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 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 two 806 standmounts 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 that’s 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 uses cone material in its construction. This time, the primary ingredient is unturned carbon fibre, arranged in parallel – something the French company says further improves consistency – and then sandwiched between two layers of thermoplastic polymer. The resulting cone has been dubbed Slatefiber because it looks like slate once the driver has been finished. The resulting driver is extremely light and 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 55Hz at +/- 3dB, which drops to 49Hz at +/- 6dB. This seems to be because the priority here is ease of driver 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 claiming 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 effort. The range is available in three wood effect with different coloured grilles that cover the main drivers are standard – there’s an addition of a solid slate grey for the Chora 806. Placement isn’t as important as with previous Focal speakers.

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 for 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 recording and the Focal luxuriates in it. Hannah Reid’s stirring vocals are given pride of place, but they’re stretched 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 harshest 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 generally. It indisputably does its best work with material that doesn’t demand too much. Placement isn’t as important as with previous Focal speakers.

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 units 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.

HiFi Choice

SOUND QUALITY

OVERALL

We say:

A supremely well balanced sound and easy to place and use

An extremely easy speaker to drive. If you partner the 806 with a more budget-minded amplifier would be a sound idea. 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 recording and the Focal luxuriates in it. Hannah Reid’s stirring vocals are given pride of place, but they’re stretched 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 harshest 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 generally. It indisputably does its best work with material that doesn’t demand too much. Placement isn’t as important as with previous Focal speakers.

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 units 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.

HiFi Choice

We say:

A supremely well balanced sound and easy to place and use

An extremely easy speaker to drive. If you partner the 806 with a more budget-minded amplifier would be a sound idea.

REVIEWS

FOCAL

CHORA 806

£600

OVERALL

LIKE:

Beautifully judged balance between detail and refinement

DISLIKE:

Some more traditional Focal virtues are also present. The 806 manages to image exceptionally well. This grows and thickens 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 budget-minded amplifier would be a sound idea.

£600

LIKE:

Beautifully judged balance between detail and refinement

DISLIKE:

Some more traditional Focal virtues are also present. The 806 manages to image exceptionally well. This grows and thickens 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 budget-minded amplifier would be a sound idea.

£600

LIKE:

Beautifully judged balance between detail and refinement

DISLIKE:

Some more traditional Focal virtues are also present. The 806 manages to image exceptionally well. This grows and thickens 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 budget-minded amplifier would be a sound idea.

£600

LIKE:

Beautifully judged balance between detail and refinement

DISLIKE:

Some more traditional Focal virtues are also present. The 806 manages to image exceptionally well. This grows and thickens 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 budget-minded amplifier would be a sound idea.

£600

LIKE:

Beautifully judged balance between detail and refinement

DISLIKE:

Some more traditional Focal virtues are also present. The 806 manages to image exceptionally well. This grows and thickens 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 budget-minded amplifier would be a sound idea.

£600

LIKE:

Beautifully judged balance between detail and refinement

DISLIKE:

Some more traditional Focal virtues are also present. The 806 manages to image exceptionally well. This grows and thickens 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 budget-minded amplifier would be a sound idea.