

REVIEW

Top Twenty



Adam Smith takes a listen to PMC's new top-of-the-range Twenty-24 floorstanders.

The early 1990s was an interesting time to be setting up a new hi-fi company. Following the demise of many manufacturers during the darker days of the 1970s and the move to the brand new CD format in the 1980s, the British hi-fi industry was not in the best of shape, with the buying public bidding a fond farewell to many companies that had been virtually household names as far back as the 1950s. However, into this uncertain time stepped Adrian Loader and Peter Thomas and the result was the Professional Monitor Company, now PMC loudspeakers.

Peter's background was in Engineering and he went to work for the BBC in the 1970s, culminating in a role as manager for outside studios, including Maida Vale. He soon realised that there was a need for a new loudspeaker that could handle high sound pressure levels but still offer monitor standard quality and, finding nothing available that could do the job, he set about designing his own, in conjunction with friend Adrian Loader. The result was the BB5 ('Big Box!') and the two set up PMC in order not to conflict with their interests at the BBC.

In the past 20 years, PMC have risen to become one of the most successful professional monitoring loudspeaker companies out there, but they have also succeeded in breaking into the hi-fi market, with a wide range of models that incorporate their signature transmission line configuration. After the activity of the company's 20th birthday last year subsided, it was time to unveil the latest project – the Twenty Series.

Although PMCs previous domestic loudspeakers have shown a clear lineage to the professional models, they broke the mould somewhat with the launch of the very striking Fact series a couple of years ago, and I personally think the Fact 3, with its matching stand, is one of the most attractive designs on the market today. However, things have moved a step further with the new Twenty series, their novel 'swept-back' stature making them instantly recognisable.

The range consists of four models – the standmounting Twenty.21 and Twenty.22, plus the floorstanding Twenty.23 and Twenty.24, the largest of which is under consideration here. There is also a matching centre channel unit, the Twenty.C, which was launched this year at the Bristol Sound and Vision show.

In the case of the Twenty.24s, drive unit lineup consists of a 170mm bass/midrange driver, which fires at the rear into a transmission line of 3m effective length, venting at the bottom front of the cabinet. This is a completely new driver design for the Twenty series, as is the 27mm Solonex tweeter, which PMC say allows a lower crossover point of 1.8kHz between the two units.

The crossover itself is also new and once more borrows design cues from the Fact range. What this

by a decent amount, so allowance should be made for room behind them. A weight of 21kg each is more than enough to ensure that they stay stable but also means that they are not unduly difficult to move around. Finish options are Oak, Walnut and Amarone real wood veneers, plus the rather lovely Diamond Black gloss. Finally, the grill is a properly thought-out item that covers the full front of the speaker and attaches firmly using magnets. Too often I find that grilles can be an afterthought and look

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means is a fibreglass PCB board with thick copper tracks to minimise inter-component resistances and allow higher power handling. Add in a sprinkling of Solen capacitors and hand-wound inductors and you have a recipe for a crossover circuit that should offer minimal interruption to the signal passing through it.

Dimensionally, the Twenty.24s tip the ruler at 1028mm high, 184mm wide and 419mm deep, so they are tall and slim but I found that they benefit from being out in open space

rather ungainly but as someone who much prefers to listen with grilles in place, I offer firm thumbs aloft to PMC.

SOUND QUALITY

With a good long warm-up under the belt of the PMCs I sat down to listen and found myself enjoying a loudspeaker that I feel sure will appeal to many. I have gathered the opinion in the past that many feel PMC loudspeakers have a particular kind of sound which can tend to polarise opinion for many; like Marmite, many either love them or hate them, it seems! Personally, I've generally always been a fan but I can also appreciate why their monitor-like qualities do not appeal to everyone. However, the Twenty.24s continue a precedent started by the Fact series that I am sure will make them appeal to a wider audience, without alienating long-standing fans. In short, they are a very likeable design.

Working on the theory that "if you can't dive straight in with a bass test track when the speakers in question have a transmission line, when can you?" I cued up a recent acquisition in the form of 'The Vision' by Joker, which has some mean bass lines on it! I was delighted to hear that the PMCs absolutely lapped it up, offering a superbly punchy rendition of the tracks. The album is a modern dance type offering and so the bass sequences are synthesiser-based but the fast, tight nature of the notes came through extremely well. I felt on occasion as I pushed the volume level higher that I could detect the faintest hint of box overhang but the nature of the music meant that the next note was well underway a short time later



and the Twenty.24s never felt uncomfortable, allowy or boomy, as long as they were not placed too close to rear walls – I found around 50-70cm was best and then they came together beautifully. Even with less thunderous source material, the Twenty.24s left me incredibly impressed by the way in which they were never too straight-laced and always revealing of the information on the record. They have a glorious sense of authority and control that they impart in a subtle but very effective manner across all styles of music.

As noted by Noel in his measurements (see Measured Performance) the Twenty.24s do have a rise in output towards the upper registers. However, this is actually placed quite well within the frequency range – much lower and instruments start to sound a little overblown and, the higher the peak moves, the more the treble can become uncomfortably sharp and even slightly 'hissy' at times. In fact, the Twenty.24s again have a very well judged balance, offering plenty of crispness, detail and insight to the treble but without any of those unwanted side-effects. Consequently, violins were superbly outlined yet sweet, and cymbal strikes were deliciously snappy and vivid.

So, highs and lows were good. What about the middle? When considering a loudspeaker that has a rise at either end of the frequency spectrum, the midband can often be somewhat left floundering in the middle. Fortunately, the Twenty.24s suffered no such issues and turned in a beautifully balanced performance. With my ultra-critical hat on I would say that perhaps they do not project vocals three-dimensionally out into the room as well as one or two other designs at the price, but they certainly never sounded constrained or shut-in. Their overall nature is well balanced and acoustic instruments were well rendered. The slight treble rise actually combined beautifully with the Antonio Forcione's acoustic guitars to add a real sense of precise impact to every string pluck. Furthermore, the sense of anticipation was palpable as Ravel's 'Bolero' built up to its crashing crescendo; from the whisper quiet action right at the



beginning right up to the climax, the PMCs captured everything perfectly and had me on the edge of my seat with excitement – always a good sign!

CONCLUSION

The PMC Twenty.24s are a fine way for PMC to celebrate their coming

of age. They take the best of the technologies that the company has spent 20 years developing and update it into a sonically effective, visually striking and aesthetically pleasing package. The result is a loudspeaker that has the deep bass of a transmission line and inside which beats the heart of a well-honed monitor, but yet the whole package just seems more approachable and a bit 'nicer' for want of a better word! The result is a loudspeaker that most certainly tells you the truth but doesn't quite ram it down your throat in the way that some older models used to.

The Twenty.24s are likely to win over a whole new generation of loudspeaker buyers I believe, whilst at the same time keeping those of us who always liked the PMC sound happy. As you may have gathered, I liked them!

REFERENCE SYSTEM BOX
 Garrard 301 turntable
 SME 309 tonearm
 Ortofon Kontrapunkt b cartridge
 Anatek MC1 phono stage
 Naim Supernait amplifier

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The PMC Twenty.24 is a little different in having a long internal acoustic line to lose rear energy and return some in-phase with the bass unit. This is a form of transmission line, a difficult principle to make work correctly, especially in short lines like this one. Port output peaks around 200Hz and there is a pronounced overhang our decay analysis shows, suggesting a bit of boxy or chesty coloration. Otherwise, the decay analysis is relatively clean, meaning this is otherwise a low coloration design. A smooth frequency response characteristic reinforces this feature.

However, measured on-axis treble (green trace) from the tweeter rises strongly to +6dB at 12kHz, sufficient to be audible brightness. Off-axis (grey trace) this falls to a more amenable +3dB at 10kHz, so the speakers are best pointed straight down a room, and listened to off-axis by twenty degrees or so.

Bass extends down to 55Hz, but the lower port extends down further. However, port output is not strong so bass is unlikely to sound heavy. The bass unit is well damped by the line though the impedance curve shows, so bass quality should be good.

Sensitivity was high at 88dB Sound Pressure Level from one nominal watt input (2.8V) so 40 Watts or so will give

plenty of volume. High power amplifiers are not needed and since impedance measures a high 8.4 Ohms overall the Twenty.24 is easy to drive.

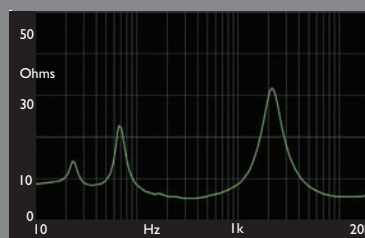
The Twenty.24 will have a bright balance but this apart it will sound quite smooth and even. Bass quality should be good, but some box coloration or chestiness on male vocals may be apparent. NK

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



Green - driver output, on axis
 Grey - off axis
 Red - port output

IMPEDANCE



VERDICT ●●●●●
 Stylish, detailed, punchy and thoroughly enjoyable, the PMC Twenty.24s are a very welcome addition to the loudspeaker market.

PMC TWENTY-24
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FOR
 - styling
 - superb authority
 - crisp, clean treble

AGAINST
 - slightly recessed midrange