

Kudos where it's due

KUDOS RETURNS TO ITS ORIGINAL STANDMOUNT SPEAKER DESIGN WITH SOME CONSIDERED UPGRADES PROMISING HIGHER PERFORMANCE. ED SELLEY LISTENS IN

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In pretty much any field of manufacturing, once you reach a certain size of product range, the process of updating those ranges takes on an element of 'painting the Forth Bridge': as soon as you feel you have 'finished' your line-up, the oldest product in the range is ready for some further attention. Categories where obsolescence is a more recognisable phenomenon suffer from this effect more readily but it applies to more long-lived products too.

Having successfully brought the new range of exceptionally capable Titan speakers to market, Kudos has now turned its attention back to the Cardea C10 and C20 models at the entry point of its range. Indeed, these are also the first speakers Kudos offered commercially which gives them a certain historical significance, and while the changes for the new models don't dramatically change the speakers, they take lessons and ideas that have been accrued since they were developed.

This means that the C10, at £3500/pr, remains almost a type standard of what you might expect in the design of a two-way standmount speaker. Founder and head of Kudos, Derek Gilligan, is opposed to the idea of complexity for its own sake, so the C10 is about the high quality implementation of a relatively straightforward design rather than anything truly novel, meaning the C10 can look slightly austere compared to more ambitious looking devices – until you look at the details.

The driver complement is a 29mm soft dome tweeter with a 180mm doped paper mid/bass driver, the key to both being the longstanding relationship between Kudos and Norwegian driver manufacturer SEAS: this enables the company to have existing SEAS designs tweaked, the better to suit its requirements. So the tweeter is a development of the Crescendo K2, and a fairly high-spec unit for a speaker at this price-point.

Meanwhile the mid/bass driver, tuned with a large rear port to aid low-end response, is also bespoke, to the extent of not even being shared with the £4000/pr C20 floorstander. Here it has a 39mm voice coil, whereas in the larger speaker this is reduced to 26mm, Kudos having found the smaller coil works better in the larger cabinet.

The crossover linking the two drivers is also an example of the same thinking: with the handover taking place at 2.6kHz, the crossover itself is

intended to be simple as possible. Low frequencies are controlled by a first order arrangement using a zero-distortion low-resistance Mundorf air-core inductor. The high frequency section is filtered by a second-order electrical circuit using an ICW capacitor and more from Mundorf: another air-core inductor and an MOX resistor.

Unlike the Kudos Super and Titan models, the C10 has no direct driver inputs for active speaker use, this aiding that simplicity while reflecting that creating an active setup around a £3,500 standmount is fairly unlikely. Here, connection is via single pair of simple but sturdy terminals.

Upgraded cabinet

The C10 enclosure is now made from high density fibreboard (HDF) rather than the more typical medium density material (MDF) seen elsewhere, Kudos arguing that the greater density is both beneficial in performance terms, and offers greater batch consistency too. The crossover is attached to its own section of HDF which is then torqued to the rear section of the cabinet. Kudos saying this maintains the overall rigidity of the cabinet and ensures the resonant behaviour is the same, while still allowing the C10 to be serviceable long-term.

The result of this effort is a speaker that manages to feel more special than the inoffensive but slightly prosaic nature of its design might suggest. Lift them from the shipping carton, and it's clear this is a fastidiously designed and assembled speaker, and even at the £3,500 asking price, you won't feel short-changed. Every aspect of the C10 feels robust, and the understated design means it's unlikely to incongruous in many spaces, with or without the magnetic tab removable grilles supplied.

Kudos gives the impedance as 8 ohms and the sensitivity at 87dB/W and, in practise, the C10 neither requires huge amounts of power, nor does



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it show any odd behaviour in normal use. I've spent some time running it in partnership with the Cyrus i7 XR which claims an entirely modest 50 watt output into 6 ohms, and at no stage has it felt anything other than up to the job. This is not a speaker that is likely to demand wholesale changes to your existing equipment simply to get it to work.

A benign design

In the course of testing, the Kudos has been used with the Cyrus, a Naim Supernait 3 and Cambridge Audio Edge A and these have collectively demonstrated a slightly contradictory but wholly welcome behavioural trait. The C10 is at once sufficiently revealing to tell you a great deal about the equipment to which it's connected, while also indisputably possessed of its own characteristics.

These traits ensure that, unless you actively seek to provoke the speakers, this is an exceptionally benign design. This is most apparent in the treble response: I'm fortunate enough to live with a pair of the Kudos Titan 505 standmounts, and the use of a similar tweeter imparts some very similar characteristics. The fractionally 'hot' vinyl pressing of Sturgill Simpson's *Cuttin' grass Vol 2 (Cowboy Arms Sessions)* sounds sweet and endlessly refined via the C10s, without ever tipping over into sounding rolled off or soft. Kudos makes great play of the requirement of all their speakers to be as happy with 'sub reference' material as it is the perfect recordings, and across the different amplifiers I used, with their varying presentations, its speakers remained resolutely civilised.

The bass response is admirably consistent, to the quoted lower response of 40Hz 'in room' seemingly routinely achievable in use. Yes, you can buy standmounts at similar money – or indeed less – able to produce a deeper low end, but I don't believe this is what Kudos aimed for. With the C10, it isn't so much the extension that is notable as the control and agility; as long as the speakers are half a metre out from a rear wall, there's no perception of the rear port in the performance, and as a result the speaker has a genuine spark of engagement to it.

A case in point is the wonderful modern classic piano of Neil Cowley's *Hall of Mirrors*. This is not a ballistic piece of music and neither was it intended to be, but via the C10 there's energy and intensity to leave rivals sounding a little uninvolved. The sparse, electronic underpinning the piano – to say nothing of the piano itself – have enough weight to be believable, but it's the speed with which this weight is wielded that is so compelling.

There is some of the same urgency that compels me to keep a pair of Acoustic Energy AE1s in the house: an energy and sheer immediacy that benefits everything you play on them.

Perhaps the only trait that might not be seen to be completely beneficial is the soundstage. At no point has the stereo image these speakers produced been anything other than solid and believable, but it tends to sit between the speakers rather than extend much beyond them. This has been apparent across two rooms and the various amps and source equipment, and how much it concerns you will be both partly subjective, and also down to what you listen to on them.

If you are listening to a performer or band, this compact image works extremely well. When you need a full orchestra to be reproduced, it is a little less effective. Some of this is the simple physical limitation of a speaker that stands 35 centimetres tall, but the presentation of the Kudos is focused rather than enveloping.

A tangible presence

I find myself willing to forgive this trait almost entirely, partly because the material I listen to is rather more in keeping with this sort of scale, and also because the way the speakers fill that soundstage is exceptional. In a world where ever more exciting ends of material science are corralled into for speaker drivers, silk and paper can seem almost laughably low tech but to hear the Kudos playing the beautiful *I'll Be Gone* by Sarah Jarosz is to question why some companies go to the efforts they do. Jarosz is a tangible presence in the track. Her inflections, breath work and even some of the sense of her movement is stitched into the presentation. The manner that the Kudos does this is so natural that you don't sit there marvelling over specific details, instead you note that what they are doing is simply very good indeed.

This even-handed delivery of joy is what the C10 does best. In the time they've been running and across the various test amps and sources, they have been able to consistently crack a smile with a huge variety of recorded material. This is not a warts and all monitor speaker. It is accurate and detailed but, ultimately, it exists to show your music library in its best light and it does this with a level of enthusiasm that is rather hard not to be delighted by.

In fact, the C10 is a wonderful demonstration that a practical and room friendly speaker doesn't have to be boring or matter of fact. Instead, Kudos' smallest speaker delivers a commendable chunk of what has made the Titan range so well received and does so while demanding very little of what is connected to, where it is placed or what you listen to on it. The entry-level speaker of any company's range should embody the traits the designer holds dear, but in miniature, and the C10 does this exceptionally well. This particular part of the bridge won't need re-painting again for a while yet.

HIFICRITIC
HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

Specifications Kudos Cardea C10

Drivers	29mm fabric dome tweeter, 180mm paper-cone mid/bass;
Enclosure Type	reflex-ported
Sensitivity	87dB/W/m
Impedance	8ohms nominal
Power handling	25-200W
Frequency response	40Hz- 30kHz
Dimensions (HxWxD)	350x200x270mm
UK Price	£3495/pr

kudosaudio.com

