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EDITOR'S CHOICE

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Dial 'M' for Magnifico

The new Cremona Auditor M may not look that different on the surface, but underneath...

PRODUCT Sonus Faber Cremona Auditor M

TYPE Standmount loudspeaker

PRICE £2,690 per pair

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 20.2x35.3x36.5cm
• Weight: 18.4kg • Two-way rear ported loudspeaker
• 25mm ring radiator tweeter • 150mm coated paper cone bass unit • Sensitivity: 88dB • Impedance: four ohms

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Sonus Faber is a bit like a swan: refined and graceful on the outside, these Italian products are subtly different from generation to generation. Yet, underneath, there's a lot of paddling going on, because the changes to the sound are huge. And so it is with the new Cremona Auditor M (for Modified) standmount speaker.

If you put the new Cremona Auditor M up against its predecessor, you can see where the differences are almost immediately. The angles behind the grille are sharper, the bass driver is different and the base of the dedicated speaker stand (which is good but £575) is now V-shaped. The back of the speaker is very different, too. But principally, the two share a lot in common.

In fact, all of the Sonus Faber speakers share a lot of the same DNA. Scratch the surface (not recommended – the finish is way too pretty to do that) and you'll find ideas developed in models like the Elipsa, which are in turn derived from the Stradivari Memento; you'll also find concepts hewn from the Guarneri Memento. Naturally, this is only to be

expected – the Sonus Faber design school doesn't re-invent the wheel every time a new speaker is announced, but the closeness of the designs means the products have a distinct *suono della famiglia* (family sound). And it's a sound that's changing.

As it was with the Cremona Auditor, the Auditor M is a two-way standmount box loudspeaker, with a rear-firing port. The 'box' itself is a tapered lute-shaped sandwich and gorgeously finished. The sandwich construction features hand-selected, top-grade layers of maple, designed to keep resonance and standing waves at bay – and to look fantastic, too. The rear port and terminator block is finished in piano-gloss black, the front is in black leatherette and what's in between is

either finished in natural maple or light graphite-coloured lacquered wood. Combine the finish with the elegant styling exercise and you have a speaker that's as far removed from regular standmounts as the Connolly leather interior of a new Jaguar is from the torn-up insides of an eight-year-old Nissan minicab. Little wonder then, that the speakers come supplied in their own cloth protective bag.

The 25mm modified Scanspeak ring radiator tweeter, with its distinctive pointy waveguide, is retained from the last version of the speaker, but the bass driver is all new. It's a 150mm (six-inch) black wood fibre cone, treated (presumably with carbon fibre) to control break-up and features the Symmetric Drive motor system first seen in the Cremona speakers. Symmetric drive means three copper rings in the motor to keep the inductance of the voice coil even throughout its travels. This drive unit is exclusive to Sonus Faber, although



the electrostatics. The disappearing act that the Cremona Auditor did so well in the first iteration isn't only repeated here; it gets to be

“...you have a speaker that's as far removed from regular standmounts, as the interior of a new Jaguar is from the inside of a Nissan.”

it's made by the Tymphany group (which makes Vifa, Scanspeak and Peerless drivers).

Sonus Faber has gone for a smooth approach to crossover manufacture, with a first-order network producing a mild 6dB per octave roll-off, from the crossover point of 2.5kHz. The company still claims an effective frequency response of 50Hz-30kHz, including the tuning ports, but this is still impressive for what is essentially a small-box speaker in free space. The speaker has a natural backward tilt, which should provide a degree of time-alignment in and of itself, but the crossover network is also both time and phase aligned.

The speakers are designed for free space use – a good metre or so from rear and side walls – and, ideally, on the specialist stands supplied. A cat's cradle of loosely tensioned black strings, which act as sort of speaker grille – complete the elegant appearance.

SOUND QUALITY

The sound of older designs being slowly replaced with something altogether more modern and accurate could spell disaster with lesser speakers, and we've all heard modernist revisions of classic designs that end up sounding unnecessarily bright and brash. Fortunately, that's not the case here. What you get instead, is an extended, clean and yet not hard treble sound, allied to a midrange so detailed and so natural, you'll be looking for

even more invisible than before. Slip a piece of plastic on the CD, close your eyes and you cannot locate the speakers in space. While your eyes are shut, try and determine the size of the speakers... you'll think they are twice as large as they really are. I'm sure there will be Sonus Faber dealers leading blindfolded customers into the listening room before long.

Sonus Faber has pulled off a neat trick. The Cremona Auditor M gets surprisingly close to the sound of the Guarneri Memento, in many respects. It manages to throw out a huge soundstage, producing an openness and accuracy that will keep musicologists happy and a bass depth that will have amateur speaker designers scratching their heads. And it's musical, too. It's not a Guarneri, though; where the two differ is that the Homage series model makes everything sound sumptuous.

As such, there will be those who will prefer the Cremona Auditor M over the Guarneri Memento. This is, perhaps, the more accurate of the two speakers, in that it doesn't make Television or The Clash sound smoother than they really were. Don't think this means the Cremona Auditor M somehow pulls back from sounding musical, though. It manages to combine that accuracy and fine detailing with a fine sense of musical entertainment.

Another neat trick; the Cremona Auditor M is less amp and room fussy than before. No, you cannot just plonk them down in the living

room and hooking these babies up to some hoary old amp that was already well past its sell by date in 1976, is a recipe for disaster.

Are there any negatives? Not really, other than the obvious physical limitation of small speakers (don't expect deep-deep bass or use it in big-big rooms) and there is a warming and blurring of upper bass notes that is mild by comparison to most ported speakers, but is noticeable thanks to that disappeary midband.

In the main, though, we like what Sonus Faber is doing to its speakers. What began with the original Guarneri Homage has made the speakers far more approachable to more audiophiles. We thought a lot of the original Cremona Auditor, but this raises the game substantially. **HFC**

Alan Sircom



VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★★	PRO Accurate, honest and musical, the little high-end speaker that is better than ever and will give any similar design a run for its money. Easier to integrate than ever, too.
EASE OF DRIVE ★★★★☆	CON You cannot change the laws of physics and the quality of the mid and treble can highlight the limitations of the bass, especially in big rooms.
BUILD ★★★★★	
VALUE ★★★★☆	

CONCLUSION
If it sounded as good as it looked, the Cremona Auditor M would take the high-end world by storm. Fortunately, it does. Those after top-notch audio performance in small rooms should start raiding piggy banks now.

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OVERALL SCORE ★★★★★