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AUDIO PHYSIC SPARK 3

This beautiful, compact German floorstander lights our fire

The Spark 3 – or perhaps the New Spark, because this example is a substantially revised version of the original – is one of the less elaborate and costly models in Audio Physic's extensive range. Yet a pair still costs a not inconsiderable £1,499, which places it well up towards the top end of this group.

It's certainly a most attractive-looking speaker; its unusually slim front combines with elegantly curved sides and a pronounced backward tilt to create a classy-looking box that oozes minimalist discretion. The curved sides increase the panel stiffness and help avoid the parallel faces that create standing waves, while the elegant backward tilt should significantly aid mid-to-treble time-alignment.

Our samples came in a tasty looking 'light maple' real wood veneer, one of five alternatives available. Four steel outriggers with plastic trim pieces are screwed into the bottom surface to extend the stability



footprint, and also provide secure spike fixing. That said, the backward tilt does rather compromise the overall stability, and it wouldn't take much of a shove from the front to push it over.

There are three drive units in total – a 25mm soft dome tweeter for the treble, plus two newly developed 150mm main drivers with cast alloy frames and 95mm doped paper cones. Though apparently identical, the latter pair operate in a two-and-a-half-way configuration, the lower unit just operating through the bass region, while the upper main driver covers both bass and midrange frequencies. Driver output is also supplemented by a rear port, set somewhat above the single pair of high class WBT terminals (bi-termination is an option) that are mounted on a mechanically decoupled panel.

SOUND QUALITY

Delicate, discreet and beautifully self-effacing, the Spark 3 doesn't have the most vigorous or exciting sound around. However, it is a beautifully smooth and even-handed performer, one which is notable for its freedom from boxy colorations.

The overwhelming majority of speakers possess some degree of 'character', for good or ill, which gives the reviewer something to write about. On this occasion though, the standard of neutrality is so high, there's little to criticise. More than most, the Spark 3 seems to 'disappear', acoustically speaking, leaving just the music spread out between and around the speakers. Imaging is beautifully precise and well ordered, with no tendency to 'hug' the speakers. It also delivered good depth perspectives and a pleasant airy spaciousness that was particularly effective with naturally miked classical material.

For such a compact speaker, the bass delivery is impressively good. No surprise that it doesn't deliver enormous grip or authority, but there's enough to bring a decent impression of scale to the proceedings. And the bass it does deliver has good agility, delivering good punch with adequate weight even on an album like the Chemical Brothers' *Push the Button*.

Said album, especially the title track, does tend to sound aggressive, particularly if played loud, but the Spark 3's slightly laid back delivery helps remove some of the 'sting' from this recording, which is mostly welcome. At the same time, however, voices lack a little coherence, and dynamic expression does seem a shade softened. **HFC**



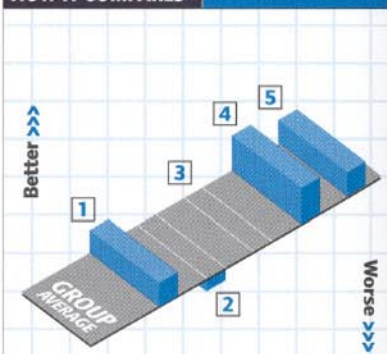
LAB REPORT

One might expect a brand that calls itself Audio Physic to take the technical side of its products seriously. The little Spark 3 in no way disappoints, delivering a beautifully smooth overall in-room balance with the speakers well clear of walls.

Under far field conditions, the presence zone (2-4kHz) is slightly depressed, but this is by no means unusual. The combination of backwards tilt and 47Hz port tuning together tend to create a slightly heavy and detached bass, so there's a good case for moving this speaker a little further out into the room than our normal 1.1m (measured from the baffle), if that is domestically acceptable.

Sensitivity is a generous 90dB, and this is only mildly compromised by a load which stays above 5 ohms throughout. Though generally smooth, a slight perturbation in the impedance trace at around 150Hz is probably due to an enclosure resonance – possibly the vertical standing wave.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> +20%
- 2] Bass extension >> -10%
- 3] Ease of drive >> 0%
- 4] Overall frequency balance >> +30%
- 5] Response smoothness >> +20%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	89dB	90dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	~4 ohms	7/5 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	-	30Hz

VERDICT

SOUND >> 88%

PRACTICALITY >> 86%

BUILD >> 90%

VALUE >> 87%

This backward-leaning floorstander is neither fast nor particularly dynamic, but the understated sound is beautifully balanced, especially through the midband, and has surprising bass weight.

HI-FI CHOICE **88%**
OVERALL SCORE