

AUDIO
FILE

Three-way isodynamic/ribbon floorstanding loudspeaker
 Made by: Magnepan Inc., White Bear Lake, MN, USA
 Supplied by: Decent Audio, Stockton-on-Tees
 Telephone: 05602 054669
 Web: www.magnepan.com; www.decentaudio.co.uk
 Price: £18,995



Magnepan Magneplanar 20.7

Back in the 1980s, one of the most memorable imports into the UK was the Magneplanar isodynamic loudspeaker. The Minnesota-based company still has a strong reputation in the US, where, with spiralling high-end product prices, its offerings are now viewed as giant-killers. None more so than the 20.7 here, a giant itself at 79in (just over 2m) tall, which will set you back just under £19k a pair.

The 20.7 is a three-way design, with treble frequencies delivered by a full-height ribbon driver, set close to one edge of each speaker. As the 20.7 is supplied in mirror-image pairs, the user can opt to have the tweeters positioned towards either the outer or inner edges of the panels. Bass and midrange

'The 20.7s turned the room into a giant pair of headphones'

frequencies are carried by two isodynamic panels each.

One of the advantages of isodynamic drivers is that they have almost resistive impedance, which as well as rendering them easier to drive makes crossover design significantly simpler. Our lab tests suggest that the bass-mid crossover is around 460Hz, while crossover to the tweeter appears to be at around 3.5kHz.

Bi/tri-wiring and bi/tri-amping are not possible. But resistive attenuators can be fitted to the midrange and tweeter sections to adjust tonal balance.

EERIE TRANSPARENCY

As with any dipole speaker, the 20.7 radiates the same intensity of sound backwards as forwards, posing different challenges for room placement than unipolar speakers.

After set-up, and auditioned with Constellation Taurus amplifiers [HFN Dec '17], the 20.7s delivered a seamless and exceptional expanse of sound from top to bottom.

It was eerie to hear Abba's 'Eagle' [*The Album*; Polydor] with a degree of transparency you don't get from conventional box speakers. Elements in the mix not always apparent became clear as day.

Similarly, Al Jarreau's cover of 'Summertime' [*Tenderness*; Reprise] gained new life. Suddenly everything was super taut with ultra-fast leading edges to the bass guitar and hi-hat cymbal work. The thick licks of keyboard, brilliantly syncopated with the percussion, really hurried things along and proved a lynchpin of the song.

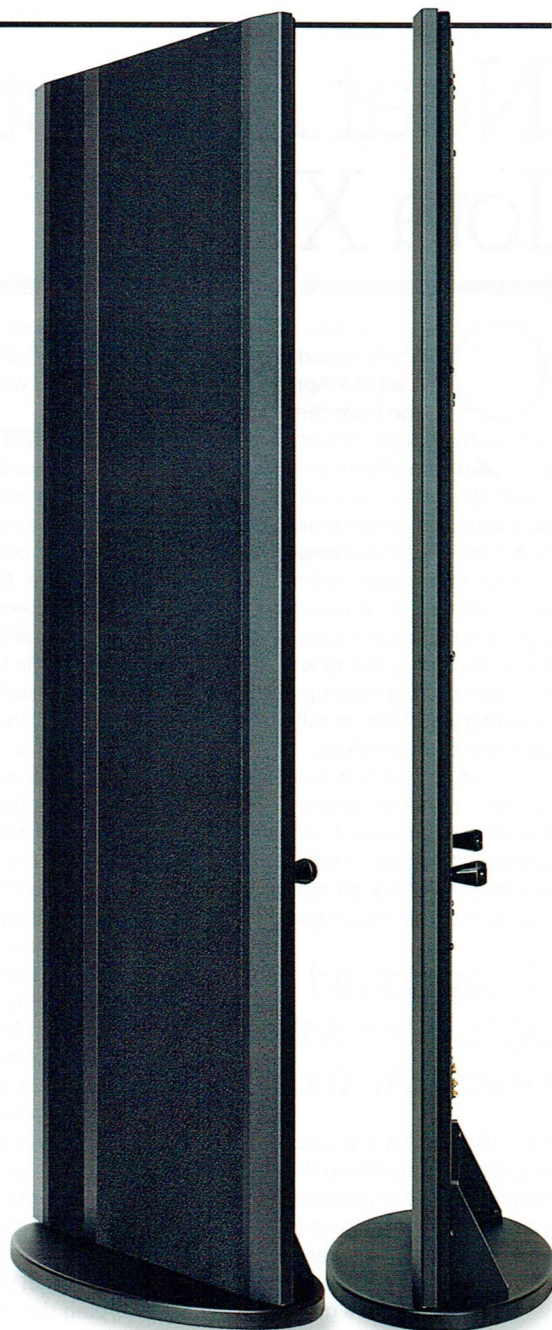
As you'd expect from large panel speakers, their soundstaging was superb. The massed orchestral strings from Ryuichi Sakamoto's 'Theme From *The Last Emperor*' [Virgin] were rendered almost supernaturally large and three-dimensional.

Things were wonderfully immersive – the two panels projecting a vast wall of sound turning the room into a kind of giant pair of headphones.

We were even more impressed by the way it maintained the 'timing' of massed instruments. On the 808 State track 'Ancodia' from *90* [ZTT Japan], we were charmed by the way the cymbals on the right channel were playing off the tambourines on the left, where most speakers just deliver a blur completely obscuring this.

VERDICT

Most music lovers will be beguiled by this exceptional loudspeaker, but while the 20.7 avoids many problems of 'box' designs the big issue is whether you have a listening room large enough to accommodate it! But nothing else will sound quite the same. ☺



ABOVE: Available with a natural oak, dark cherry or black frame (or with silver, black, or gloss red aluminium trims), the panels and ribbon are protected by a 'sock' grille

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Sensitivity (SPL/1m/2.83V – Mean/IEC/Music)	80.4dB/79.7dB/79.2dB
Impedance modulus: minimum & maximum (20Hz–20kHz)	2.5ohm @ 451Hz 4.4ohm @ 30Hz
Impedance phase: minimum & maximum (20Hz–20kHz)	-16° @ 232Hz 16° @ 20kHz
Pair matching/Resp. error (500Hz–20kHz)	±5.5dB/ ±8.7dB/±9.7dB
LF/HF extension (-6dB ref 200Hz/10kHz)	- / >40kHz/>40kHz
THD 100Hz/1kHz/10kHz (for 90dB SPL/1m)	<0.1% / 0.5% / See text
Dimensions (HWD) / Weight (each)	2007x737x52mm / 58kg