have a particularly charming tonal character that lures you toward beautiful sounding recordings. This speaker cannot be so easily fooled, if the music isn’t good enough you know all about it, and if it is then this is doubly the case. There is no danger of being diverted from the musical truth, that is where the beauty of this art form is to be found and this modest speaker delivers it in spades. It would be hard not to recommended the loudspeaker, but as it doesn’t cost a small fortune to achieve all this, it should be at the top of your ‘must hear’ list! +