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APRIL 2011

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A pair of white Quadral Platinum M4 loudspeakers, one shown from the front and one from the side.

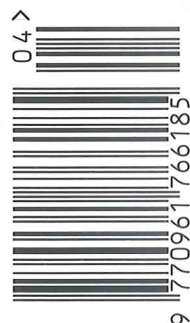
EXCLUSIVE!

**QUADRAL
PLATINUM M4**
loudspeakers

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APRIL 2011



**10 PAGES OF LETTERS - THE BEST WINS A PAIR OF
KEF iQ30 LOUDSPEAKERS! (UK ONLY)**

Fourth Bridge

Quadral hopes its new Platinum M4 loudspeaker will open up new territories for the company. Noel Keywood is your host for the journey...

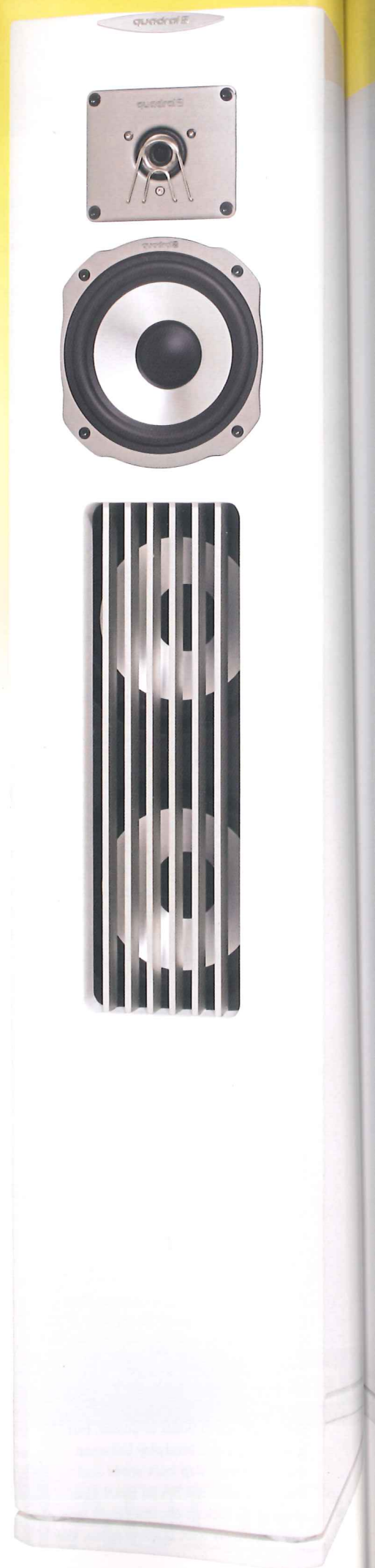
Germany is more economically buoyant than most European countries at present, and their exports stronger than ever. The UK is a big market by European standards, if peanuts by America's, but the two are linked by language and much else. All of which makes the UK attractive to German manufacturers, they tell me when I visit the High End Show in Munich.

But it's a difficult market to get into because of the strength of Britain's indigenous manufacturers, something we're little aware of. France has three large loudspeaker manufacturers for example, Britain far more. British products are good and prices low too, they say. But this is as good a time as any to get through the door and many German manufacturers are trying, Quadral included. What they have that their German rivals lack is low price. I was expecting the slickly styled and well finished Platinum 4 loudspeaker reviewed here to be priced way over £1,000, perhaps £1995 due to the usual heavy distributor margin. But no, it's priced at £699 – and that's competitive.

KEF, B&V, Acoustic Energy, Tannoy, Mordaunt Short, Monitor Audio and many others can all point to rival models in their product ranges I'm sure, at similar prices,

which just underlines how competitive they are. But with the Platinum M4 Quadral manage to offer a quality German loudspeaker that doesn't find itself at a price disadvantage. So what about legendary German engineering?

The first embarrassment on this front is one of basic approach: good engineering includes tonal accuracy, our measurements show. Once upon a time this was looked upon as characteristic of UK loudspeakers, but not any more. I know British manufacturers have R&D facilities as good as anyone's and I also know that making a loudspeaker accurate these days is not difficult, but as I mentioned in last month's review of the German Cantons, there isn't the will or confidence to do this any more in the UK. So where we once sniggered at the 'boom and ting' of German loudspeakers, smug that it was well beneath what was possible, now the tables have turned. We are getting accurate loudspeakers from Germany whilst producing inaccurate ones here. Oh shame!



Needless to say the Platinum M4 is well styled and very well finished. Styling of course is a matter of taste, influenced by current and often local fashions. The M4 is flashy, with its chromed protective tweeter rods, matt alloy bass unit bars a little reminiscent of Cambridge loudspeakers of yore (R70s I believe) set against a shiny white lacquer cabinet. Sort of reminds me of Range Rover Sports now cruising the streets in conspicuous white livery, usually driven by men of Middle Eastern origin! If you want to make a statement, then chrome brightwork against a deep white lacquer cabinet isn't a bad way of doing it. So there's no doubt the Platinum M4 stands out.

Look closely and you'll see an attention to detail that is very German. The drive units have smartly finished surrounds and fit the baffle like a glove. Here's where a product like the Platinum M4 gives rivals a hard time. Most UK cabinets of this price will have a vinyl veneer wrap of conservative appearance and spray black drive unit surrounds. It's a fair fit for most homes, but hardly as eye catching as the Quadral's.

Peer into the specifications and it gets better. With a little obfuscation, possibly to avoid patent wrangles, it appears Quadral have their own variant of the Ring Dome tweeter from Vifa and Scan Speak that is slowly making its way into quality loudspeakers. Ring Domes give an unusually smooth sound, character-free. Under measurement they are almost as smooth as ribbon drive

noise, then another 24 hours with Monitor Audio's De-Tox disc that throws random phase noise plus curious plinking, plonking sounds in a long varying pattern at the loudspeaker. I still don't know whether this is magic and de-toxes a loudspeaker as suggested, but it is clever in its make up, so I'm happy to use it.

It is as important to make sure voice coils and amplifiers are well warmed through for representative results, especially with our Icon Audio MB845 MkII valve amplifiers, since valve amps need at least thirty minutes running before use.

With the Quadral's I started off with valves and did not hear much of their magic, so swapped quickly to our grippy Musical Fidelity AMS50 Class A power amplifier and felt that both this amplifier and a Leema Pulse II best complemented them. Curious how different this situation was from the Kingsound Queen IIs, where conversely valves were the best option. The AMS50 really put pep into the M4's cones in this case, driving them vigorously.

Let me paint the big picture straight away. Just as measurement suggested, the M4s came across as remarkably even natured and completely without shout. At times they almost sounded warm, as if the upper midrange was a little recessed, but in truth they are just accurate and less shouty and forceful than most rivals. Turning up the wick a little the M4s fairly thundered along, sounding supremely relaxed and easy

"above all the Platinum M4s were a model of balance and couthness. They really do get all the basics right and you get to relax with a loudspeaker that is closer to right than most..."

units I have measured and listened to. This tweeter has beneath it an aluminium coned midrange unit, and below this lie two aluminium cone bass units.

Around at the rear lies a huge port, big enough for the cat to squeeze into, plus a set of sturdy bi-wire terminals joined by flexible wire links.

SOUND QUALITY

As always the Quadral's were well run in, first for 24 hours with pink

going.

There was, again as expected from measurement, just a tad little extra push up top to ensure cymbals rang out clearly, and also quite obvious rolling bass that had weight and presence. But above all the Platinum M4s were a model of balance and couthness. They really do get all the basics right and you get to relax with a loudspeaker that is closer to right than most.

With the big, walking bass lines on Angélique Kidjo's 'Fifa' CD it

was obvious that even with our AMS50 the M4's have enthusiastic bass with plenty of bounce. This isn't a loudspeaker that could be accused of being weak kneed, yet that few dB of lift we measured was not enough to make them bass heavy and overpoweringly bloated. There were times when an under-damped bloom could be heard around bass notes, a slightly boxy sound that commonly arises when damping is on the low side. Subsonics were absent, but audible deep bass had plenty enough power, making for a mobile feel to bass lines such as that in 'Shango' from Fifi. As the following track 'Bitchifi', opened its striding bass line had plenty of muscle and good time domain outline too. The M4 is energetic.

Also at the start of 'Bitchifi' I started to become aware that the aluminium drive units, although not as hard edged as most, do add a little 'schh' to strongly hit cymbals and metallic percussion instruments such as ride cymbals, bells and what have you.

In between the Platinum M4's



extremes, however, lies a supremely civil midband, far better worked out than most. Vocals rang out clearly centre stage, back in the plane of the loudspeakers as the M4s are not falsely projective (there's no midband lift). A nice spread of harmonising vocalists sat behind Angelique Kidjo's vocals.

A smidgen of midband warmth became more evident with Eleanor McEvoy's cleanly recorded 'Look Like Me'. The midband chamber imposes a little warmth and could be heard to add a little to the lady's voice, yet at the same time the M4s were almost hauntingly even natured and clear.

These loudspeakers charm by their easy nature that presents music in a simple, unforced but convincing fashion. The well etched clarity of aluminium cone drivers is there but very well tamed.

Eleanor McEvoy plays violin as well as a variety of other instruments and her enthusiastic violin work on 'I'd Rather Go Blonde' showed the tweeter brings a sheen to the strings. The piano beneath Arcadi Volodos' hands had perhaps a touch of a hard metallic tone to it but metal cone loudspeakers always add a little something and whilst this invariably sharpens Rock timing, it doesn't necessarily complement unamplified classical instruments. So it was that the Royal Philharmonic delivered a rousing version of Tchaikovsky's 'Marche Slave'; it strode along with weight and authority, pipes trilling sweetly, the main theme having the gravitas expected

from a Russian composer. Sudden crashes from timpani made me jump at times; the M4s are full of life; no one could accuse them of being sluggish or limp. Lower strings, notably cello, sounded fruity and this helped to a nice, large presentation, if one that has a little hardness to it at times – well, compared to say an electrostatic.

CONCLUSION

German engineering shines through with Quadral's Platinum M4s.

Now we have a confident German industry producing excellent hi-fi products they are keen to get into the UK. For the successful it's a big market, one that consumes more music per head than any country in the world except the U.S., at least the last time I looked at IFPI figures. With the Platinum M4s Quadral do an excellent job and although they will not shout in a show room battle, they will beguile, enough to make UK friends I believe. These are smooth, accurate and well made loudspeakers that work well with all types of music – at a great price.

VERDICT

Smartly finished, eye-catching speaker with an even, accurate sound. Real fidelity at an affordable price.

QUADRAL

PLATINUM 4 £699.00

+44 (0)1785 748 446

www.quadralgb-ie.co.uk

FOR

- smooth, easy sound
- eye catching style
- slickly finished

AGAINST

- obvious bass
- upper treble zing

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Quadral's Platinum M4 has an interestingly flat frequency response, almost ruler flat in a third-octave analysis not shown here. At both frequency extremes though there are small peaks; a +2dB bass peak around 100Hz to add some bounce to bass at low volumes, and a treble lift of +2dB above 8kHz to ensure treble has presence. These lifts are insufficient to make the Quadral sound tonally unbalanced, like so many of today's loudspeakers, but have almost certainly been engineered in to ensure the Platinum M4 has some zest. Small peaks apart though our measurement shows the Platinum is remarkably accurate – and smooth too, suggesting low colouration. This is an impressive result and obviously the designer has sought accuracy rather than contrivance in the sound. The only issue here is that accurate loudspeakers do not have strong character traits; neutrality is a property that, by definition, does not catch the attention.

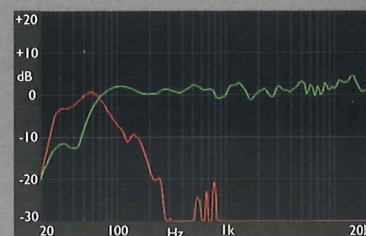
Bass goes low, but not to subsonic frequencies. Quadral appear to be using an input capacitor, rising low frequency impedance suggests, to roll down deep bass, as KEF once did. The Quadral is flat down to 55Hz and output rolls down rapidly below 30Hz. The huge port works around 60Hz. Large ports reduce distortion and this one worked exceptionally well, distortion reaching just 2%, when 10% or so is common. Likewise, distortion from the bass units was very low, around 1% below 100Hz. Above 100Hz distortion varied

around a low 0.1% value, so this is a low distortion loudspeaker. Colouration was low but inevitably there was some bass overhang, as a result of light bass damping.

The Platinum M4 produced a high 90dB Sound Pressure Level from one nominal watt (2.8V) of input, aided by a 3 Ohm bass unit, our impedance analysis shows, and 6 Ohm overall measured impedance value.

The Platinum will have obvious bass and a little added bass bounce, plus a little treble zest, but it is still a fundamentally accurate loudspeaker and well engineered in all areas. NK

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



Green - driver output
Red - port output

IMPEDANCE

