

Hip to be square

The smallest speaker in the Monitor range might look a little odd, but **Ed Selley** finds himself charmed by what it has to offer

As the smallest member of the Monitor range of speakers, the Monitor 50 is a two-way standmount that features a 25mm tweeter partnered with a 140mm mid/bass driver. The tweeter is immediately identifiable as a Monitor Audio unit as it uses the same C-CAM (Ceramic-Coated Aluminium Magnesium) principle as the Bronze and Silver models, although here it gets a more prosaic black coating. The larger driver is more unusual. This uses a material called MMP II (Metal Matrix Polymer), which is a polypropylene with metallic particles added during the production process with a view to making it stiffer – which in turn allows a thinner profile to achieve the same rigidity.

Where the Monitor 50 differs from every other Monitor Audio speaker design, is how the drivers are arranged. Instead of being directly over the mid/bass driver, the tweeter is offset to one side and mounted proportionally lower on the front baffle. This allows for a smaller cabinet and the result is that the Monitor 50 is almost cube-shaped and a very compact one at that, measuring around 200mm in every direction. As this is a relatively small

speaker, Monitor Audio has augmented the low end by fitting one of its HiVE bass ports at the rear and then supplying a foam bung for those that need to use it close to a wall, or on it – which is possible, thanks to a screw mount for a wall bracket.

The aesthetics of the Monitor 50 are going to divide opinion, but I rather like it. The vivid orange hue of the mid/bass driver complements the grey front panel nicely and the speaker has enough of a retro look to appeal to a fun audience, but it also avoids going too far. No less importantly, for £160, this is an exceptionally well made little speaker that feels equal to anything at or near the price.

Sound quality

If you're sitting on the fence when it comes to its appearance, the good news is that the performance is much less of a point of contention. Connected to a Naim Uniti Star one-box system (HFC 433), it is usefully sensitive and fairly unfussy about placement. More importantly, it is also extremely entertaining. Whether or not the distinctive driver arrangement has any direct effect on the sound is tricky to judge, but the speaker benefits from a phenomenal

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Monitor Audio
Monitor 50

ORIGIN
UK/China

TYPE
2-way standmount
loudspeaker

WEIGHT
3.6kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
206 x 206 x 238mm

FEATURES
• 1x 25mm
C-CAM tweeter
• 1x 140mm MMP
mid/bass driver
• Quoted sensitivity:
87dB/1W/1m (8ohm)

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integration between the tweeter and midrange. A 44.1kHz rip of Peter Gabriel's *I Have The Touch* is delivered with no discernible clues that you are listening to two drivers instead of one. This lends the presentation a sense of speed and transparency that is impressive at the price.

This is partnered with a believable sense of tonality and detail. Gabriel's distinctive vocals are delivered with enough of the gravel to the upper notes to be a decent facsimile of the man himself and well-recorded instruments like the guitar and supporting drum in Seasick Steve's *Swamp Dog* have a believable weight and presence to them. The tonal balance is a touch forward of neutral and it does mean that if partnered with forward-sounding electronics, the combined effect might be a bit too much for some tastes. But with more neutral sources and amplification, it puts a spring in the step of most music. Interestingly, the 'handed' nature of the cabinet has a slight effect too – with the tweeters facing outward, the soundstage grows a little, while inward improves the focus at a small cost to the sense of space.

Conclusion

Something that is rather more welcome from a speaker of this size and price is the bass response. As you might imagine, there are limits to how deep a 200mm³ box can go, but the manner in which the Monitor 50 extends down from that exceptionally cohesive midrange into a controlled, detailed and consistently satisfying bass is very convincing. The result is a speaker that does a fine job of ensuring that you concentrate on the music it is playing. The looks might not be to everyone's taste and once you break the £200 mark there's plenty of seriously capable competition, but for the attractive asking price, the Monitor 50 is a remarkably talented and compelling little loudspeaker indeed ●



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Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY

★★★★★

VALUE FOR MONEY

★★★★★

BUILD QUALITY

★★★★★

EASE OF DRIVE

★★★★★

LIKE: Detailed, cohesive and fun sound; build

DISLIKE: Unusual looks; can be a little forward with some equipment

WE SAY: A fine speaker for its low asking price that delivers a healthy dose of musical joy

OVERALL

★★★★★

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