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SPICA SC-30 LOUDSPEAKER

Manufacturer: Spica, 342S Bryn Mawr N.E.

Albuquerque, NM 87107

Price: \$399 per pair

Source: Manufacturer loan

The first time I heard the \$399/pair Spica SC-30 was at the high end wing of the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas. There they were, competing head on with \$2,000 Thiels, \$3,000 Martin Logans and \$4,000 Apogeos. The Spicas were no match for the big guns, but they weren't embarrassed either.

The SC-30 is a rather conventional-looking two-way loudspeaker. You would never know that it's made by the same company that produces the radical, edge-of-the-art TC-50. The SC-30 is not time-aligned (it's not even mirror-imaged); nor does it share any of the driver components of the TC-50. Whereas the TC-50 uses a soft dome tweeter with response dropping off at 16.5 kHz, the SC-30 uses 1.5-inch polypropylene cone tweeter which is rated flat out to 27 kHz. The SC-30 is also quite a bit larger than the more costly TC-50. So, is one getting more loudspeaker for less money here?

In a way, the answer is yes. The SC-30 appears to be tailored to a different buyer. It clearly has more bass extension than the TC-50. It also can be played louder with less overall bass distortion. If Consumer Reports tested these two loudspeakers side-by-side, there is no question that the SC-30 would be the recommended choice.

The SC-30 appears to be designed as the loudspeaker that audiophiles will recommend to their friends who aren't into audio and who don't want to spend a great deal of money. These friends would probably hate the TC-50. After all, the TC-50 has little bass extension, and its high frequencies sound like it lacks the requisite zip for rock music.

In comparison, the SC-30 has bass. It even has a touch of zippiness in the highs. Last, but not least, rock aficionados can pump up the volume without as much fear of frying the driver components.

The SC-30 has some other qualities worth mentioning. It is attractively finished in black wood-grain vinyl on all six cabinet sides. The grilles are straightforward, easy to remove, and exhibit none of the sagging tendencies I've noticed all too often with other inexpensive loudspeakers. Sonically, the SC-30 projects a solid image and exhibits a degree of focus that betrays its big box enclosure. This focus allows the speaker to present a sense of depth that is extraordinary, considering its budget price. Consequently,

some musical instruments can, with certain recordings, sound as if they are coming from a location ten feet behind the loudspeaker plane, while other instruments can be pinpointed closer to the loudspeaker plane. If the SC-30 shares any sonic qualities with the TC-50, it is in the areas of focus and imaging.

On the debit side, that zippiness in the highs can be just a bit intrusive at times. It's the type of brightness that impresses on first exposure. However, it doesn't sound quite accurate, and it is altogether absent on finer speakers—including Spica's own TC-50.

Another debit has to do with the quality of the highs with this loudspeaker. The upper registers lack the ultimate clarity and resolution for the big gun (expensive) audiophile speakers. Thus, reproduction of some percussion sounds and vocals can occasionally come off sounding a bit too electronic. In all fairness, I have found that this area (more so than bass response) is the Achilles heel of inexpensive loudspeakers. The SC-30 is no better or worse in high frequency reproduction than most other speakers in the sub-\$600 range. It's just that there are a few sub-\$600 loudspeakers that are substantially superior in this regard—e.g., the \$595 BBC LS3/5A as well as Spica's \$550 TC-50. Despite this debit, the SC-30 still manages to sound more transparent than the majority of other loudspeakers in its price range.

Finally, there's the bass response. Although it's more extended than the TC-50, that's not hard to do (given the TC-50's relative diminutive size). The SC-30 does have bass extension, but it's no earth mover. The SC-30 is rated 3 dB down at 54 Hertz, which is just respectable considering the size of the cabinet. To paraphrase my spouse, with that large enclosure, one expects greater bass extension. In all fairness, however, the Spica's bass extension out-classes all the mini-speaker darlings recommended by so many audiophiles.

In summary, Spica appears to have taken an entirely different set of criteria in designing the SC-30. The SC-30 does not even quite share the tonal signature of the two more expensive Spicas the popular TC-50 and top-of-the-line Angelus. On the other hand, the SC-30 may appeal to more consumers than either of the two other models. It's just enough added brightness to satisfy rock 'n' rollers without totally alienating the audiophile crowd. Its dynamic capabilities give the speaker what the British (i.e., Linn folk) like to call "slam." It can be driven by modestly-powered amplifiers/ receivers. It's attractive. And, of course, it's only \$399/pair. If slam-bam-thank-you-ma'am is what you (or non-audiophile friends) are looking for, try the SC-30 on for size. **RN**

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