

# Qln Prestige One stand-mount loudspeaker

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**Q**ln is one of those slow-burn companies that make the audio world something wonderful. Based in Gothenburg in Sweden, the company has a small but perfectly formed range of loudspeakers. Perhaps the best-known model in the range is the evergreen Qln One, which first saw the light of day at a CES back in 1981 and was re-released by the brand 40 years later. However, the Prestige One design takes the design cues and development from that original loudspeaker and runs with it.

In fact, Qln has managed to develop three, very different models from that original loudspeaker; this Prestige model, the paper-coned entry-level Qln One and the upcoming *ne plus ultra* Signature.

## Slanted and truncated

The Prestige One is a compact stand-mount monitor-style speaker not too dissimilar in aspect and configuration to the original Wilson Audio WATT, although comparisons fade on even the most surface comparison (the original WATT has an inverted metal dome tweeter and weighed almost twice as much as the Prestige One). The slanted baffle and truncated pyramid of the Qln Prestige One harks back to the company's original design from the early 1980s, and like that early model, this cabinet shape helps time-align woofer and tweeter, keeps most extraneous baffle effects at bay and reduces internal standing waves, thanks to its non-parallel layout. The thanks for the absence of cabinet effects is not solely the result of a good cabinet design; the cabinet material itself contributes substantially. Unlike most 'boxes' at this level, the Qln Prestige One uses a simplified version of its 22mm Qboard design. This is made up of a viscoelastic layer sandwiched between two layers of high-density fibreboard. This scheme was first promoted by Qln's Mats Andersen back in 1995 and, while constrained layer damping has slowly moved into some other cabinet designs, few have as much experience with the technology as Qln, and as a consequence few loudspeaker cabinets are as free from distortion as the Prestige One.

There is also a substantial rear port on the Qln Prestige One, but the loudspeaker has minimal port 'chuffing' and





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» the internal faces of the 22mm Qboard cabinet are damped with organic wool. The concern with any large rear port is not simply 'chuff-chuff' sounds that sing along with bass notes; it's that so many ports act like musical cornflour; they are a thickening agent to bolster up the sound of a smaller loudspeaker by exaggerating the upper bass. To Qln's infinite credit, this has never been a function of its designs, and the Prestige One doesn't suffer the tell-tale bass bloom; it uses the natural roll-off of cabinet and loudspeaker driver to deliver a good, honest bass instead of an artificially boosted one.

Speaking of drive units, the Prestige One sports a Scan Speak made, Qln selected 177mm Kevlar cone mid/bass design with a copper ring in the magnet system, and a 25mm soft, textile-dome tweeter also has a copper ring in its 'Air Circ' magnet system, has a large roll surround and a substantial rear chamber. The two drivers have been chosen not just because they integrate together well, but because both do what Qln considers to be 'best of breed' attributes for their respective tasks; the woofer is optimised to deliver low intermodulation distortion and max out midrange dynamics, while the tweeter is free from reflections and resonances that are magnified in a tweeter.

Integration between the two drivers is key and the crossover is hardwired with baked air coils (my favourite kind, especially those dusted in cinnamon before baking) and polypropylene capacitors. Internal attention to detail continues in the guise of Qln making its own solid-core internal wiring; none of which is externally visible, but comes to rest in a pair of high-grade WBT plugs. There are also a matching pair of stands that come pre-assembled and are about as near mandatory as it gets!

### Manual mode

The manual for the Qln Prestige One is a fine one. It relies more on 'tell' than 'show' (there aren't many diagrams), but is informative and clearly written. It gives good instructions on placement, stand-height and run-in that are eminently sensible and free from 'first, peel your elf' style magic fluff.

This also proved to be an extremely forgiving and pliant loudspeaker in terms of partnering electronics. Yes, of course the better the equipment, the better the performance, and it's probably not the kind of loudspeaker that responds well to low-power single-ended triode designs (that Kevlar driver needs some solid-state damping factor if it is to play beyond whisper quiet levels) but is otherwise extremely electronics friendly.





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» The Qln Prestige Ones I received had already seen some miles on the clock, so I can't speak to their manual-recommended 50 hours to sounding good and 200–300 hours to sounding great. They sounded great right out of the box. And 'great' in this context translates to 'being extremely impressed by the precision and depth to the bass.' The important word in that sentence was 'precision'; the Prestige One has a tidy, ordered and precise bass. There is good depth (especially in a small room) that belies the claimed -3dB point at 42Hz, and I suspect this is due to a clean and fundamentally honest bass performance without any blooms, booms or thickening along the way. As something of a tribute to the sad passing of Maxi Jazz, I felt compelled to play 'Insomnia' by Faithless [*Reverence*, Cheeky] with that drop and Sister Bliss' epic riff followed by some extremely deep dance beats. These bass notes can thunder and wobble where they should simply 'boom', and the Prestige One does 'boom' very well indeed. It also gets close to nailing the Trentemøller test ['Chameleon', *The Last Resort*, Poker Flat], which has successive deep, almost square-wave notes that choke up any port. The Qln Prestige One falls into that rare group of ported speakers where the degree of congestion is extremely low. All signs of an extremely well-engineered loudspeaker.

The fun doesn't stop with the bass notes, and is not limited to electronica. As you move up the frequency range, the same precision and control apply and it's here I have to be mindful not to damn the product with faint praise. Precision and control could be read as euphemisms for an undynamic or boring sound and it's absolutely neither of those things. In fact, if anything, the Prestige One is one of the most dynamic-sounding stand-mounts in its class. It's an exciting performer too. However, that precision and control means it's only exciting when the music is exciting, and it's as dynamic as the music you play through the speaker. This is a good thing, as loudspeakers are often either easily impressed by music (and therefore prone to over-exuberance) or dour and over-damped. The Qln Prestige One is one of the few that sits squarely in the middle; letting the music flow without constraint or adding its own fingerprint. This is the easiest part to hear in the Qln's performance because so many recordings occupy this midrange; Bob Dylan's voice, for example, springs out against the rest of the band on 'Hurricane' [*Desire*, CBS]. It's always distinct and as articulate as Dylan's nasal vocal gets, but here it occupies the song, making the intensity of the lyrics all the more poignant.

Dylan's voice does highlight perhaps the only mild shortcoming of the Prestige One; the upper end of his adenoidal voice can get a bit too nasal at times. Not 'strident' or even 'hot'... but maybe 'warmer'. However, that aside, what applies at the lows and mids, also applies to the treble, which is effortless and never peaky, whatever the music played. And the whole package creates an extremely good soundstage too. But, I think what really shines with the Prestige Ones is that 'whole package' part; a reviewer's job is to tease apart the performance of a product, and that is something the Qln Prestige One singularly fails to allow; you are listening to coherent, cogent music at all times, and while a reviewer needs to be drawn into discussions about aspects of the loudspeaker's performance, the whole really is so much more than the sum of the parts.

### Top performer

Given Qln's heritage, I was expecting something good, and I wasn't disappointed. However, I wasn't expecting something *this* good. The top-end two-way stand-mount world is a heavily contended one, with players big and small wanting to make everything from an upscale book-shelf model to a full-blown studio monitor. As such, it's difficult for any loudspeaker to carve its own niche. But, I don't think Qln has that problem; the sound is so intrinsically 'right' and 'enjoyable' and that holds whatever music you play through the Prestige One. Put simply, if you like music, you'll love the Qln Prestige One! +

### Technical specifications

**Type** two-way full-range rear-ported stand-mount loudspeaker

**Drivers** 25mm wide surround, AirCirc magnet, soft dome tweeter; 177mm Kevlar cone woofer

**Sensitivity** 87 dB SPL 1 Watt 1m, 100–10kHz

**Low frequency performance** -3dB at 42Hz

**Impedance** 8 ohms

**Amplifier requirements** 25–250 Watt RMS

**Standard finishes** Walnut Piano, Walnut Matte, White matte

**Dimensions (HxWxD)** 390 × 265 × 372mm

**Weight** 14 kg each

**Price** £6,800, piano lacquer £7,350, stands £880

**Manufacturer** Qln  [www.qln.se](http://www.qln.se)

**UK distributor** Fi Audio

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