

# Kudos Super 20A

KUDOS CONTINUES ITS RANGE REFRESH WITH CONSIDERED UPDATES TO THE SUPER VERSIONS OF ITS CARDEA MODELS – AND THAT ‘SUPER’ IS A DESIGNATION ED SELLEY THINKS THEY RICHLY DESERVE

**A lively sub-genre of engineering of which I’ve long been a fan of is that of ‘Q’ devices. Originally coined for the Q Ships of the First World War – vessels that looked defenceless but were anything but – these days it sees most use in the automotive sector these days. A ‘Q car’ generally resembles a lowlier member of the range but is possessed of rather more poke, a setup ideal for those of us that have absolutely no desire to attract unwanted attention to our periodic desire to get a shift on. With Q devices, the extra engineering is packed in under the skin with perhaps a slight visual clue here and there that those in the know can see and understand that this is the ‘hot one.’**

The feelings of Derek Gilligan and the rest of Kudos Audio towards Q devices isn’t a matter of public record but, looking at the £5000/pr Kudos Super 20A, there is some evidence that he might be a fan. In essence, the 20A is an example of ‘Q-Fi’; a piece of equipment that closely resembles another member of the range but that, thanks to differences under the skin, can do rather more. In this case, the other product is the Cardea 20A, bigger brother to the 10A we looked at in HIFICRITIC April-Jun ‘20 and, stretching the Q device concept a little, a seriously capable speaker in its own right. The Super 20A takes the same basic ingredients and proceeds to improve them further.

The principal difference – certainly the most visible one – concerns the mid/bass driver. It’s still 180mm across and is the result of Kudos’s long-running relationship with SEAS, with a coated paper cone attached to a 26mm voice coil (as in the standard Cardea, smaller than the 39mm one in the ‘10’ standmount in order to better match the characteristics of the cabinet). This is mounted in a die cast chassis with as much open area as possible, but there’s now a copper ring added to this assembly to reduce distortion and the driver is finished with a metal phase plug. As well as being a splendid spot to pop the Kudos logo, this also serves to aid directivity and heat dissipation.

The tweeter is the same 29mm, Kudos-adapted SEAS Crescendo unit found in the standard Cardeas, Kudos pointing out that – even at the increased price of the Super models – this is still a fairly impressive piece of hardware.

What has changed is that the crossover has been significantly revised: it’s first-order for the low frequency section, making use of a low-resistance Mundorf air-core inductor, while the second-

order high-frequency section uses a smaller pairing of a Mundorf inductor and resistor and an ICW CMR capacitor. Crossover between the two drivers is at 3.2kHz, and the Super models are internally wired with the company’s own KS-1 cabling.

In keeping with the previous generation of Super models, one key difference between them and normal Cardeas is that they are also fitted with direct inputs for active use. The connections bypass the internal crossover and allow for use with options from Naim, Exposure, Devialet and Linn. The argument for making these Super models the most affordable Kudos speakers to offer this option is as much down to the cost of these solutions relative to the price of the speaker: you’d certainly spend as much again to get any of them up and running.

The cabinet is still an impressive piece of engineering in its own right. Kudos uses sections of high density fibreboard to construct the cabinet itself and, to ensure that there is no weakened section where the crossover is placed, the circuitry is mounted on its own section of board and firmly bolted into place on the rear panel. You can buy more visually spectacular looking devices for the price of the Super 20A but few of those alternatives feel as solidly put together.

As a floorstander, the Super 20A is equipped with a different port arrangement to the standmount. The cabinet is downward vented, the port working against the fixed boundary of the plinth. Kudos says that the result is a speaker that’s easier to place.

Also noteworthy is that the Super 20A is extremely benign in terms of sensitivity and impedance. Kudos says it never drops below seven ohms and, combined with a claimed sensitivity of 88dB, it ensures that the Super 20A is a very easy speaker to drive.



The Super 20A is a fine looking speaker. I'm not sure that the satin white finish of the review samples would be my choice, but it's clean, modern and elegant. Black oak, natural oak and walnut are also available, and the dimensions are entirely room friendly, too, with the cabinet standing just under a metre tall with spikes fitted.

Nothing the standard Cardea models get right – and they get a great many things right – is altered or impeded by the Super modifications. My initial listening was conducted on Naim Supernait 3 and Chord Electronics Hugo2 and 2Go streaming module that had been used for a significant portion of my Cardea C10 testing, and the notes for both speakers are peppered with similarities.

Perhaps the most logical of these, given the commonality of the tweeter in both designs is that the treble of the Kudos remains beautifully judged and balanced. This is an extremely hard speaker to provoke, even with the more uncivilised ends of my music collection but it manages to achieve this without any perception of rolling off or otherwise curtailing the high frequency output. With a good recording such as Agnes Obel's *Philharmonics*, the Kudos is gloriously vivid. Obel herself has a presence and overall realism that anchors everything else on the album. She's a living, breathing presence in the middle of the recording and her supporting piano is barely less convincing.

### Open and three-dimensional

Where the Super 20A makes an immediate step forward is a greater spaciousness to this presentation I didn't always find with the C10. This is a more open and three-dimensional speaker, finding space where the stock version sometimes felt a little narrow and constrained. The larger the piece of music, the more this makes itself apparent and the vast Hans Zimmer score for *Dune* is positively panoramic. Those revisions may be relatively subtle but their benefits are not.

Nor has any of the speed, energy and cohesion that made the C10 so enjoyable been lost. On the end of the Supernait 3, an amp less out-and-out ballistic than Naim designs of old but one that still has a fundamental ability to enjoy itself, the Kudos is a consistently joyous device to listen to. It tears into the 'I can't believe it isn't James Brown' magnificence of Lee Field's *Lets' Get a Groove On* with unbridled joy. The urgency never feels artificial or overbearing, as if the speaker was forcing the presentation. Instead, there is simply an infectious get up and go that takes you beyond the point where you're listening as a casual observer and are instead emotionally invested in what is doing. It does this while ensuring that this (deliberately) rough and ready recording is never anything other than a good listen.

This behaviour is something I have found that that the larger Titan family excels at and the Super 20A gets closer to their extraordinary ability to somehow balance accuracy with unbridled joy. It's not to say that there isn't competition that has its own take on this combination; Spondor's similarly priced D7.2 might not be as fleet of foot as the Kudos but it is effortlessly accurate and revealing, at times finding details that the Super 20A doesn't make as overt. That information is present if you listen for it but there's less perception of the Kudos pulling it out of the mix in quite the same way.

Something that the Super 20A does very effectively though is use its larger cabinet and that clever port arrangement to deliver genuinely lovely bass. None of the listening positions I have tried it in have shown any signs of anything other than negligible amounts of room reinforcement. What results is a speaker that extends down to a point that is satisfyingly into the point where you feel it as much as hear, and it does so with no appreciable trace of bloat or overhang or indeed any signs of the room joining in. The struck drum in the live version of Fink's *Sort of Revolution* is tremendously satisfying experience on the Super 20A, hefty without being embellished. On the end of the effortlessly muscular Cambridge Audio Edge A, the Kudos meets every reasonable definition of 'room filling' you could reasonably make.

It does this while asking commendably little of you at the same time. This is a speaker that does not require millimetric precision in terms of placement to deliver and, combined with those sensitivity measurements that feel entirely believable in use, it doesn't need vast amounts of power to strut its stuff either. This should not be taken to mean that the Kudos is ambivalent as to what is connected to it because it is sufficiently revealing that, if you don't really like the electronics, it isn't going to do anything to fundamentally alter their character. It does mean though that there's no need to have an amplifier that could also be used to weld with unless you really want such a thing.

What this speaker is then is a version of an already great design that's able to give you a bit more in every aspect of performance while being no harder to live with than the stock version. The Super 20A makes use of those extremely capable underpinnings to bring you a performance that gives a genuine taste of what the Titans are capable of while keeping the same handsome but unobtrusive lines of the Cardea models. This is Q Fi done to perfection; a speaker that looks like its more affordable brethren while delivering a level of performance that even they can't touch. The result is one of the most viceless speakers I have tested at or anywhere near the price.



### Specifications

#### Kudos Super 20A

Type	Floorstanding speaker
Price	£5000/pr
Drivers	29mm fabric dome tweeter, 18cm paper-cone mid/bass unit
Sensitivity	88dB/W/m
Nominal Impedance	8ohms
Frequency response	30Hz-30kHz (average in-room response)
Power handling	25-300W
Dimensions (HxWxD)	92.5x20x27cm

kudosaudio.com

