

**Mark Craven** luxuriates in the clear, crisp waters of PMC's Twenty Series speakers

# The art of transmission

**WITH ITS EARLY '90s** origins in the world of pro audio, PMC is a well-known marque in hi-fi circles. It has collected accolades for its range of speakers that aim, in the company's own words, 'to replay the purest intentions of the artist without colouration.' It doesn't, in case you were wondering, make a soundbar.

Nor, in fact, does PMC sell a sub/sat system or anything else that might appeal to the cash-strapped movie fan. Cinephiles with bigger pockets, however, may be tempted by its Twenty Series of speakers, which now includes a dedicated centre channel model and subwoofer in its lineup. The idea being that you can enjoy PMC's premium ethos in a multichannel environment.

Taking the front left and right positions in the 5.1 system reviewed here is PMC's Twenty.26 floorstander – the flagship model in the Twenty Series. And, as the rest of the speakers feature similar technical and design attributes, it's as good a place as any to start.

A three-way speaker, the Twenty.26 features a 1in tweeter, 2in midrange driver and 7in bass driver, arranged in that order from top to bottom on the front face. While the latter two are in-house PMC designs, the tweeter is a co-production with Norwegian acoustic noodlers SEAS. Dubbed a SONOLEX tweeter, this soft dome hides behind a bespoke grille that aims to widen high-frequency dispersion.

The Twenty.26 features PMC's traditional Advanced Transmission Line (ATL) system. In layman's terms, this means it's a ported speaker, only the port is a long tunnel (3.3m in this instance), damped with specifically-engineered absorbent material ('mere foam will not suffice,' says PMC). The claimed benefits include reduction in unwanted upper bass frequencies, a greater bass extension over a traditional ported or sealed speaker, and a consistent frequency response regardless of listening level.

Accommodating the transmission line and the pressure levels it generates requires some thoughtful interior construction. The cabinet is built from twin-veneered HDF, with panels ranging in thickness from 18mm to 35mm; the speaker is heavy (22.5kg) and resolutely inert. The styling is somewhat reserved, although the lean-back design (which aids time alignment of the drivers) and relatively slim width catch the eye. In addition to the walnut finish here, there are Oak, Amarone and Diamond Black options.

On surround channel duties are the Twenty.23s. Also floorstanders, these eschew the dedicated midrange driver in favour of a two-way design using a 5.5in mid/bass unit. Again, they use the ATL system, as does the Twenty.C centre channel speaker.

The Twenty.Sub reminds me of Q Acoustics' SUB 2070S, in that it stands vertically and employs two front-firing drivers (at roughly £3,000 it's about ten times more expensive than Q Acoustics' bass bin, though). Powering its dual 7in bass drivers (the same model as on the Twenty.26 floorstander) is a proprietary 400W Class D amp. Sonic fettling comes from onboard DSP (just to refine some bits and pieces, says PMC) and parametric EQ. Like its siblings, the woofer sports the same slender design and lean-back aesthetic. PMC says this form factor was decided upon as a result of speaking to consumers. Big, squat bass boxes are, apparently, going out of fashion.

## Smooth mover

The stand-out impression of the Twenty Series in full-flight is that it is supremely musical, >

## AV INFO

**PRODUCT:** Premium 5.1 speaker package

**POSITIONING:** PMC's only range with matching sub and centre channel

**PEERS:** DALI Epicon; Monitor Audio Gold GX

'Turns multichannel mixes into works of art... audition if you like the finer things in life'





The sub offers pro audio-style XLR hookup

for want of a better word. There's a wonderful smoothness to its performance, from its low-end poise to the higher-frequencies. Nothing is overblown, and there's simply no hint of unwanted resonance or distortion. The nuances and subtleties of recordings are therefore presented in all their glory. PMC's mission statement is accomplished.

When Quaid visits Rekal Inc (*Total Recall* 2012 remake, Blu-ray) and finds himself in a shoot-out, the speakers placed me right

**'PMC's devotion to utter clarity and even-handed delivery works wonders with music and movies too'**

there in the gloomy room, covering. The details in the DTS-HD MA mix, such as falling bullet shells or the sound of a rope being untied, were clean and distinct, with the PMCs countering a slight lack of attack with a healthy dose of naturalness and fleet-footed delivery. This array purrs like a well-oiled engine.

The two-way surround speakers, voiced to match the rest of the array, have presence enough to ensure panning effects and rear details don't peter out. And throughout the soundfield, there's a sense of the audio being dislocated from the speakers themselves.

The centre channel is no slouch. The most sensitive (90dB) of the system, it locks horns with the flanking speakers on the front

soundstage to build an appreciable wall of sound, and presents the dialogue channel with real projection and panache. This element of the *Total Recall* mix is very well-recorded, and it shows here. Conversely, the centre speaker is very revealing of some of the ADR work during *Skyfall*'s opening sequence.

Chris Nolan's cerebral sci-fi *Interstellar* perhaps showcases this 5.1 package at its very best. The film's soundmix seems tailor-made for these speakers' strengths, with the lengthy sequence where Matthew McConaughey and Matt Damon go for a stomp across the lunar landscape, and then have a fist-fight hampered by their ungainly space suits, proving rather emotional. The swirling, snow-laden winds whip around the soundfield with ice-cold precision, while the Twenty.C continues to enunciate dialogue with absolute believability – the anguish in Damon's voice as he confesses to his ruse is palpable. And throughout this scene, Hans Zimmer's organ-infused score raises goosebumps as it swells to a crescendo, the instrumentation sounding startlingly real. The way these speakers bring clarity and body to those crucial mid-range frequencies is astonishing. The result is complete immersion in the onscreen image – which is what home cinema audio is all about, really.

The new subwoofer actually struggles to make itself star of the show. A mitigating factor is that the bass performance of the front floorstanders is excellent in speaker terms, with the ATL design helping PMC to claim an extension down to 28Hz. What the Twenty.Sub is required to do is merely add some extra icing to an already well-decorated cake. It does this well, integrating flawlessly with the rest of the soundfield in terms of tone and presence, and showing it can pressure a room when required, as in the LFE-heavy scene in *Total Recall* when Quaid falls through the hole in Rekal Inc's floor. That said, I found myself wanting more vigour and slam at the very bottom-end.

As a last-gasp test of the array's mettle, I spun Machine Head's *This Is The End* (CD), a brutal five minutes of multitracked guitar riffs and double kick drums. I've heard this delivered as an unruly, disassembled mush on plenty of systems. Remarkably, the Twenty Series seemed partial to it. Sumptuous timing, clear instrument separation and rapid bass beats were the order of the day – I could barely stop my foot from tapping.

**The art of noise**

The styling of the Twenty Series isn't really to my tastes, and I'd hope for an extra level of unabashed slam from the subwoofer, but otherwise this a supremely accomplished premium speaker setup. PMC's devotion to utter clarity and even-handed delivery works wonders with music and movies too – turning bold multichannel mixes into works of art. Audition if you like the finer things in life ■

**SPECIFICATIONS**

**TWENTY.26**

**DRIVE UNITS:** 1 x 7in bass driver; 1 x 2in midrange; 1 x 1in SONOLEX soft dome tweeter  
**ENCLOSURE:** Transmission line  
**FREQUENCY RESPONSE:** 28Hz-27kHz  
**SENSITIVITY:** 86dB  
**POWER HANDLING:** 300W  
**DIMENSIONS:** 190(w) x 1,062(h) x 439(d)mm  
**WEIGHT:** 22.5kg

**TWENTY.23**

**DRIVE UNITS:** 1 x 5.5in mid/bass driver; 1 x 1in SONOLEX soft dome tweeter  
**ENCLOSURE:** Transmission line  
**FREQUENCY RESPONSE:** 29Hz-25kHz  
**SENSITIVITY:** 87dB  
**POWER HANDLING:** 150W  
**DIMENSIONS:** 152(w) x 918(h) x 330(d)mm  
**WEIGHT:** 13.2kg

**TWENTY.C**

**DRIVE UNITS:** 2 x 5.5in mid/bass drivers; 1 x 1in SONOLEX soft dome tweeter  
**ENCLOSURE:** Transmission line/ported  
**FREQUENCY RESPONSE:** 45Hz-25kHz  
**SENSITIVITY:** 90dB  
**POWER HANDLING:** 200W  
**DIMENSIONS:** 520(w) x 172(h) x 305(d)mm  
**WEIGHT:** 9.5kg

**TWENTY.SUB (SUBWOOFER)**

**DRIVE UNITS:** 2 x 7in bass drivers  
**ENCLOSURE:** Sealed  
**FREQUENCY RESPONSE:** 22Hz-200Hz  
**ON BOARD POWER:** 400W  
**REMOTE CONTROL:** No  
**DIMENSIONS:** 200(w) x 577(h) x 516(d)mm  
**WEIGHT:** 23kg  
**CONNECTIONS:** Balanced XLR stereo input (phono unbalanced adaptor provided); balanced XLR stereo output; AES XLR input/output

**HCC VERDICT**



**PMC Twenty Series 5.1**

→ £12,500 approx → [pmc-speakers.com](http://pmc-speakers.com)  
 → Tel: 0870 444 1044

**HIGHS:** Smooth, even-handed and clear delivery; slender form factor; great for music; excellent centre speaker  
**LOWS:** Not the most stylish cabinets around; subwoofer more fluid than frightening

