

hi-fi news

& Record Review

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



• **PLUS** 18 pages of music reviews & features • **VINYL RE-RELEASE** Various *Natural Born Killers* LP
• **OPINION** 12 pages of letters & comment • **VINTAGE REVIEW** Sony's Discman portable CD player
• **SHOW BLOG** We report from Munich's High End • **READERS' CLASSIFIEDS** Hi-Fi bargains galore

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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'.

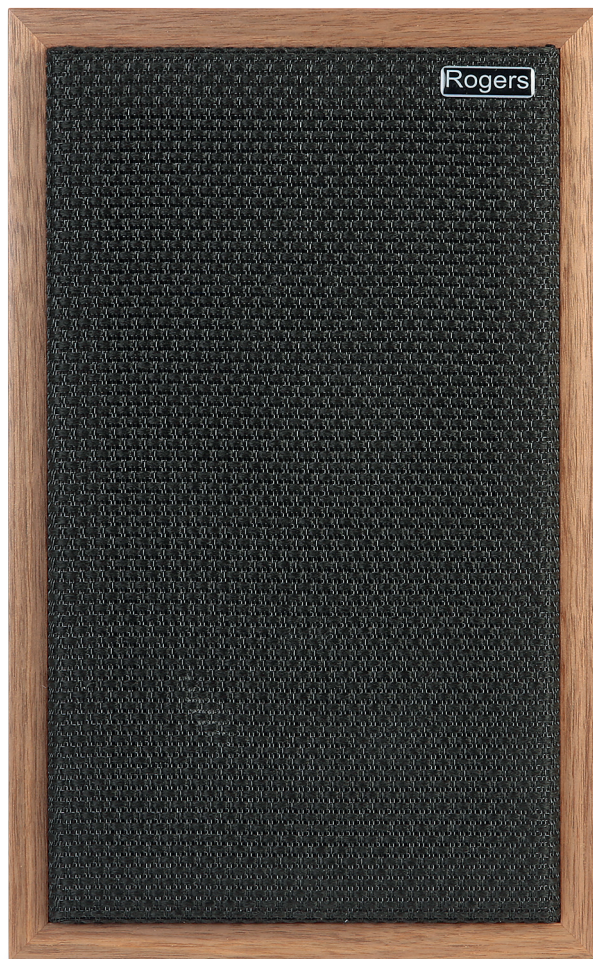
Then came the drivers, which – though re-engineered to recreate exact copies of the KEF drivers – are not identified as such. KEF, after all, is the custodian of the B110 and T27 nomenclature.

RIGHT: The Birch ply cabinet hosts a Rogers-design 110mm doped-bextrene mid/bass driver and 19mm mylar-dome tweeter with a BBC specification FL6/23 (15ohm) crossover network

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.

'This just
may be the
finest voice
recording ever'



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.



THE BEGINNING

An oft-told tale, in the 1970s the BBC needed a small nearfield monitor for on-location usage and for equipping studios throughout the land. I recall them in a local BBC outpost in Kent, smaller than my bathroom. What they offered was consistent sound quality, site to site, especially for voice. Conceived as the LS3/5, the final LS3/5a version was licensed to 11 brands for production, the Beeb limiting it to three at any one time. With minor variations (connector types ranging from multi-way binding posts to screw terminals), the specification was tight. It included the KEF B110 mid/bass driver with doped Bextrene cone and neoprene surround and the KEF T27 Mylar dome tweeter, fitted with a perforated grille. The 131x19x16cm (hwd) enclosure had an internal volume of approximately 5 litres and was made from 12mm birch plywood strengthened with beech braces. And oh – how they worked!

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.

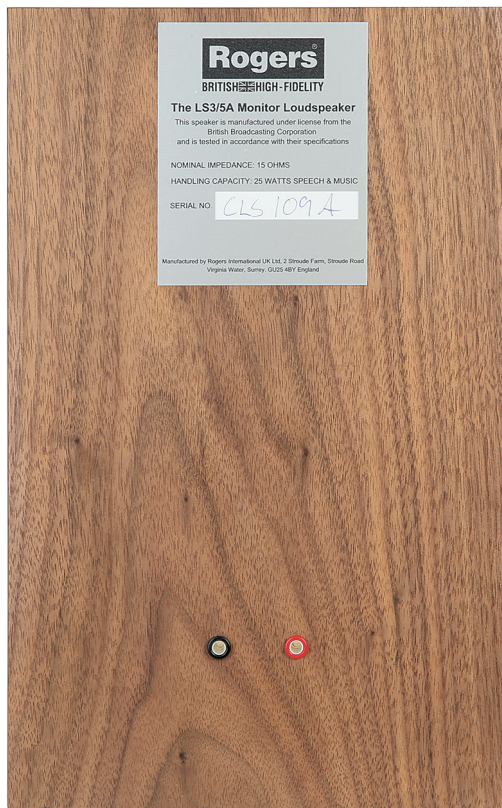
What my high-end system did was enable me to hear the Rogers unsullied. Whitesnake proved too much, as the recording is coarse, so I turned to Classic Records' definitive 45rpm edition of Dusty Springfield's 'The Look Of Love' [Casino Royale; CR-5005-12], as well as Colgems' reel-to-reel version [CG03 1001]. This just may be the finest voice 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 ELS-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

ROGERS LS3/5A CLASSIC



LEFT: Simplicity itself – the sealed 5-litre cabinet is fitted with single sets of 4mm speaker cable sockets. Produced under licence, every LS3/5a is individually numbered

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-

mastery that makes it the speaker's greatest strength. Ms Springfield enjoyed an untrammelled 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

Caterham 7 might seem a leap too far, but a true petrol-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

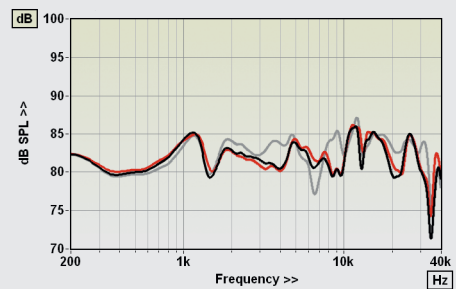
Let's not mince words: the best LS3/5as I have ever heard are the 50 pairs of sold-out Falcon limited editions. Next, though, are the two current choices, the sonic differences defined above. Hand on heart, I'd find it tough choosing between them, but dock Rogers a point because price must be factored 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%

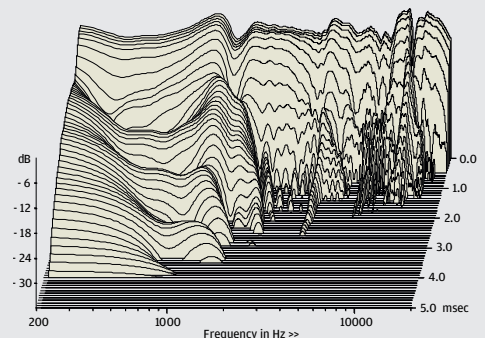


Rogers is unusual in quoting the sensitivity of its Classic to 0.5dB – but when a speaker is this insensitive, every half dB counts. The specification says 82.5dB SPL for 2.83V at 1m and our measured pink noise figure is reassuringly close at 82.3dB. This low figure is due in significant part to the high 15ohm nominal impedance. Although that doesn't quite square with our measured minimum of 7.9ohm, the Classic is unquestionably a high-impedance loudspeaker by today's standards. While this hurts its sensitivity, it makes the Classic easy to drive. Despite quite large low frequency impedance phase angles, the high modulus ensures that the EPDR (equivalent peak dissipation resistance) never falls below 4.2ohm/128Hz. There's a second dip to 4.3ohm/46Hz but no worthy amplifier will struggle driving this speaker.

The forward responses [Graph 1, below] were measured at 1m on the tweeter axis with the grille in place [red/black traces] as this should minimise reflection effects from the raised edge of the inset baffle. The notch at 6.5kHz is exaggerated once the grille is removed [grey trace]. The overall trend is flat and, while there are many undulations, errors are modest at ± 3.4 dB and ± 3.3 dB. Pair matching error over the same 200Hz-20kHz span is high at ± 2.2 dB but this is caused by a very narrow-band disparity at about 13kHz. Ignoring that, the matching error reduces to a fair ± 1.2 dB. Diffraction-corrected nearfield bass measurement shows a rising output as frequency falls to 145Hz, before the expected 2nd-order roll-off kicks-in below 100Hz. Bass extension is limited to 73Hz (–6dB re. 200Hz) but boundary gain can be exploited to improve the effective bass extension. The CSD waterfall [Graph 2, below] shows some treble resonances. KH



ABOVE: Resp. is essentially flat despite undulations. Removing the grille brings a notch in presence [grey]



ABOVE: Small cabinet is almost necessarily well-damped while driver modes are limited to the treble

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Sensitivity (SPL/1m/2.83Vrms – Mean/IEC/Music)	83.1dB/82.3dB/82.2dB
Impedance modulus min/max (20Hz–20kHz)	7.9ohm @ 20Hz 68.9ohm @ 90Hz
Impedance phase min/max (20Hz–20kHz)	–55° @ 104Hz 52° @ 76Hz
Pair matching/Response Error (200Hz–20kHz)	± 2.2 dB/ ± 3.4 dB/ ± 3.3 dB
LF/HF extension (–6dB ref 200Hz/10kHz)	73Hz / 33.4kHz/>40kHz
THD 100Hz/1kHz/10kHz (for 90dB SPL/1m)	1.7% / 0.5% / 0.9%
Dimensions (HWD) / Weight (Each)	305x190x165mm/5.4kg