

Back to basics

Kudos has updated its entry-level, long-running Cardea C10. **Ed Selley** finds out if the revisions are more than skin deep

Where some companies have a schedule for model changes so that a product will enter the market with a fixed lifespan (and its replacement likely already being sketched out from the moment it launches), others work on the more relaxed philosophy of keeping a product in the range until they have the scope to make something meaningfully better.

Kudos Audio is a keen adherent of the latter theory and has been making the Cardea C10 and the partnering floorstanding C20 since the company was founded in 2006. As a testimony to how happy the company is with the basic design, it is only now that the C10 has seen some revisions.

The fundamental layout of the C10 remains unchanged. It's a two-way standmount featuring a 29mm soft dome tweeter and a 180mm doped

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paper mid/bass driver. Kudos enjoys a longstanding relationship with Norwegian driver manufacturer SEAS and both of these units are slightly tweaked to better suit its needs than the standard 'off-the-peg' versions. The tweeter is an evolution of the Crescendo K2 – a very high-spec unit that is used in a further evolved form in the fearsomely capable Titan 505 (HFC 451) standmount and indeed the rest of the Titan range.

The mid/bass driver is a custom unit that uses a die cast chassis and a 39mm voice coil – making it a fairly large and potent assembly for a speaker this size. A single rear port is fitted to assist air management. More notable, though, is what's not fitted. Unlike the more sophisticated Titan models, this driver functions as a single unit rather than as an isobaric duo. Something else quite unusual is that the floorstanding C20 uses a similar but not identical driver in

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Kudos Cardea C10

ORIGIN
UK

TYPE
2-way standmount

loudspeaker

WEIGHT
9kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)

200 x 350 x 270mm

FEATURES

• 29mm soft dome tweeter

• 180mm doped paper mid/bass driver

• Quoted sensitivity: 87dB/1W/1m (8ohm)

DISTRIBUTOR
Kudos Audio

TELEPHONE
0138 8417177

WEBSITE
kudosaudio.com



this role, keeping the same basic construction but employing a smaller voice coil that Kudos claims works better with the larger cabinet.

The major point of revision has been the crossover. Operating with a 2.6kHz handover point between the two drivers, it's intended to be as 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 another Mundorf air-core inductor and a Mundorf MOX resistor. The idea is that the number of components in the signal path is as low as practical and those that are included deliver the highest performance possible. This simplicity is further aided by the C10 not having the direct inputs for active use that more expensive Kudos models enjoy.

The cabinet that encloses all of this is simple but immensely sturdy. Kudos has elected to use high-density fibreboard rather than the more commonly seen medium-density (although honesty dictates that I am not aware of an official 'density scale' by which these things are judged). The theory goes that the principle advantage of this sturdier board is its greater consistency both in each section and batch to batch. One particularly clever idea is how the crossover is added to this cabinet. It's mounted to its own section of HDF, which is in turn screwed firmly to the back of the cabinet. This means that the crossover can still be accessed for

service, but the cabinet has the effective rigidity of a solid rear panel.

The appearance is little changed from the original, but this is no bad thing. It eschews design flourishes to come across as classically handsome. The proportions are elegant and the simplicity of the design gives it a clean and timeless look. It's also beautifully built, feeling immensely solid while the quality of the veneer is impeccable. This is a speaker that, when you study the on-paper spec relative to the asking price, can leave you wondering where the money has gone. This tends to dissipate when you heave it out of the box. The footprint will work with most stands, while Kudos' own Titan stand (at £1,000 a pair) works well.

Sound quality

Absolutely key to the performance is that the purity of the design has a direct impact on how it sounds and behaves. First up, the claimed sensitivity of 87dB/W and 8ohm impedance feel attainable in practise, ensuring this is not terribly demanding to use. It does respond positively to being driven, however. The Cyrus i7 XR (HFC 473) is not a hugely powerful amp, but its ability to supply current is impressive. It ensures that the Kudos sounds weighty, controlled and engaging. The claimed

The cabinet employs the principle of being very simple but immensely sturdy

in-room low-frequency response of 40Hz is entirely achievable in this room, even with the C10 used in something approaching free space.

There is also a wholly welcome turn of speed to the performance, too. The way that it gets stuck into the crunching riffs of Royal Blood's *Trouble's Coming* is pure and simple good fun. This is a speaker that works hard to never be the story in itself. In a matter of minutes, you are listening through it to the music rather than the hardware. This means that this dense and potent recording is unpicked into something that becomes a performance when you close your eyes. The C10 finds order without losing the boisterousness.

This very useful attribute is further aided by the performance of that customised tweeter. Here the relationship to the Titan 505 is easiest to appreciate as they share the same perfectly judged ability to sound detailed – at times almost forensically so – airy and tonally believable, but without ever sounding hard or forward.



Focal's Kanta No1 (HFC 454) is able to pick up behavioural traits that the C10 doesn't make as obvious and, when you give it a truly sumptuous recording, it has a sense of space and tangibility that the Kudos struggles to replicate. The C10 delivers a far more consistent performance and is more forgiving of less than perfect recordings. It's also more fun. It can't scale the absolute performance heights of the more expensive Focal, but its consistency shines through.

The Cyrus takes few prisoners in this regard, but even with this as the source and playing the deliberately hard-edged *Tascam Tapes* by DeWolff, it's civilised without compromising on the 'raw and real' feeling of *Blood Meridian I*.

When you give it something with high production values, however, like the beautiful *Blue Heron Sessions* by Sarah Jarosz, there is a liquid quality to the upper registers that even similarly priced rivals can struggle to recreate. Jarosz's delicate but distinctive voice is the star of the show and something that is clearly the centre of attention. What's so joyous about the C10 is that all the other fine details that make this recording as good as it is are present and easy to discern, but never a distraction. This realistically isn't a monitor in the classic sense of the term, but it is something that consistently makes music an enjoyable event.

This is a forgiving speaker in both a measurement and presentation sense, but it will reflect the quality of the equipment driving it. Substituting the Cyrus for a Naim Supernait 3 (HFC 456) – which is over a grand more and does without on-board decoding – does extract more performance from the Kudos and further demonstrates that it responds positively to being driven. When listening to very large-scale material, like the orchestral re-workings on Moby's *Reprise*, the C10 creates a soundstage that sits within the confines of the cabinet rather than extending much out beyond it.

Conclusion

The C10 is a relatively straightforward design executed with the highest quality materials possible so it manages to combine clarity, detail and tonal realism with a sense of fun that then goes on to have an impressively forgiving edge. It's survived as long as it has because the fundamentals are so obviously correct. Without losing any of this balance, the latest upgrades make it even better still ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

- SOUND QUALITY** ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Wonderful balance between impact, realism and tonal sweetness
- VALUE FOR MONEY** ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Slight lack of large-scale space
- BUILD QUALITY** ★★★★★ **WE SAY:** The C10 remains a superbly capable and flexible speaker that will delight many owners
- EASE OF DRIVE** ★★★★★

OVERALL

