



**Neat's new Motive SX3 standmount offers a big sound from a small enclosure. Jon Myles takes a listen.**

# Small & Neat

**N**eat might not be the most high-profile of British loudspeaker manufacturers – but the company has built up a loyal following since launching its first products back in the late 1980s.

Operating out of County Durham, the company's main men are Bob Sturgeon and Paul Ryder – who both happen to be accomplished musicians as well as loudspeaker designers.

So it's no surprise that Neat's various transducers have won repeated plaudits for their innate musicality and ability to carry a tune.

While its products now range from the truly diminutive Iota to the range-topping (and expensive) multi-driver Ultimatum XL10, one of its mainstays since its debut in 2005 has been the Motive series, comprising three floorstanders, a standmount and a centre channel 'speaker.

These have now been relaunched in SX versions. Changes include

revised cabinet construction and – most importantly – a new tweeter.

The smallest of these is the £1085 Neat Motive SX3 reviewed here, measuring 325mm x 160mm x 200mm (HxWxD) and weighing in at 6kg per loudspeaker.

A traditional two-way bass-reflex design, mid/bass duties are handled by a 134mm main driver while the Motive's titanium tweeter has been replaced by a new unit featuring a 25mm inverted dome whose diaphragm is made from anodised

aluminium.

Neat says this was chosen after lengthy experimentation with various materials and gives a smoother response, as well as providing a seamless transition with the mid/bass.

The rear panel features a single pair of gold-plated 'speaker terminals' so biwiring is not supported. A small reflex port is situated below.

Standard finishes are natural oak, American walnut, black oak and satin white, while other options are available to special order.

**SOUND QUALITY**

Neat loudspeakers have a long-standing reputation for working well with Naim electronics – so I quickly paired the SX3 with the excellent Supernait 2 connected with Tellurium Q's exceptionally open Ultra Silver cables (see review elsewhere this issue).

It was immediately obvious there's a natural synergy at work here. The Neat doesn't go exceptionally low in the bass but it is well-defined and clear which suits the Naim amplifier's relatively low damping factor well.

What you get is an inherently musical, fun and fast presentation that sounds extremely insightful.

Uptempo material such as the electropop of Charli XCX's 'Sucker' has tremendous vibrancy – the synth lines were bright and clean, while the bass track simply charged along. That small enclosure might not produce prodigious low-end but nor does it exhibit any overhang, meaning the music isn't slowed by smeared timing.

The Neats also handle dynamics well. On 'Mars' from Holst's 'Planet Suite' the orchestral crescendos were portrayed with realistic scale and depth, while the complex arrangements never sounded congested or overly compressed. Part of this is down to the excellence of the new tweeter, which while clear and open never sounded unduly bright or harsh.

In contrast, the mid/bass driver could sound a little unruly at times. It doesn't have quite the sophistication of the tweeter with a slight coarsening of the sound on smoother and well-recorded material such as Eleanor McEvoy's 'Yola' where you don't get quite the resolution some rivals can provide.

Having said that the two units do blend together with rare assurance – seemingly devoid of any midband suck-out.



That also translates into good stereo placement. Images projected well into the room and extended realistically beyond the edges of the cabinets.

On Kraftwerk's atmospheric 'Minimum-Maximum' I got a good sense of the ambience of the live venues, the varying tempos of the intricate musical strands meshing well into a believable whole.

When the sound of a car door shutting and engine starting heralds

the opening of 'Autobahn' it actually comes over as startlingly realistic.

The SX3s do, though, need a decent amount of power to go loud. Neat quotes a sensitivity of 86dB, but our tests put it at a low 83dB (see Measured Performance). They were more than happy on the end of the Naim but low-powered SET devotees need not apply.

Partner them carefully and the Neat SX3s are an essentially enjoyable loudspeaker that bring a sense of vibrancy and coherence to anything you play through them.

They may not be the most tonally accurate loudspeakers available at the price but they more than make up for that with their timing, brio and sheer joie-de-vivre. And, after all, that's what we listen to music for in the first place.

**CONCLUSION**

The Neat SX3s are a small but potent pair of loudspeakers. They have a foot-tapping rhythmicity which has the ability to get you bouncing around the room with a big smile on your face. Add in great detail for their size and they come very highly recommended indeed.

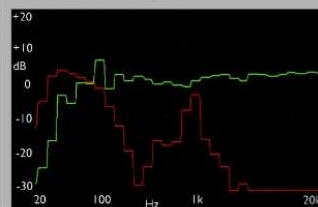
**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

Our frequency response analysis shows the Motive SX3 has an unusual plateau lift in output above 1kHz, of up to +2dB across the whole audio band right up to 20kHz. There is no significant dip at crossover between the drive units at 3kHz to ameliorate the plateau lift.

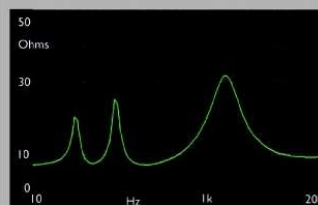
As a result the Motive SX3 will sound a little shiny bright, very detailed, perhaps fast and certainly insightful. It will likely also have well defined stereo

**FREQUENCY RESPONSE**

Green - driver output  
Red - port output



**IMPEDANCE**



images. There is no peaking of any sort and the tweeter looks especially smooth in output so highs will probably be easy on the ear.

Peaking up output from the bass/midrange unit above 1kHz, a breakup region, to achieve this unusual response is uncommon and may coarsen the midband.

Bass output extends down to 40Hz before rolling off sharply, but the small rear port extends this down a little. The port applies broad damping to the bass unit suggesting the Motive will produce well defined bass with little overhang. It will suit near-wall placement.

A 6.6 Ohm (dcr) bass unit is used, quite a high value. As a result overall impedance measures 10.5 Ohms, far above most loudspeakers. As a direct result voltage sensitivity was low at 83dB sound pressure level from one nominal Watt (2.84V) input power, meaning the Neat will need volume turned up and must be used with relatively powerful amplifiers of 60 Watts or more (into 8 Ohms).

The Motive SX3 measures well enough but it is a slightly unusual design that will have a quite particular sound.

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**NEAT SX3 £1085**



**OUTSTANDING - amongst the best**

**VERDICT**

A great small standmounter that majors on musical communication. Needs decent power but rewards with a fast, upbeat and addictive presentation.

**FOR**

- detail
- timing
- refined tweeter

**AGAINST**

- no low bass
- needs power

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