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Guru QM10 Speakers Review by Robert Learner

by Robert Learner, Mar 09 '08



Manufacturer: Guru Loudspeakers
Country of origin: Sweden
Model number: QM10
Price: \$2595 direct from sjofnhifi
Website: <http://www.guruproaudio.com/newguru/>
Website: www.sjofnhifi.com (US distributor)

CONCLUSION FIRST

The Guru QM10s are the first small speaker I've heard that turns me on like a floorstander can. These squat little boxes disappear in the huge, forceful and deep soundfield they throw.

Sonic Circle: INTENSE

Intense speakers and components feature a cool sound and big, concert-like dynamics. Speakers are full-range with multiple drivers and amps are big watt, solid state affairs.

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SONIC CIRCLE SOUND: Intense

Intense with a shot of refined: they play with the power and body to get you up on your feet, but stay smooth at all volumes. The numbers: \$2595/ less than 1 cubic foot of volume imply tradeoffs and there are some, just not the ones you might expect.

I heard a lot of good speakers at the Stereophile HE2007 show last May, but my first 'wow' was the Swedish-made Guru QM10. I walked in to a pulsing, rocking room to find this oddball black cube against the wall, ostensibly the source of the energy. This foundation was underneath a clearly organic presentation. As with the women I've spent any significant time with, I knew from moment one that this was something special. Erik Ring and Lars Erickson of Sjofn Hifi, the US distributor, agreed to send me a pair for review.

Several months later when they were in my room, I fired up 'Ego Tripping...' from the Flaming Lips [Yoshimi Battles the Pink Robots](#) and there came my second 'wow.' The soundstage these things threw was HUGE, extending well past the sides of the speakers. Here was a deep, pulsing wall of sound, a presentation I met over and over from the superbly recorded blues of Hans Theessink's [Slow Train](#), to the monumental rock of The Arcade Fire's [Funeral](#) and onto a favorite live album, Little Feat's [Waiting for Columbus](#). These are among the very few small speakers I've heard that convey the big band scale and sweep Columbus demands. Further, despite sitting on 28" stands which put their drivers at only 33" or so, the Gurus gave the front row perspective of Lowell George and the band towering over me; way, way above the speakers. I was awed, agog, agape, *slain* by the image height presented by these small boxes. Note here that I'm no fan of reviewer hyperbole (*a sonic wonder!!!, an auditory revelation!!!, !!!*), and a sixth grade science experiment gone awry notwithstanding, I don't shock easily. Bottom line, there are small speakers that play big for their size (*bass that belies their diminutive stature!*) -- the QM10s simply play big.



Powerful bass, huge soundstage – the other constant with the Gurus is a liquid presentation that maintains the natural flow of music. These are seductive speakers that don't dissect; good recordings sound great and bad ones remain listenable. I find them subjectively neutral – no part of frequency range is accentuated.

Well recorded vocals, such as Kelly Flint singing '[Marisa](#)' on Dave's True Story's self-titled album come through with beautiful body and size. Very subtly lacking though when compared side-by-side was the crystalline transparency of the [Amphion Ion](#), a Precise speaker which gives the impression of being just slightly more resolving from the mids up than the Guru. The Ion's left/right imaging is also a bit more focused, though is less forgiving of moving out of the sweet spot while maintaining image stability. At roughly half the price and size, the Ion doesn't go nearly as deep, play as powerfully, or throw the enormous stage of the QM10. For a main system, I'd want a sub for the Ion, but could live without one with the Guru.

By memory, I'd also rate the \$2K [ATC SCM11](#) as marginally more transparent than the QM10 with a bit more macrodynamic capability. But like the Ion, it doesn't go nearly as deep as the Guru, nor does approach its image size and depth.

I recall the \$1795 [Zu Tone](#) having slightly more dynamic ease, microdynamic liveliness and apparent speed than the QM10, but as with the Ion, it doesn't match the foundation and scale of the Guru. Additionally and impressively, the two-way Guru matches the coherence of the primarily single driver Tone.

Note the above uses of *slightly*, *subtly*, *bit*, and so forth. At their size and price, you have to nitpick with the Gurus. They may be a very close second in certain performance aspects to competing speakers, but nothing I've heard for this size/money approaches the Gurus for full-blooded satisfaction. They energize the air with music like no other small speaker I've heard and do so with organic liquidity – this is true engineering magic. I'm a big speaker guy who could live with the QM10s.





SYSTEM SYNERGY: Plug 'n play

I was able to drive the Guru's reasonably loud and deep with a 50 watt Nuforce IA-7 integrated (\$995) as well as the 50 watt Peachtree Decco (\$800) tube/ss hybrid. I preferred the Decco slightly - it accentuated the liquidity of the Guru's presentation without compromising bass extension. Note too that the Decco includes a DAC at that price - a review is forthcoming. My beastly 200 watt hybrid Llano Trinity led the Gurus down to subterranean with an enormous soundstage, but beware of overloading the 4" woofer with too much power. A blue LED on the front baffle lights if you're in the neighborhood of doing so - useful because the speakers give little audible hint of being at their limit.

Given that they sounded good with all my amps, I think a number integrated amps in the \$1000/50 - 100 watt range would work well with the QM10s. The refined [Dussun DS99](#) that Josh Ray recently reviewed might be a great match. Add a good, inexpensive CD player or DAC, and I think you've got a killer value system for under 4K which follows my ethos of choosing your speakers first and spending a greater percentage of your budget on them versus the upstream components. I can't think of a \$1500 monitor with \$2500 in front of it that would approach the quality the of such a Guru system.

If you're willing to spend more on amplification, I'd look at hybrid designs. The Guru's are a great combination of finesse and balls, which is the idea behind hybrids.

TECH TALK

Most speakers these days present a narrow front baffle to minimize the surface for the driver's output to bounce off of. As with ridiculous bass from a small box, the Guru goes the opposite direction with width being its largest dimension. At 12"wx10"dx9"h, the QM10 is squat and cube-ish in a world of slender, upright rectangles.

The box is made of MDF and, though only 13 pounds, feels quite rigid. It's currently available in matte or gloss black finishes (gloss shown) all around except for some gray plastic-like material that surrounds the drivers and covers the top. I don't yet know the purpose of this material - perhaps it is just a simple way to finish some seams - but I can tell you that a few people found it to be an excellent surface to park a drink on. Luckily, I cannot report on the Guru's weatherproofing. Running nearly the width of the front baffle along the bottom is a slot-like port. The speaker sits on four rubber feet located at the corners. The back panel has provision for banana plugs only.

Driver complement is a 1" mylar dome tweeter sourced from Visaton in Germany and a 4" plastic covered paper cone proprietary midwoofer made by Tymphany in Denmark, makers of the well known Peerless, Scanspeak, and Vifa drivers. The crossover is specified as '2- 7khz non-schoolbook function'. Got it. What I can tell you is that the drivers work together seamlessly and the imaging has great depth - something I've come to attribute to good crossover design more than anything else.

The QM10 is designed to be placed against the wall, which is a real world blessing. I've heard some great speakers six feet out from the front wall at shows, but near or against it is where most speakers reside in the homes of both ordinary civilians and even hardcore audiophiles. The Gurus small size and the fact that bookshelf placement is not discouraged is a further boon to domestic tranquility.

As per the recommendation of Lars Erickson, I angled the front face of the Gurus toward my listening position just enough so I could see the outer side of each speaker. Also prescribed is some absorptive material directly behind the speakers, favoring the area between them. This usefully helps minimize the reflection off the front wall but is not a deal breaker if such treatment ain't happening in your house. The final bit of advice is to put the tweeter just below your ear level.

Bottom line: these are easy to place speakers that don't require you sit in exactly the right spot to appreciate their strengths.





FINAL THOUGHTS

"With the QM10s, you can fill your living room with orgasmically realistic music, without spending an arm and a leg -- and without any of those huge phallus substitutes ruining your décor" -- this from the Sjöfn Hifi website.

As opposed to those Vikings from Northern Europe, maybe it's just white Jewish guys like me that aren't ready to give up 'those huge phallus substitutes.' Once you've heard what a big speaker can do, the way it can energize the air, create a huge soundstage and play with seemingly unlimited power and sweep, there's no turning back. For this though, I must descend to my underground bunker. Everywhere else, which includes most rooms on earth, discreet is either a desire or partner-requirement. Here, smaller speakers reign like the Vikings once did (for better or worse it's us Americans now Lars, get used it).

This is the first small speaker I've heard anywhere near its price that doesn't leave me wishing for a larger substitute. Or a sub, or anything else for that matter. Finally, my [monitor quest](#) is complete.

StudioSound:dk

High End Audio Udstyr - NuForce, Modwright, SP Tech, Berning, Belles

ScanSpeak Loudspeakers

Both Revelator & Classic Series Peerless v-line, Vifa, Tymphany

Comments

It's difficult to find anything in Bob's review with which to disagree -- and not just because it's highly laudatory.

There are, indeed, a few monitors out there that might do one or two things slightly better than the GURUs -- but none that I've encountered which come close to the QM10s in terms of overall accuracy. And that includes tonal/timbral accuracy, dynamic accuracy, and smoothness of frequency response. And absolutely no one does bass, imaging, or rhythm/timing like GURU designer Ingvar Öhman. No one.

Astutely, Bob also points out that this a speaker for real people and real world listening environments. If you have the space and \$\$\$ for a huge floor-standing system, great -- but the QM10 will get you closer to the performance of that system than anything else I've ever heard. (Rodney Dangerfield often quipped, "I've heard a lot of f***in' jokes" -- and I've heard a lot of f***in' speakers!) And a middle-class person can actually afford the GURUs.

If I have a quibble with Bob's review -- and I'm not sure that I do -- it would be that I prefer the GURUs driven by all solid-state electronics. To my ear, the full flower of the speaker's punch 'n' slam reveals itself only with silicon. Check out some Rammstein or Patti Smith on the GURUs with any decent transistor setup: to say that it's an intense experience is something of an understatement.

In conclusion, I think that even a cursory listen to the GURUs will demonstrate why, when I first heard them in Ingvar's demo room near Stockholm, I concluded that this product just had to emerge from the Swedish underground and make its way to the U.S. And it's now available in a number of other countries, as well.

Thanks kindly, Bob, for your thoughtful, mellifluous review!

Posted by: [Lars Erickson](#) at March 13, 2008 3:44 PM

Lars,

I think my hybrid Llanos will go as deep or deeper than any hunk of pure bipolars or FETs you've ever heard.

If you're into the sound of tubes, I think you can find stuff out there that'll punch 'n' slam you like Tyson. May be more expensive though than SS equivalent from a bass standpoint.

Posted by: [Robert Learner](#) at March 14, 2008 2:33 PM

As I have no experience with the Llano, I can't comment. I've heard an EAR/Yoshino stack perform with no lack of testosterone (albeit on speakers other than the GURUs), and I understand from our European operatives that there's a company called MalValve in Germany that makes some stout-testicled glowing-phallus amps. But the tubes I've tried with the GURUs seemed to lend anywhere from a mere scintilla of romance (Copland and Conrad-Johnson, whose products I love) to turning the entire frequency range (especially the bass) into a warm bath with your socks on (home-grown Chinese gear and old Dyna stuff).

Bob, there's only one thing to do...I have a 70s-vintage Realistic integrated that demonstrates how the GURUs sound great great even with crappy electronics. You'll just have to swap me the Llanos for a year or two!

In the meantime, I'm pretty gaga over the GURUs with the Holographic Audio preamp (a Swedish rig which we also import) and just about any decent solid-state power plant -- and the Hegel gear from Norway (which we don't sell). A GURU owner who uses the Danish Thule electronics reports Viagra-

like effects - but I cannot confirm...

Posted by: [Lars Erickson](#) at March 14, 2008 8:38 PM

The Gurus are definitely interesting creatures. For kicks, I put in an EL34 8 watt tube amp in front of the Gurus and, guess what? It sounds great! In this situation, the Gurus are running in a computer near-field, studio monitor setup, so big watts aren't needed. The output isn't titanic but the bass is surprisingly fantastic, better than the 50 watt Decco. With the 8 watt volume cranked, my windows flex like trampolines.

Posted by: [Josh Ray](#) at March 17, 2008 8:27 AM

I'm a fan of the Copland stuff and tubes in general, but I think I'll pass somehow on the Llano/Realistic integrated swap. Gonna have to hunt around though for a perfect mate that fits my size/price profile.

8 watts/small speakers/windows flexing w/high quality bass -- yeah, pretty interesting creatures.

Posted by: [Robert Learner](#) at March 17, 2008 9:36 AM

More colour options for the QM10's? Please.

Posted by: [Max](#) at March 26, 2008 1:18 PM

I think it's black only for the moment.

Posted by: [robert](#) at March 28, 2008 10:45 AM



Hi everyone!

The floorstanding QM60 is available in veneer finish from May 1st 2008. It's possible to pre-order from Sjöfn Hifi now. QM10 is in black matte and glossy right now. Custom painting is possible. Just drop us or Sjöfn an e-mail and we'll see what we can do.


Regards,

Erik och Guru Loudspeakers

Posted by: [Erik Ring](#) at March 29, 2008 6:00 AM

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