Full-range electrostatic loudspeaker
Made by: International Audio Group, China
Supplied by: IAG Ltd, Cambs
Telephone: 01480 447700
Web: www.quad-hifi.co.uk; www.internationalaudiogroup.com
Price: £12,999

Quad ESL 2912X

As old as *Hi-Fi News* itself, Quad's iconic full-range electrostatic stays fresh courtesy of new upgrades

Review: **Ken Kessler** Lab: **Paul Miller**

Apocryphal it may be, but one of the lingering mysteries about Quad was why MD and chief designer Peter Walker never went 'high-end' with bigger amps or speakers. His answer was always that his amplifiers and speakers were 'adequate for most needs'. While that's true, one cannot deny the efforts of others to make Quad's inaugural ESL [see boxout, p48] go louder and deeper. So while the ESL 2912X may not be the cost-no-object/size-no-object electrostatic that some devotees of the brand might dream of, I wonder what Peter Walker would have made of the not inconsiderable £12,999 asking price?

That said, Quad's ESL 2912X is surely 'big enough'. Ten seconds of listening to Ozzy Osbourne's 'Rocky Mountain Way' from *Under Cover* [Epic 82876743142] assuaged any fears I might have harboured about its size. After all, this is the 1570mm model rather than the shorter, 1070mm sibling, the £10,999 ESL 2812X.

> 'This is the Quad ESL's sixth generation'

NO RUSH

According to Quad, this speaker represents the sixth generation of its ESL, which is quite a display of model longevity when you consider that there were so few designs in 68 years. This model follows the ESL-57 (1957), the ESL-63 (1981), the ESL 988/ESL 989 (1999), which was the first occasion when a Quad electrostatic speaker was offered in two sizes, the ESL 2805/ESL 2905 (2006), and the ESL 2812/ESL 2912 in 2012. Thus Quad has waited 13 years to release this latest revision.

This 'X' iteration arrives after Quad's five-year-long R&D exercise towards developing a superior and more consistent semi-conducting layer applied to the delicate film-like membrane. The thickness and density of this layer needs to be controlled accurately to maintain an even, and very high, electrostatic charge across the diaphragm even in regions of high humidity. Quad has also improved the ruggedness of the 'egg crate' mechanical construction holding the stators [see pic, p48] and the accuracy of hole punching through the copper conducting layer of the stators, thus reducing the possibility of arcing if overdriven.

BACK IN BLACK

Quad points out that Paul McConville, whose history with the company goes back to the introduction of the ESL-63 in 1981, worked on the new models. He assisted the production team in creating new mixing and spraying techniques, as well as in the evaluation of quality control to ensure that the electrostatic panels would consistently maintain a charge of over 5kV.

To ensure the stability of the 5.25kV Extra High Tension (EHT) feed to the panels, Quad developed a new PCB design where the EHT section is now isolated from the input power supply, the audio, and protection PCBs. Cable dressing from the EHT section to the panels has also been optimised to eliminate the intrusion of humidity or dust.

While the look is familiar, the all-black 'stealth' finish seems to ⮕



RIGHT: Standing over 1.5m tall and leaning back 3°, the ESL 2912Xs are dipoles clad in an acoustically transparent cloth. They aim to produce a spherical soundfield from a virtual 'point source' and need to be kept clear of rear walls