

## EQUIPMENT REVIEW

# Magico S1 Mk II loudspeaker

By Alan Sircom

**M**agico is perhaps best known for its huge, multi-driver floorstanding loudspeakers that cost as much as a really good car. The S1 Mk II is the first rung on the Magico ladder, as it's a two-way floorstanding loudspeaker that costs as much as a really good watch. Given that it seems highly unlikely that Magico will make a speaker that costs as much as a really good pizza, the S1 Mk II represents the starting point into Magico's ethos, and that makes it important.

As the name suggests, this isn't the first Magico S1 loudspeaker. In fact, it isn't even the first Magico S1 loudspeaker we've reviewed, having looked at the original version back in Issue 103. And at first glance, there might not seem to be that many changes between the original and latest model. Appearances can be deceptive, however, as the only things that are retained from the previous model are the main enclosure and the speaker terminals. Everything else – from the top plate to the outriggers for the speaker spikes – is redesigned.

One of the big changes in the intervening years is the commercial availability of graphene. This technologically innovative carbon-based material, in atom-thick layers, has 200x the tensile strength of steel with the kind of absence of density that makes a sheet of paper seem like it's made out of black holes. Graphene simply didn't exist prior to the first years of the 21st Century and it's taken almost a decade to find its way out of the lab.

Magico is one of the first brands out of the starting gate to use graphene commercially, originally in its limited run, top-end M-Pro model. The wider availability of graphene recently has made it possible for the material to trickle down to the S1 Mk II, which features a graphene-coated 178mm M390G Nano-Tec mid-woofer. The results of using graphene are materially obvious, as at a stroke the cone is three times stiffer and at the same time 20% lighter than before. It also has what Magico describes as a new "underhung neodymium base motor system" and a long-throw voice coil, both of which contribute to better power handling. The tweeter, too, is a trickle-down design from the M-Pro, and the 25mm MBD7 dome tweeter is unique to the brand in that it combines a thin layer of beryllium with an even thinner layer of diamond.

The inclusion of new drive units would necessitate a reworked crossover, but in this case it's the company's 'elliptical' design, bristling with expensive Mundorf components.

That new top plate is significant, too. It's machined from solid, using Magico's five-way CNC milling machine. That much work on a solid billet of aluminium takes an hour and a half to make, and longer still to finish ►



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▶ to a suitably high degree in Magico's M-Coat colour system, and not much less to finish it in the standard M-Cast. This top plate not only further mass loads the S1 Mk II, but has useful diffraction benefits above a flat top-plate. Adding a plinth instead of four spider-leg outriggers not only helps keep the centre of gravity low, but makes the loudspeaker look more elegant in installation.

Partnering the S1 Mk II is relatively easy, knowing that few people are going to use a loudspeaker costing just shy of £21,000 with an old receiver from the 1970s, or a part-broken valve amp from the 1950s. With a sensitivity of 86dB and a four ohm impedance, the loudspeaker needs some relatively meaty amplification behind it, but this is as much about quality as it is quantity. It was perfectly happy being driven by the Hegel H80, which is a 75W amp that costs less than 1/10th the price of the loudspeakers, so the concept of the S1 Mk II requiring vast amounts of expensive power is not mandatory. The S1 Mk II is one of those loudspeakers that manages to show just what better power can do without making it the presentation so demanding that it only works with esoterica.

My pair arrived relatively well run in, so precisely how much shakedown time is needed to get them to the best performance is unclear, but they also performed better after a couple of days of bedding in, so expect them to improve from their fresh out of the box status. The loudspeakers are 'pragmatic' in installation, as their sealed box means they can work surprisingly close to rear and side walls, but that they also respond well to careful installation.

We listen to music from the midrange out, and any loudspeaker that gets the 200Hz-2kHz part as 'right' as the S1 Mk II deserves immediate and high praise. Put on a female voice – 'Take The Night Off' by Laura Malling from her *Once I Was an Eagle* album [Virgin] – and her vocal articulation and tonality is clear, and instantly differentiated from her guitar playing. What's more, through the S1 Mk II you stop hearing that guitar as just 'a guitar' – it's a dreadnought, specifically a Martin D28. OK, so the D28 is one of the most recognisable acoustic guitar sounds you can hear on record, but it becomes all the more instantly recognisable here. If a transducer is supposed to add or subtract as little as possible, then the Magico is doing an extremely fine job, with only the slightest hint of character in the upper mid, which gives the speaker a ▶

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▶ sense of forwardness and directness that's very attractive. It gives the speaker an 'attentiveness' to music that cuts both ways; you cannot simply play music as background sounds, and the loudspeaker has incredible attention to detail.

Audiophiles want their loudspeakers to be precision tools, but perhaps not so precise as to be a scalpel upon the skin of the music. And perhaps it's in that balance that the S1 Mk II shows its greatness. The dynamic range and detail available from these loudspeakers is humbling – it's often closer to listening to the real instruments, just with that slight studio-derived sheen in place. However, in the process they do not leave the music laid bare and soulless. Play something truly sorrowful – Biber's 'Mystery Sonatas' [Holloway, Virgin] – and you start getting suicidal ideation, but play something up-beat – James Brown's 'The Funky Drummer' [King Records] for example – and you start moving to the groove. You don't get that kind of scope through most loudspeakers. Something has usually got to give, but not this time.

The S1 Mk II is fundamentally honest and accurate sounding from its highest frequencies to its lowest, and a sealed box of this size has a 'lowest' around the 40Hz mark. There's still content going on right down to the depths, but if you need full-range bass underpinning and very low-end bass lines, you'll need a bigger speaker than this. And a bigger room. But the thing about the S1 Mk II is when you listen to it, you will be unlikely to want 'bigger' bass. The S1 Mk II has a fat-free bass and practically everything else you'll hear that fits in the same setting will sound lumpy or leaden by comparison.

Magico is at the bleeding edge of technological development, but it might need to slow that pace down a little in future. The S1 became the S1 Mk II in around three years, and there is nothing in the way of an upgrade path. The improvements made in this version change are major, and in most loudspeaker brands those major changes would occur every five to eight years. It seems counter-intuitive to suggest slowing technological progress, but those who buy products with one eye on their resale value will find such a rapid churn

of design difficult to reconcile. I'd really want the jump from Mk II to Mk III to be as substantial as the one from Mk I to Mk II, but I think I'd prefer to see that product in 2022 rather than 2020. But that's Magico, for you: uncompromising in every respect.

The Magico S1 Mk II is a product of superlatives. You can't express that without appearing to be a rabid fan of the product, because if you like loudspeakers that are neutral, you are a fan of the product, and if you've heard the original S1, you're an even bigger fan of the S1 Mk II. So, yes, the superlatives come with the territory. The Magico S1 Mk II is, quite simply, outstanding. Very highly recommended! +

**TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS**

**Type:** two way sealed floorstanding loudspeaker  
**Driver Complement:** 1 x 2.54cm Diamond Coated Beryllium Dome, 1 x 17.78cm Graphene Nano-Tec Cone  
**Sensitivity:** 86dB  
**Impedance:** 4 Ohms  
**Frequency Response:** 32 Hz - 50 kHz  
**Recommended Power:** 50 watts  
**Dimensions (HxDxW):** 109x23x25cm  
**Weight:** 54.5 kg  
**Price:** £20,998 per pair (M-Cast), M-Coat price on application

**Manufactured by:** Magico LLC  
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