



Kind of blue

Focal turns its attention to the affordable end of the market, so **Ed Selley** takes a look at the smallest member of its new range

Loudspeaker manufacturers with a product lineup that runs from three to six figures are few and far between. Focal is one such example, however, and after a few years where the bulk of its new arrivals have been at the more premium end of the scale, the focus has shifted back to being affordable. The Chora series is the second tier of the company's range and comprises two floorstanders and the 806 standmount you see here.

It follows the basic pattern of Focal standmount speakers. It's a relatively large, two-way design that's front ported and single wired. While the formula hasn't significantly changed, the ingredients have. The 25mm aluminium and magnesium tweeter has been seen before, but it now uses

a surround made from a material called poron which has trickled down from the company's more expensive models. This is intended to reduce distortion across the high sensitivity point of our hearing while simultaneously improving dispersion.

The 165mm mid/bass driver is all new. Like previous models from Focal, it makes use of composites in its construction. This time, the primary ingredient is unwoven carbon fibre, arranged in parallel – something the French company says further improves consistency – and then sandwiched between two layers of thermoplastic polymer. The resulting concoction has been dubbed Slatefiber because it looks like slate once the driver has been finished. The resulting driver is extremely light and

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Focal Chora 806

ORIGIN
France

TYPE
2-way standmount loudspeaker

WEIGHT
7.35kg

DIMENSIONS (WxHxD)
210 x 431 x 270mm

FEATURES
• 25mm aluminium magnesium tweeter
• 165mm Slatefiber mid/bass driver
• Quoted sensitivity: 89dB/1W/1m (Bohm)

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stiff – qualities Focal has long placed great emphasis on.

You might anticipate a combination of a 430mm-tall cabinet, 165mm bass driver and hefty front port to result in an extended low-frequency response, but the Chora only claims a figure of 58Hz at +/- 3dB, which drops to 49Hz at +/- 6dB. This seems to be because the priority here is ease of drive rather than outright clout. Focal claims a sensitivity of 89dB/1W/1m and an impedance that doesn't dip below 4.6ohm. The result is a speaker claimed to be happy on the end of anything with 25W or above output.

Aesthetically, the 806 is recognisably a Focal, but it isn't the company's best work. The range is available in three finishes and the gloss black of the review sample is the weakest of the three. The other options that match a wood effect with different coloured baffles do a better job of working with the proportions of the cabinet and those vivid blue drivers than the black does. It's all well assembled, though, and all the points of contact are much better than what might reasonably be expected at the price. Small speaker grilles that cover the main drivers are provided and there is also a dedicated stand available for an extra £200.

Sound quality

Historically, I've found the performance of Focal speakers to be highly dependent on placement, but the 806 is the exception to the norm. It responds to a little care being taken, but delivers the fundamentals of its performance without the sort of exacting precision that the older models so often required.

This is useful but far more importantly, the overall performance is a significant step forward over any previous affordable Focal offering. Initially connected to a combination of the significantly more expensive Rega Aethos (HFC 457) and T+A DAC 8 (HFC 463), the 806 behaves in a manner way above expectations for a £600 speaker.

It boasts a beautifully judged balance between detail and refinement. Listening to Fischer-Z's *Berlin* from the *Red Skies Over Paradise* album, it does a fine job with this periodically thin and edgy recording. John Watts' highly distinctive vocals lose none of their edge, but there is a civility present that encourages you to listen as loud as you like rather than what you feel the speaker can handle.

This is allied to tonality that is consistently good. *Everyone Else* by London Grammar is a less frenetic and urgent recording and the Focal



The Focal is £50 more than B&W's 606 (HFC 454), which has better bass extension and offers a similar level of refinement. The Chora 806's presentation is more spacious and detailed with better three dimensionality. The impressive sensitivity also means it works with a wider selection of amplifiers. Both designs are very fine speakers, but the Chora has a performance edge and greater scope to work with better equipment as your system improves.

Placement isn't as important as with previous Focal speakers



luxuriates in it. Hannah Reid's stirring vocals are given pride of place, but they're stitched into the wider performance in a way that feels effortlessly natural.

The expected limitations of the bass response don't manifest themselves as seriously in reality either. Given the size of the cabinet, the 806 isn't the hardest-hitting speaker going but the bass is nonetheless well integrated with the upper registers, maintaining the same levels of detail and refinement that the speaker possesses in general. It indisputably does its best work with material that doesn't

It opens out dense and congested music without losing the emotional clout

depend on the reproduction of seismic low notes, but even here it never feels lightweight.

Some more traditional Focal virtues are also present. The 806 manages to image exceptionally well. This grows and shrinks with the material being played, but there's a constant perception of front-to-back depth that helps create a feeling of immersion that some speakers can struggle with; giving a performance that has plenty of width, but ultimately feels somewhat two-dimensional. The efforts towards ensuring reasonable sensitivity have also been successful as this reveals itself to be an extremely easy speaker to drive.

If you partner the 806 with a more price-equivalent pairing of a Rega Brio (HFC 446) and Chord Electronics Qutest (HFC 436), the qualities it exhibits with the more expensive

devices remains fundamentally unchanged. The 50W that the Brio has to its name are more than sufficient to hit any listening level you're likely to need in a domestic environment. Moreover, the Focal delivers on that same invigorating combination of detail and civility that ensures you can choose anything in your music library and find it a highly rewarding experience.

The demented electro blues of RL Burnside's *A Bothered Mind* is something it revels in. It opens out this dense and congested recording without losing its emotional clout, keeping the crunching guitar intact.

Conclusion

The Chora 806 is one of the strongest loudspeakers I can remember testing at this price. It may not be the prettiest available and it's possible to find rivals with better bass extension, but it lands all the punches in the right places. This is a speaker that combines ease of drive and fuss-free positioning to deliver a performance boasting tonality, detail, refinement and realism to outstanding effect ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY
★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY
★★★★★
BUILD QUALITY
★★★★★
EASE OF DRIVE
★★★★★

LIKE: Beautifully balanced sound; well made and easy to place and drive
DISLIKE: Some limits to the bass extension; not especially pretty
WE SAY: A supremely talented speaker that delivers an exceptional level of performance

OVERALL
★★★★★