

KEF LS50 Meta



WHAT HI-FI?
★★★★★



KEF launched the original LS50 standmounters as an anniversary celebration back in 2012, and they proved a huge success – so much so that they have continued in production pretty much untouched since then.

Eight years is a long run by any standards, but it was made possible by a combination of sound quality, build and aesthetics that remains highly appealing today. That hasn't stopped KEF's engineers from having a fresh look though, and the result is the LS50 Metas.

The LS50 Metas don't look any different from the LS50s, and in many ways they aren't. The company considered revising that beautifully made enclosure but concluded that little could be improved. The only obvious changes are to the back panel, which has been tidied up.

The cabinet shape and size still works well, and the curved front panel – made of Dough Moulding Compound, a polyester resin combined with glass fibre and calcium carbonate – continues to make for an impressively rigid and well controlled foundation for the Uni-Q drive-unit array.

The rest of the box is made from MDF, which is heavily braced and carefully damped to minimise any resonances. The LS50 Metas are available in four finishes – Mineral White, Carbon Black, Titanium Grey, or a Royal Blue Special Edition.

Different on the inside

The one area ripe for improvement was the LS50's Uni-Q driver array, where the tweeter sits in the throat of the mid/bass unit. This has been reworked, taking in all the refinements that KEF has developed over the past eight years and adding something called Metamaterial Absorption Technology (MAT) – a new way of absorbing sound that comes off the back of the 25mm aluminium-tweeter dome, via a series of small tubes. The result should be cleaner, less distorted highs.

These aren't particularly sensitive speakers, at a rated 85dB/W/m, and the minimum impedance is just 3.5 ohms, so

it makes sense to partner them with an amplifier that has a bit of grunt, such as Cambridge's CXA81 or Naim's SuperNait 3.

At just 30cm tall, these KEFs are pretty compact – but don't be tempted to stuff them in a bookshelf or right up against a wall. They won't sulk if you do, but they will sound a lot better if placed around 50cm into a room, away from the walls.

A clear step forward

It doesn't take long to realise that the LS50s have improved significantly. While the basic sonic character is instantly familiar, the new ones have gained a level of clarity and finesse the originals only hinted at.

Listening to Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony*, we're soon marvelling at the LS50 Meta's delicacy and precision. They sound so much more transparent than before and manage to render low-level details, such as instrumental textures, much more convincingly.

It's a surprisingly full-bodied presentation with a good degree of authority for such compact speakers. Still, there's only so deep a 13cm magnesium/aluminium mid/bass unit in a smallish, 30cm-tall cabinet can go. Stretch to the likes of the Award-winning and larger three-way KEF R3s (£1300) and you'll get notably more in the way of low-frequency reach and punch. But you don't get the LS50 Meta's insight, delicacy or top-end refinement.

It looks like the Metamaterial technology really works. These new

KEFs sound so much cleaner and more sophisticated than before, particularly at higher frequencies. These Metas make the R3s sound congested and ham-fisted in comparison, and that's a real shock.

Large-scale dynamics are handled well and there's a good amount of muscle for a speaker of this size. There's little to complain about when it comes to tonality either. The KEFs sound smooth and balanced, while still having enough in the way of high-frequency bite.

KEF's Uni-Q designs tend to image well by their very nature, and these speakers are no different. The LS50 Metas generate an expansive and tightly focused soundstage where the instruments are layered convincingly. We're also impressed by the image's stability when the music gets demanding.

Midrange magic

We switch to Neneh Cherry's *Blank Project* and these KEFs continue to shine. Their detailed and clear midrange performance makes the most of Cherry's passionate vocals, delivering dynamic nuances and subtle shifts in timing superbly. There's a good degree of punch to the bass and the KEFs render rhythms in a surefooted manner.

We've always loved the LS50s and this newest version takes their performance to a notably higher level. All the work KEF's engineers have put into the Uni-Q array has propelled the LS50 Metas to the head of the class at this level. Buy them with confidence.



WHAT HI-FI?

SOUND



COMPATIBILITY



BUILD



FOR

- Exceptional sonic transparency
- Subtle and precise presentation
- Innovative technology

AGAINST

- Nothing at this price

VERDICT

KEF has taken an excellent speaker and made it even better. The LS50 Metas are now the class leaders

RATING ★★★★★