

► **DETAILS**

PRODUCT
B&W 805 D3

ORIGIN
UK/China

TYPE
2-way standmount
loudspeaker

WEIGHT
12.6kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
238 x 424 x 345mm

FEATURES

- 25mm Diamond dome tweeter
- 165mm Continuum mid/bass driver
- Quoted sensitivity: 88dB/W/m (8ohm)

DISTRIBUTOR
B&W Group Ltd.

TELEPHONE
0800 2321513

WEBSITE
bowers-wilkins.co.uk



Born in 1979, B&W's 800 series started with the iconic 801 Series 80 – which went on to find a home at Abbey Road, as well as several other great recording studios. Since then, Bowers & Wilkins has both developed and expanded the range. And as it has got progressively larger, it's taken in everything from the range-topping 800 Diamond behemoth to the compact 805 you see here. This is the latest and greatest incarnation of B&W's 800-series standmounter, and shares many of the clever tricks that the rest of the D3 range is blessed with.

B&W says it is radically different to what came before – aside from the high-frequency unit and a few other minor details, which have been retained. The headline news is this two-way reflex-ported design uses the company's respected 25mm Diamond dome tweeter, which crosses over at 4kHz to the new 165mm Continuum-coned FST mid/bass driver (see box out). The Diamond dome tweeter has been brought over from the previous D2 model launched in 2010 (see Q&A). The treble's diaphragm is coated

The D3's Diamond tweeter is very fast, yet never sounds hard or coarse

in diamond particles using chemical vapour deposition, and gives a light but stiff action.

The 800 series cabinets have been continually refined, and the 805 D3 sports many of the latest improvements to the breed. As you would expect, it has Matrix construction but in a new Finite Element Analysis-optimised form with panels of double the thickness of the old. There's an aluminium mid/bass structural 'pod' housing the mid/bass assembly that couples directly into a DMC (dough-moulded compound) insert in the rear face of the baffle. As with all 800-series speakers, the 805 D3 has its tweeter in a special cast tube; gel is used to decouple the housing from the cabinet further. The 18mm-thick MDF cabinet has been inverted so the radiused part is at the front; the baffle also sports B&W's specially finished reflex port.

Round the back are bi-wireable speaker cable connectors, which take either naked wire or standard banana plugs; a set of high-quality wired links are supplied for those that don't want to bi-wire. Many purchasers will want the matching FS-805 D3 stands (not

Diamonds are forever

David Price auditions a luxury standmount from Bowers & Wilkins' auspicious 800 Series Diamond – the 805 D3



HOW IT COMPARES

Dynaudio's £3,750, Contour 20 (HFC 421) is a Danish take on a high-end compact standmount. It's also a two-way that's more conventional looking and less 'high tech' with its flat front. It sports a 28mm Dynaudio Esotar2 soft dome tweeter and 180mm Magnesium Silicate Polymer (MSP) cone mid/bass, bolted to an aluminium front baffle. It has a slightly less dynamic sound, but seems a little more subtle with oodles of detail and a satisfying tonal quality – that's just a touch warmer, smoother and more organic than its rival. Treble is marginally sweeter, while bass is a little lighter but a tad more tuneful.

Robust and bi-wireable speaker terminals



shown); they're expensive at £600 a pair but are undeniably of super quality. Even they have been redesigned to be stiffer, taller and mechanically more effective, with the central column closer to the centre of mass of the speaker. The new 805 is immaculately finished – better than ever – with a choice of Rosenut real wood veneer, gloss black or satin white. The black gloss sample is exquisite, and the lacquer is as smooth as glass.

Sound quality

Anyone that has listened to the smaller floorstanding models in the new 805 range will think this sounds familiar; it's like an 803 D3 or 804 D3 that's shrunk in the wash. It is nowhere near as large in physical scale yet goes about making music in a similar way. This is no bad thing; all the latest 800-series models have a wonderfully even, do-it-all nature and give great results in most normal listening rooms across a wide range of programme material. The 805 D3 is no less civilised, even-handed and user-friendly; indeed in some ways it is superior. This is because being a standmounter confers serious benefits in smaller rooms. Its lighter, less extended bass is not as likely to set off resonant modes, making it more enjoyable at higher volumes. B&W quotes its frequency response as 34Hz to 35kHz, which is still very good for

a compact standmounter. It specifies 88dB sensitivity, which is decent if not outstanding for a speaker of this type. B&W says any amp between 50W and 120W into 8ohm will suffice, but in reality it needs a good 100W per channel of solid-state power to really get going.

My reference system comprises a dCS Rossini CD player and Arcam P49 power amp (HFC 409), both of which the 805 D3 seems to love. This is a pretty transparent speaker

What seals its status as a great all-rounder is its rhythmic alacrity

that demands excellent ancillaries. My first outing is Goldie's *Terminator*, a thumping drum and bass track with vast swathes of low end, and the 805 D3 copes surprisingly well for a mere standmounter. As 4hero's *Cosmic Tree* subsequently proves, it goes down lower than a great many speakers of its size, and while doing so doesn't lose the plot further up the frequency range. I love the way it serves up a clean and powerful rendition of both songs, with a larger scale than expected from a speaker of this size. All the 800 D3 range attributes are there; you can peer

well into the mix thanks to a well-focused midband, which integrates extremely well too, giving an 'all of a piece' feel.

This loudspeaker can unpack densely layered and heavily compressed techno records, but still shines when you switch to a totally different type of music. My 24/96 WAV version of Kate Bush's *Snowflake* is a real revelation. This is a breathtaking wideband modern recording with superlative keyboard and vocal work. It serves up a lovely piano sound, with shimmering harmonics and a really delicate treble that conveys a great sense of space – despite its diminutive dimensions. Kate's vocals are a great test of its mettle too, sounding surprisingly unconstrained and devoid of any hint of 'nasal' colouration, and there's a sense of openness and a general 'light touch' in the way that it handles the natural tonality of a recording.

The Who's *Won't Get Fooled Again* showcases the fine stereo imaging; the B&W snaps everything into focus with zeal and you're never left in any doubt where in the mix an instrument or vocal is supposed to be. It images wide left and right, and hangs back well too, giving a fine sense of depth. In this respect, I am surprised at how the 805 keeps up with its floorstanding 804 big brother; it sounds expansive and unconstrained, despite the much smaller cabinet.

IN SIGHT



- 1 25mm Diamond dome tweeter
- 2 Bi-wireable binding posts
- 3 Bass reflex port
- 4 165mm Continuum mid/bass driver

LINE OF CONTINUUM

B&W's new Continuum cone is a leap forward for the company. Since the late eighties, it has used Kevlar cones for midband driver duties as it is light, stiff and strong – so much so that it is commonly used in bulletproof jackets. The material does, however, have issues with the way it breaks up, meaning that distortion isn't linear and so as easily controllable as engineers might wish. Kevlar-coned drivers can be made to sound very good, but are not ideal – and this is why B&W embarked on a project to replace them. The new Continuum cone is said to be the result of

seven years of intensive development using state-of-the-art computer modelling, and has been through 70 or so iterations to get to this point. The material is essentially a woven composite material designed to break up in a certain, controlled way; importantly when this happens it has been made to return to its normal state as fast as possible, so there's less distortion in the time domain, or 'ringing'. As the listening tests show, sonically it is a clear advance over Kevlar, sounding cleaner and faster with less obvious tonal character.

Feed the 805 D3 a pretty dense, midrange-intensive recording meanwhile, such as Hi-Tension's *Hi-Tension*, and it remains remarkably even-handed, playing the music without histrionics or complaint even at very high levels. This classic funk track can be a little too forward via CD, yet this loudspeaker keeps things perfectly in their place. You'll never get the same kind of sound pressure levels from this as you would an 802 D3 for example, but still it shows little sign of compression even at high levels.

What seals its status as a great all-rounder is its overall rhythmic alacrity. I have heard designs that are even more enticing in the way they carry the music's natural flow, but they're inevitably more flawed in other respects. What this little B&W does is work very effectively across a wide range of competencies. It's fast and lithe, really making music with the jazzy strains of Herbie Hancock's *The Prisoner* shuffling along in a beguilingly fluid way. Being so detailed, it's also great with the music's tiny dynamic accents that make it come alive. It seems that the fine Diamond tweeter helps here; it's very fast yet never hard or coarse, so the flow of the song is helped along without the instruments themselves acquiring any artificial edge. Never

boring, it is well able to distil down the music to its inner magic.

Conclusion

Here's a great all-rounder that goes loud cleanly, is fast and fun, yet delicate and detailed too – and nicely transparent and spacious. In its remit the B&W 805 D3 standmounter succeeds brilliantly and might actually sound better in smaller listening rooms than its floorstanding brothers, which move far more air around the room. A fine value high-end floorstander that should appeal to a wide range of space-limited potential purchasers; go forth and audition ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

- SOUND QUALITY** ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Crisp, clean, open and musical sound; superb build
- VALUE FOR MONEY** ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Needs a powerful amplifier for best results
- BUILD QUALITY** ★★★★★ **WE SAY:** Seriously capable high-end standmount speaker
- EASE OF DRIVE** ★★★★★

OVERALL ★★★★★

Q&A

Andy Kerr
Marketing and communications director, B&W



DP: What type of buyer is the 805 D3 aimed at?

AK: There are many different models to choose from around this price point including more choices from Bowers & Wilkins. Most are large floorstanding products and most can produce a large-scale and well-extended sound. The 805 D3 is somewhat different – it's more focused. It's got scale and power, for sure, but its overall appeal is aimed at a very specific customer, the audiophile whose clear priority is the very best quality in terms of outright accuracy, detail and realism.

What's special about the new Continuum mid/bass driver?

This is a woven composite material that expands on the original thinking behind Kevlar. It similarly uses a precision weave to resist the build up of resonance within the cone, but the material, finish and process are greatly optimised relative to Kevlar. We developed Continuum over the course of seven years, it's entirely our material from our own process and we manufacture it entirely in house. Its chief characteristic and improvement over Kevlar is its 'quietness' – it resists unwanted resonances even more effectively, resulting in more resolution through the midrange.

Is the tweeter carried over from the last model?

Diamond was introduced to 805 in the D2 Series, which we launched in 2010. Previous generations of 805 used aluminium tweeters. The diaphragm itself is unchanged from the D2 to the D3, but every other part of the HF assembly, including the solid-body tweeter housing, the decoupling, the diaphragm mounting plate, the grille and even the motor system has been comprehensively re-engineered. The solid-body tweeter assembly has a new decoupling system – the diaphragm is coupled to the assembly and only the assembly itself is decoupled from the cabinet. So the motor, tube loading and most of the rest of the system are new.