

".... It presents itself as sophisticated, versatile and with a sound that is honest through and through"

## Magnat

### SHADOW 203



**+ OVERALL RATING: 1.1**  
**+ CLASS: MIDRANGE**  
**+ PRICE/PERFORMANCE: VERY GOOD**

# Magnat

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## Magnat Shadow 203 – forget about being in the shade, out into the spotlight!

Compact 2-way speakers are much like the "Golf class" in the hi-fi loudspeaker sector. They do not amount to penny-pinching but are "sensible and reasonable" and, in particular, versatile. And what makes these loudspeakers so universal? We have examined this question using the brand-new Shadow 203 as an example.

### Numerous applications

Using a tweeter and a subwoofer makes it possible to cover the audio frequency spectrum audible to the human ear fairly broadly. The volume provided for the subwoofer is sufficient for appreciable bass reproduction in conjunction with a bass reflex opening. The cone surface area - it is mostly subwoofers with a diameter of 13 - 18 cm that are used in this kind of loudspeaker - can already produce a very decent maximum level, so you really can let it rip in small to medium-sized rooms. And a dedicated tweeter mostly performs distinctly better in terms of upper cut-off frequency and resolution than an individual wide-range device is able to do, for example. In contrast to large floor-standing loudspeakers, compact shelf-top speakers make the set-up much more flexible. Most compact 2-way devices can also be positioned close to a wall and don't even mind being put on a sideboard or a shelf. A lot of well-positioned compact speakers sound ultimately better than a large floor-standing loudspeaker whose positioning has been compromised. The areas of application of such speakers are equally diverse: Combined with a modern all-in-one music center, a compact high-quality system can be put together, for example. Or speakers of this type are also ideal as a replacement for technically outdated loudspeakers in an "old" system or as a high-quality alternative to the "accessory speakers" of some compact systems - where the loudspeakers are often the weakest link. And compact 2-way loudspeakers can also be used really well in a home movie theater surround AV system on account of most manufacturers offering matching center speakers and subwoofers.

### Popular and expandable

No wonder then that this is a fiercely competitive market in which the manufacturers make a lot of effort to be able to offer the consumer sophisticated products with a great price-performance ratio. So the Magnat Shadow 203 speakers concerned here face tough competition and have to fend off numerous competitors. And they don't find it that difficult. In terms of image alone, the German Magnat brand has enjoyed an excellent reputation over a period of decades. The Shadow line models are positioned directly below the top loudspeakers of the Quantum range in Magnat's loudspeaker hierarchy. In addition to the compact Shadow 203, the manufacturer currently also offers the floor-standing loudspeakers Shadow 209, 207 and 205 as well as the Center 213.

### Practical features

The features of the Shadow 203 are very practical. The speakers are available in black or white. The enclosure is lined with wood decor of the respective color version - it looks good and is resistant. The front has a high-gloss finish, in line with the spirit of the times, and also looks good. The metal tweeter and subwoofer enclosures are decorative but are striking in visual terms. The drivers themselves have plastic cages, which is modern and stable.

Those who do not like the technical aesthetics of the chassis can attach the fabric covers supplied as standard. This makes the loudspeakers look much more reserved, though it is better to keep the drivers out of the reach of children and pets. A big plus is that the speakers have permanently fitted rubber feet. These ensure protective and secure positioning on items of furniture, etc. but also do not get in the way when putting the speakers on normal loudspeaker stands. Thanks to the metal bridges fitted as standard, all of this does no harm, however. At least the user manual clearly explains the wiring possibilities. The small booklet also provides a lot of other information and also gives tips for choosing suitable cables. At a distance of up to three meters, 2.5mm<sup>2</sup> cables are recommended, with 4 mm<sup>2</sup> for longer connecting cables. Strong cables of good quality are available from Oehlbach, for example. That company is part of the same group as Magnat, by the way.

### Crisp, dynamic, honest

On account of its versatility, we tested the Shadow 203 in different settings. After an extensive warm-up phase, which brand-new loudspeakers should always be given, we first started with a classic hi-fi chain. The speakers were mounted on loudspeaker stands from Lovan, with the music data streamed from the computer converted into music signals by a North Star design DAC and then transmitted to the Shadow 203 by a Musical Fidelity integrated amplifier. The speakers were standing quite free, more than 50 cm from any wall to the rear or side of the room. In this configuration, the compact Magnat speakers really gave a powerful performance. They kept going with seemingly boundless enthusiasm, really rocking the 18 square meter listening room as if there was no tomorrow. The Shadow 203 speakers are definitely not boring! In view of this performance, you wonder how Magnat came up with the name. Nothing to do with shade or shadow, this is the full spotlight in which the speakers place the musical actors. The Shadow 203's are more on the lean side in the bass range, but are surprising in terms of depth and clean control. A lot of manufacturers like to use the trick in small loudspeakers of really laying it on thick again just before the end the lowest transmission frequency of the speakers. This makes the loudspeaker sound surprisingly powerful, but often at the expense of control in the bass range. There is none of this in the 203's. They do honestly go right to their lower limit without "cheating". The Magnat speakers also remained faithful to their honest character in the other frequency ranges. They are very clear, acoustically transparent and amazingly dynamic. Modern music material benefits from their lively, surging sound pattern. The mid-ranges sound present, clean and clear and the Shadow 203's are also very agile in the treble range. Perhaps a little warning is even appropriate in this regard: In rather bare or even reverberant living environments with little acoustic damping and with large areas of glass, hard floors and bare walls, the treble could be a bit too much. A carpet, curtains and some upholstered furniture, as well as a bookcase, are more the setting in which the Shadow 203's feel more at home. Small details, big effect: The small rubber feet provide a firm base for the 203's.

### High voice and detail clarity

In a second scenario, we operated the Shadow 203's as stereo speakers in an AV setting. Here, the loudspeakers were placed next to the television comparatively close to the wall. This can be a problem for bass reproduction. Not with the compact Magnat speakers, however.

Even though the bass reproduction was intensified somewhat by the wall at the back, the reproduction of the low tones remained absolutely within the acceptable limits. There was no droning and no humming. The Shadow 203's absolutely benefited from their lean, well-contoured bass. In terms of sound, this much tighter set-up did not cause any upset whatsoever; the Magnat speakers were just as convincing in this scenario with their balanced tonality and outstanding dynamics. What also struck us was the excellent clarity with which the Magnats reproduced speech. With dialog-filled movies, in particular, we noticed time and again how clear the voices were. Especially when listening to movies in the original language which is not your own native language, you are normally dependent on more spoken information than when you are completely familiar with the language. And the Shadow 203's really fared exceptionally well in this respect. Furthermore, the loudspeakers clearly distinguished voices from the background music or noise through their good ability to differentiate. In both listening scenarios, the spatial representation of the Shadow 203's was also convincing. There was just one small constraint when it came to generating the spatial illusion of a large concert hall. But ok, this can normally only be managed by large loudspeakers that go very low in the bass range and can authentically reproduce very quiet, low beats that build up in a large hall. What is fascinating, on the other hand, is the directional accuracy offered by the Shadow 203's. With smaller groups, you could point your finger at each individual musician. Synthetic sound effects are also really enjoyable when synthesizer spots or samples fire through the virtual space three-dimensionally. That's real listening cinema in 3D. It's clear that sound effects in movies also came across in an extremely authentic way, even on a simple stereo configuration. That's just classy.

### CONCLUSION

**The Shadow 203 demonstrates impressively what competence the traditional loudspeaker manufacturer, Magnat, has. It presents itself as sophisticated, versatile and with a sound that is honest through and through. Its stupendous dynamics and its talents in terms of three-dimensional representation ensure that the fun factor is not neglected. With its excellent resolution, it is also ideally suitable for use in AV systems, in which it is not just a matter of the immediate execution of rapid sound effects but, rather, also clear speech reproduction. With the Shadow 203, Magnat makes it clear that it has a significant say in the fiercely competitive "Golf class". Highly recommended!**

