

Wharfedale Linton 85th Anniversary loudspeaker

REVIEW

Chris Martens | Mar 2020



Wharfedale's first Linton loudspeaker was launched in 1965 and was, says the manufacturer, "bought in its millions right across the globe." Successive and successful models followed, culminating in the Linton 3XP, which was a three-way loudspeaker and one that marked the last Wharfedale offering to bear the Linton name. Or rather it was the last, until we come to the present day where Wharfedale has now created a Linton 85th Anniversary Limited Edition stand-mount model (which I will call the

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what turns out to be a *bona fide* audiophile-grade loudspeaker. So, consider the “affordability” box properly ticked.



Next, let’s consider the “fine craftsmanship” and “beautiful proportions” factors. Let me state unequivocally that from the moment you first crack open their shipping cartons, absolutely everything about the Linton 85s suggests that they must surely cost more than they actually do—a lot more, in fact. I say this because the first thing you see when you open the boxes will be a clear vinyl, snap-closure pouch that contains the Linton 85 user guide (printed on parchment-coloured paper), a set of protective stick-on rubber feet, and a pair of white linen gloves to use when handling the speakers. Further down in the box, when you first glimpse the Linton 85s, you will spy cabinets covered in gorgeous real wood veneers (either Mahogany or Walnut), not the vinyl wraps that are so common on speakers in this price range.

Once you lift the Linton 85s from their cartons you realise another fine detail touch: all their surfaces (save for the front baffle) are covered in oil-finished wood veneers. This includes the tops, sides, bottoms, narrow front bezels, and even the rear panels. On said rear panels one finds two flared bass reflex ports, a pair of gold-plated speaker binding posts, and a brass escutcheon plate denoting the

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The stands are no less lovely and they are sturdily and purposefully built. The top and bottom of the stands are satin black steel plates that exactly match the footprints of the loudspeakers, while square-section, satin black steel tubes serve as vertical risers. Then, on the underside of the top plate and the upperside of the bottom plate, there are thick mass-loading panels treated to wood-veneered surfaces to match the loudspeakers. Finally, there are nicely finished, threaded floor cones to complete the picture. These robust stands not only lift the Linton 85s to the perfect height for seated listeners, but also turn out to provide space for storing 50-60 vinyl albums beneath each speaker. Clever. Given all these factors, I think we can also consider the “fine craftsmanship” and “beautifully proportioned” boxes ticked.

This, of course, brings us to the most important question of all: namely, do the Linton 85s deliver the promised element of “natural sound quality”?



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Let's begin by looking at the internal ingredients responsible for delivering the Linton 85s' sound. The loudspeakers feature 200mm woven Kevlar-coned bass drivers with die cast chassis, 135mm woven Kevlar-coned midrange drivers that are housed in their own internal enclosures, and a 25mm textile soft-dome tweeter with a high flux ferrite magnet. Joining these drive units is a crossover that Peter Comeau describes as "near inaudible to the listener, resulting in a coherent, seamless musical output." Last but not least, the cabinet panels are formed from a three-layer sandwich of MDF-Chipboard-MDF, a panel construction said to distribute and mitigate cabinet resonances.

I found the Linton 85s to have considerable audiophile appeal as they were, by turns, engaging, energising, seductive, and just plain fun to listen to. I mention those last several points because I have heard any number of high-end loudspeakers that, while impressive in an abstract, theoretical, and academic sense, somehow manage to miss the deep emotive impact that music should have. Happily, the Linton 85s are not among them; instead, they tread the fine line between being revealing yet also inviting and at times downright seductive. They also can boogie, when the occasion arises.

One of my favourite test tracks is 'Flamingo Sky' from Marilyn Mazur, Josephine Cronholm, and Krister Jonssen's album of the same name [ECM. 16/44.1]. The track is full of Mazur's delicate high percussion and insistent, syncopated low percussion, Cronholm's unorthodox vocals, plus Jonssen's angular yet almost jovial guitar lines. The Linton 85s proved revealing yet never edgy on the high percussion, delivered the deep 'thwoomps' demanded by the low percussion, captured the desirably quirky inflections of Cronholm's voice, and caught the energy, angularity, and underlying humour in Jonssen's guitar. What is more, the Wharfedales imaged beautifully and managed to convey a sense of front-to-back stage depth that is often elusive.

Another fine illustration of the Linton 85s' capabilities came when listening to 'Chant' from Nils Frahm's *Solo* [Erased Tapes, 16/44.1], which juxtaposes middle and upper range piano phrases against powerful and sonorous low-frequency keyboard passages. The Linton 85s caught the uplifting and meditative qualities of the middle and upper range piano lines, while nailing the sheer depth and gravitas of the low-frequency elements.

Finally, for those wondering if the Linton 85 can convey (or inspire) powerful emotions, try listening to them play 'The Door' from Hildur Gudnadóttir's soundtrack to the opening episode of the HBO mini-series *Chernobyl* [Deutsche Grammophon, MQA]. The track features eerie high percussion elements set against ominous, throbbing low-bass passages, with warning hints of midrange voices woven in and through the composition. The entire track brilliantly expresses the terrible threat posed by the as-

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systems. In fact, they are so good that for many listeners they will serve not only as a high-end audio starting point, but also as a wonderful end-destination.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Wharfedale Linton 85th Anniversary Limited Edition loudspeakers

Type: Three-way, bass reflex, stand-mount loudspeakers, sold in mirror-imaged left/right pairs.

Driver complement: 200mm woven Kevlar cone bass, 135mm woven Kevlar cone midrange, and 25mm fabric soft-dome tweeter.

Crossover frequencies: 630Hz, 2.4kHz

Frequency response: 40Hz – 20kHz, ± 3dB

Sensitivity: 90dB (2.83v @ 1m)

Impedance: 6 Ohms nominal, 3.5 Ohms minimum

Dimensions (H xWxD): 565 x 300 x 360mm (incl stands)

Weight: 18.4kg/each

Price: Speakers £999/\$1,198 US. Stands/Plinths: £100/\$300 US

Manufactured by: Wharfedale

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Tel: +44(0)1480 452561

US Distributor: MoFi Distribution

URL: mofidistribution.com

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