ULTRADECK
MoFi puts its premium vinyl in a spin

Boulder 508
‘Full metal’ phono pre

Digital Down Under
Antipodes Audio EX music server

Sonus faber
Electa Amator III
Celebrating sound in style

INVESTIGATION
Buying Vintage
Our guide to the hottest gear from yesteryear!

Rogers LS3/5a
Miniature monitor reprised
Krell K-300i
The cool ‘Class A’ heavyweight

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• OPINION 12 pages of letters & comment • VINTAGE REVIEW Sony’s Discman portable CD player
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ABOVE: The Rogers’ LS3/5a Classic sports a 19mm mylar-dome tweeter above a 110mm doped-bextreme mid/bass driver. See p44.

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Rogers LS3/5a Classic

Like buses, you wait and wait for genuine LS3/5as and then two come along – now Rogers is back with a re-engineered version of the milestone, to our reviewer’s delight

Review: Ken Kessler Lab: Keith Howard

Throughout my hi-fi career, I have manifested three fixations: valves, Decca cartridges and BBC LS3/5as, all of which faced sell-by dates 40 years ago. My pessimism was unfounded. Valves have never been stronger, and London maintained the Deccas. But LS3/5as? Aside from occasional facsimiles using non-KEF drivers, the LS3/5a was history. Yet now we have two new proper LS3/5as, a rebirth I never anticipated.

Following Falcon’s reborn LS3/5a [HFN Jan ’19], its authenticity assured thanks to the input of Malcolm Jones, designer of the original drivers for KEF, Rogers has returned with its own reverse-engineered offering. Here legitimacy is guaranteed because designer Andy Whittle worked for Rogers back in the day and knows as much about LS3/5as as anyone alive.

Differences with the Falcons abound, not so much sonically as in the details. Most obvious is that the Rogers LS3/5a Classic costs more than Falcon’s version – offered between £2350-£2500 depending on finishes – while Rogers charges £2750 for walnut and £2800 for rosewood. Rogers’ parts are globally-sourced, but assembled and voiced in the UK while the Falcons are British. Cabinet materials differ slightly, as do the crossovers. There will inevitably be other comparisons, but I am not here to foment rivalry. I’ll leave obsessing over the picayune to online fetishists.

GRILLE TALK

Instead, note that both have BBC licenses, are ‘15ohm’, non-bi-wire types like the originals, and – crucially – sound exactly like LS3/5as should. The Falcon version seems to go a tad louder [though is less sensitive – see KH’s Lab Report, p47] while the bass in Rogers’ LS3/5a is a hint drier. The Falcon LS3/5a wears deluxe multi-way binding posts, while Rogers uses banana plug sockets. But the two are so close as to recall the Great LS3/5a Shoot-Out of 2001 [HFN Jun ’01], so the factors in choosing one over the other will be availability, price or the importance of the badge.

Both brands faced challenges when it came to reverse-engineering drivers and crossovers, and dealing with obsolete components. Andy Whittle recounted the trials of locating the Tygan grille material, while sourcing the enclosures proved far costlier than in an era when the UK was peppered with cabinet makers.

MAKING TRACKS

The 2019 cabinet is a critically-damped enclosure made with 12mm Russian birch ply with hardwood beech fillets, finished with balanced veneers, including walnut and rosewood, with special finishes to order. Rogers has opted for silver-plated, single-wire 4mm multi-contact sockets from Switzerland, rather than multi-way binding posts. The sockets were chosen for electrical integrity and the flush fit and, as Andy said, ‘They sound much better than anything else’.

Then came the drivers, which – though re-engineered to recreate exact copies of the KEF drivers – are not identified as such. KEF, after all, is the custodian of the B110 and T27 nomenclature.

‘This just may be the finest voice recording ever’

Grille off, it’s like looking into the past: there’s a Mylar dome tweeter with Kraft Nomex voice coil former, above the doped Bextrene cone bass unit.

‘The cabinet is full BBC spec and the front baffle is stained ply,’ Andy Whittle explained further. ‘It’s the same as the original 15ohm model, but with none of that painted-on veneer that screws up the sound.’ The crossover is new – a dual-layer PCB with 2oz copper, so there’s a total of 4oz copper tracks. All the inductors are original specification M6 laminations and are accompanied by high-quality film capacitors and resistors.

Desktop/bookshelf two-way loudspeaker
Made by: Rogers International UK Ltd, Virginia Waters, Surrey
Supplied by: Rogers International UK Ltd
Telephone: 01344 844204
Web: www.rogers-hifi.uk
Price: £2750-£2799

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By all accounts the original 15ohm LS3/5a did not have any inserts to screw the baffle into the cabinet. Wood screws went straight into the hardwood batten, so Rogers has done the same here, claiming that it sounds much better than a machine-screw-into-metal-insert fixing. Similarly, the final doping of the treble dome was only arrived at after listening to dozens of tweeter variations, and the factory in China uses new tooling for both the Bextrene woofer and tweeter. The final tweeter assembly is done in the UK, as is the pair matching of all drivers and QC testing.

**BACK TO THE… PAST**

After having listened to three types of LS3/5as before turning to the Classics, I then did something ridiculous. Thanks to the urging of fellow LS3/5a fan Jim Creed, I threw caution to the wind and drove them with the D’Agostino Momentum Stereo amplifier [HFN Aug ‘12], despite the potential to turn the speakers into rubble. Resisting any temptation to play air guitar with peak Whitesnake, I was staggered to find it a match made in hi-fi-psycho-heaven.

It’s nuts to use any speaker with an amp costing more than ten times its price, but I wanted to extract the maximum – I did the same for the Falcon LS3/5as, but with Audio Research REF 75SE amplification. I tried my best to treat these not just as the second rebirth of my all-time fave mini-monitor, but also as a modern speaker competing in the £2500–£3000 sector. I swiftly realised that it doesn’t work because there are so many killer speakers under £3k that will massacre the LS3/5a for both bass and maximum level. Here we must resign ourselves to the one reason for considering the Classics and that’s because you simply crave a brand-spanking-new pair of LS3/5as. Frankly, nothing else will do. It’s the same case for other unique products. So if you fancy a specific Barolo, you don’t substitute an Amarone. Following the mighty Wilson Sasha/DAW [HFN Mar ‘19], I expected to forgo deep bass and any predilection for head-banging, in exchange for the familiarity of the LS3/5a’s real-as-it-gets midband and lifelike-vocals. Nor was I disappointed, post-Wilson, any more than I would if going from the finest steak to the finest burger.

What my high-end system did was enable me to hear the Rogers unsullied. Whitesnake proved too much, as the recording is coarse, so I turned to Classic Records’ definitive 45rpm edition of Dusty Springfield’s ‘The Look Of Love’ [Casino Royale; CR-5005-12], as well as Coigems’ reel-to-reel version [CG031001]. This just may be the finest recording ever, notable for exposing every breath that Dusty inhales and exhales.

**EASY VIRTUES**

If any track can assert unequivocally the primary raison d’être of this speaker, it’s this one. It’s no secret that the LS3/5a has severe limitations, but in that respect, so have the Quad ESL-57, the Stax ESL-F81, the aforesaid Deccas and other astounding products that transcend any inherent weaknesses through brilliance in other areas. For the LS3/5a, there are two undeniable virtues that the Classic retains to compensate for the poor bass extension and power handling: voice reproduction and soundstage recreation.

Immediately apparent was that the new LS3/5a delivers vocals with all of the…
mastery that makes it the speaker’s greatest strength. Ms Springfield enjoyed an untrammeled presence in the middle of a three-dimensional listening space, every nuance so easily detected and appreciated that words like ‘detail’ and ‘transparency’ and ‘neutrality’ seem inadequate for conveying the realism.

ROCK OF AGES
This applied equally to intense male vocals, the opposite of Dusty’s smoky, husky delivery. The vastly underrated early ’70s British outfit Silverhead was fronted by a Steve Marriott-like belter named Michael Des Barres (nearly a half-century later, he’s playing a villain in the rebooted TV series Mcgyver), and the backing is glam-era hard rock. This presented further contrasts with the sexy, silky ‘Look Of Love’, with the sort of orchestral gloss found in 1950s Capitol LPs, and which exploited the LS3/5a’s way with subtlety and textures.

Instead, Silverhead’s 16 And Savaged [Cherry Red PURPLE 002] was all about attack, speed and – despite the constraint – bass presence. By that I don’t mean sheer quantity, either in extension or bulk, so much as its quality. Silverhead was blessed with Nigel Harrison, who would go on to be the bassist in Blondie, and his virtuoso work comes through loud-and-clear, lacking only the scale imparted by larger systems.

This showed the true worth of the Rogers LS3/5a Classic. One could go to a mini-monitor from a full-on colossus such as the Wilson Sasha/DAW, with bass galore, without feeling cheated. The best analogy I can think of is owning a supercar and then finding a small roadster in one’s garage. Ferrari 599-to-Caterham 7 might seem a leap too far, but a true petrel-head would love and appreciate both.

We mustn’t forget that LS3/5as are professional tools, used for analysis as well as monitoring. So revealing are they that the Classics were perfect for assessing vinyl vs. tape with the Dusty Springfield tracks, as well as CD vs. LP with the Silverhead album [Purple Records TPSA7511]. The differences were exposed with truly forensic authority. Then I remembered something else: these speakers also rock. 🎵

### HI-FI NEWS VERDICT
Let’s not mince words: the best LS3/5as I have ever heard are the 50 pairs of sold-out Falcon limited editions. Next, though, are the two current choices, the sonic differences defined above. Hand on heart, I’d find it tough choosing between them, but dock Rogers a point because price must be factored into the rating. Suffice it to say, whether you prefer to fly with the Falcons or being Roger’d, the LS3/5a is back. Sound Quality: 87%

### F81, the aforesaid Deccas and other turfware and then finding a...