



DYNAUDIO CONTOUR 20 BE

# SENSATIONAL UPGRADE

The Dynaudio Contour 20 Black Edition is a black diamond with an exceptional amount to offer.



Market-leading dynamic contrast and control. Rich bass reproduction and silky smooth midrange. Transparent and perfectly focused treble.



You will need a powerful amplifier to control these. Black only.



**HIGHLY  
RECOMMENDED**



OUTSTANDING

Dynaudio Contour 20 BE

High-end

One should be extremely cautious about using grandiose words, and this also applies when testing speakers – but in this case, we have no choice. Dynaudio's Black Edition of the Contour 20 is an exceptionally well-performing and well-designed speaker. It is clearly the best compact speaker in its class. By a wide margin. Here's why.

It's normal to focus on individual elements when upgrading a speaker. This could be a modified unit, an upgraded unit or both. This is often followed by a cosmetic change that makes the new version stand out from the original. Even if only slightly. This could also have been the case with the Contour 20 Black Edition. But Dynaudio has taken a different approach. Yes, we are familiar with the cabinet with the milled aluminium plates at the front from the original. Except that the cabinet is now finished exclusively with several layers of deep black lacquer. And polished to perfection, everything that

matters is new compared to the original.

When we tested the first version of the Contour 20, we were so enthusiastic that we kept the speakers for several months. They were frequently used as a reference for the compact speakers of the time. This was due to an unusually open and balanced sound image that leaned towards neutral without sounding like a studio monitor. They sounded more natural than most other speakers we tested at the time, and when we packed them up and returned them to the factory, it took us a long time to find a pair of compact speakers that were good enough to replace the Contour 20.

But after testing the Black Edition, we are inclined to refuse to return the speakers to Dynaudio. They are welcome to call, fax or send a telegram. Yes, they can even knock on the door, but we are unlikely to answer or open it. These speakers are so good that once you have heard them, you will not want to let them go.

## TOP-SHELF COMPONENTS

Behind the shiny black lacquer are four fundamental changes that all mean a lot to how the speakers sound and how they differ from the original.

In fact, apart from the Contour Legacy, these are the only speakers in the Contour series to feature Dynaudio's very best tweeter. Namely, the Esotar 3, with a 28 mm silk dome and Hexis on the back. This is a kind of internal diffuser that dampens resonances and evens out the frequency response in the treble range. The Esotar 3 is one of the finest tweeters we know of. It has usually been reserved for the flagship models in the Confidence series, so it is a little surprising that another speaker in the Contour series has been given a top-of-the-range tweeter.

## NEODYMIUM

The bass unit is a new variant of the 18-centimetre NeoTec unit - 18W55, with the MSP cone

## FAKTA:

Type: 2-way compact speaker with bass reflex  
Bass: 18 cm MSP cone 18W55 Black Edition  
Tweeter: 28 mm Esotar 3 with Hexis  
Sensitivity: 86 dB  
Impedance: 4 ohms  
Frequency range: 50 Hz - 23 kHz ±3 dB  
Crossover frequency: 3,600 Hz  
Max. load: not specified  
Recommended amplifier power: 100 W  
Dimensions/weight (cm/kg): 44 x 21.5 x 40 / 14.6  
Colors: Black lacquer  
Web: dynaudio.com

we know from Dynaudio's bass and midrange units from way back when. Dynaudio wanted to increase the sensitivity in the bass and wanted to mount a more powerful magnet on the back of the unit to achieve this. However, they found that it would take up too much space and compromise the speaker's bass response more than they wanted. So they had to find another solution. The choice fell on a neodymium magnet because it can be made smaller and deliver the same power as a large ferrite magnet.

According to Dynaudio, other details such as a longer fibreglass voice coil, a slimmer profile and a rounded basket should improve the unit's precision, dynamics and sensitivity.

But then you risk creating another problem.

New bass port and new crossover

With the increased bass response comes an increased risk of noise from the bass port.

Dynaudio wanted to avoid the airflow in the port being audible, so they opted for a new bass reflex tube with a larger diameter and curved openings at both ends. Dynaudio says this has resulted in more precise and powerful bass from the bass port with fewer artefacts as a welcome bonus.

With what are essentially brand new units, the crossover also had to be upgraded. However, Dynaudio chose instead to design a new crossover from scratch. They chose a second-order filter that divides relatively high, at 3,600 Hz. The division between the units overlaps to such an extent that there is no audible drop in the area around the crossover frequency.

The crossover has no phase or impedance correction whatsoever, nor any EQ corrections, but it does feature expensive resistors and

capacitors from Mundorf in Germany. Everything is knitted together with internal cables from Van Den Hul.

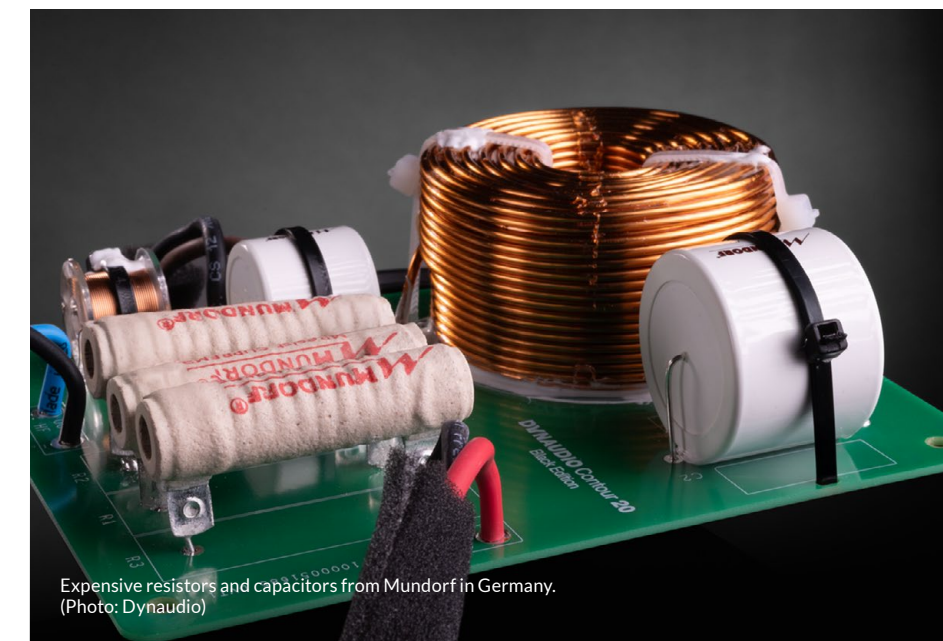
## MODERATE SENSITIVITY

The jet-black speakers, which have a system impedance of 4 ohms, have a moderate sensitivity of 86 dB, and like most Dynaudio speakers we have tested, the Black Edition also performs best when connected to an amplifier that has enough power to tame the wildness that resides within them.

## THE SOUND

It worked perfectly with Hegel's excellent H190V, which has more than enough power to drive the black speakers and give them the authority they deserve. A Yamaha A-S3200 or Musical Fidelity NuVista 800.2 is also an excellent match for the speakers and complements the amplifiers to perfection.

I started with the Hegel amplifier, and the first thing that struck me when I pressed play was how incredibly open and focused they were. This is not an unusual experience with Dynaudio speakers, but these were undoubtedly more transparent, and they had an advan-



Expensive resistors and capacitors from Mundorf in Germany. (Photo: Dynaudio)



tage over the original, which is perhaps the most distinctive feature of the Black Edition. They deliver exceptionally powerful and deep bass for a relatively compact speaker. I wouldn't go so far as to say that you don't need a subwoofer with them – because that simply wouldn't be true – but they definitely deliver deeper bass with more power and dynamics than a pair of regular Contour 20s.

One of the many things I particularly liked about the Black Edition was the way they reproduced piano sounds. A completely unique crystal-clear and deep sound filled the room when the Jan Gunnar Hoff Ensemble played *Polarity* from the album of the same name. There are some short bass runs and drum solos on the album that really came into their own with the black speakers.

It reminded me of the Bowers & Wilkins 805 D4, which delivers a soundstage with a little more warmth and glow, but which in no way manages to deliver the music with the same dynamic contrast, nor does it have the same transparency as the Black Edition.

Since it's not that long ago that I had the Contour Legacy standing in the same place in my listening room, I thought I could recognise the Legacy model's signature, but at the same time I have to admit that I think the Black Edition sounds even more open. Perhaps especially in the midrange, but of course they don't go as deep with the same authority as the Legacy does in the bass.

The Black Edition is just as good at bringing out the atmosphere and sound of Sofienberg Church in Oslo, where the *Polarity* recording was

made. The large church space comes through clearly on the recording, and I never missed the well-articulated bass of the Legacy speaker. Simply because the Black Edition is just as good. I would even go so far as to say that the Black Edition actually has an even more clearly defined midrange. I noticed this on Dire Straits' *Private Investigations*, where Mark Knopfler's guitar sound was more sharply defined than I remember from the Legacy speaker.

The percussion at the end of *Private Investigations* does not, of course, have the same impressive depth as in a pair of Legacy speakers, but there is more depth and dynamic power in the percussion here than in a pair of Audiovector R1 Arreté speakers, for example. Of course, there is nothing here that resembles a large floor-standing speaker, but the sound image from the Black Edition is in many ways a strange combination of skills. The speakers are a kind of Swiss Army knife in the way they handle both finely tuned trio jazz and the danceable rhythms of the funk ensemble Ezra Collective.

The double album *Dance, No One's Watching* is a party from start to finish and a perfect example of how these relatively small speakers manage to engage the listener. The music rocks along with a mix of jazz and Afrobeat. The lyrics aren't exactly profound, but the vocals colour the music and give it depth and warmth. The horn section, which is a key element in most of the songs, is beautifully reproduced with a rich warmth that shows that the speakers are by no means sharp or clinical.

The demo favourite, Kari Bremnes' 2015 version of *Spor*, is recorded with percussion and bass that seem to be mixed quite far forward in the soundstage. Turn up the volume and small speakers will struggle to reproduce the dynamics of the bass with sufficient realism. Some will even give up because they cannot handle the massive energy in the bass. But not the Black Edition. They just play louder when you turn up the volume. There is not the slightest hint of distortion or break-up. The speakers just thunder away with bass you can feel in your midriff. At the same time, the vocals are exemplary neutral and focused.

## CONCLUSION

The black version of the Contour 20 is not only the best compact two-way speaker for the price, it is also among the best compact two-way speakers we have tested. Period. Apart from the natural limitations of such a small speaker, these have no flaws or limitations worth mentioning. They are virtually unrivalled in their price range, and you will have to spend considerably more to get better sound quality from a compact speaker. If the Black Edition sets the standard for what Dynaudio's engineers can achieve when they feel like upgrading a pair of already excellent speakers, we can hardly wait for the sequel. You'll be hard pressed to find better sound for your money – at least not from any of the compact two-way speakers we know of.