

PMC TB2S-A

Andy Stewart experiences a moment of clarity with this updated British two-way monitor and its 'Flying Mole' companion.

Most of us have heard of PMC by now. Regarded by many as one of several elite British speaker manufacturers still pulling its weight, the Professional Monitor Company (PMC) builds an impressive range of speakers these days, from the smallest DB1 nearfields [see Issue 23] to the enormous floor-standing 'cop this earful and be impressed' MB2s and BB5s. Residing in numerous mastering houses throughout the world – and several private homes lucky enough to be able to afford them to impress the dinner guests – PMC speakers are some of the most refined, well-balanced and *expensive* reference speakers on the planet.

New to PMC's ever-expanding stable is the TB2S-A two-way nearfield reference monitor. Actually it's more of an update to the previously reviewed TB2 [see Issue 13] than a new speaker – depending on your point of view. The TB2S-A is comprised of the same transmission line cabinet design and 170mm low-frequency driver as its older model, but several of the components have been modified and/or replaced, including several electrical aspects of the crossover (which now switches over at 2kHz) and a substituted high-frequency driver. Gone is the metal dome phase-shielded tweeter, replaced by the same soft-dome tweeter that's found in all of the company's larger passive speaker models. My initial thought was that maybe this change was the

result of a dislike for the old tweeter, or

a desire to rationalise the tweeter inventory to save four feet of floor space at the factory. As it turns out, the motivation behind this switcheroo is mainly to provide better coherency across the range, especially with respect to 5.1 system construction. Whatever the reason, the result is a smooth, articulate and dynamic mid-sized monitor.

Flying Mole?

What immediately sets this speaker apart from the veritable toilet roll call of nearfields

available today (albeit perhaps more technically speaking than sonically) is the adoption of the digital Flying Mole that's attached itself to the back of the TB2S-A. Yep, the new Class-D bi-phase fusion amplifier – comically named the Flying Mole DAD-M100pro BI – is 650 grams of 'all-digital' design that boasts a quoted power conversion efficiency of 85 percent (be impressed), making it vastly more fuel-efficient than equivalent analogue amplifiers, like the optional Bryston PowerPac. As a consequence, the digital amps run far cooler than other equivalently rated amplifiers (either digital or analogue) and this allows the amps themselves to be significantly smaller and no longer reliant upon large, unwieldy heat sinks which threaten to cut your hand off every time you have to move them. With no need for any kind of heat exchange system, the amps are sealed inside their outer casing, preventing this reviewer from opening them up to look inside. A pair of TB2S-As in combination with these amps uses a paltry 60W while at play – making them perfect for that solar-powered studio – the power consumption being further reduced by removing two of the noise- and heat-generating components that your studio air-conditioning has to contend with (assuming you have some).

Sonically, these speakers are all class. Of course, judgement of sound is, ironically, where we often find ourselves caught up in a philosophical debate about subjectivity and acoustic interference. Be that as it may, even in your typical lounge room, which invariably suffers from all the usual 'intolerable' acoustic crimes against the ears and 'walls of mass corruption', the TB2S-As reveal their pedigree for all to hear. They are articulate and controlled, and possess none of the squawking, barking and shrieking characteristics of so many other speaker brands, particularly at the cheaper end of the economic spectrum. Mixes are revealed in all their glory (or inadequacy), distortion is manifest wherever it lurks, and reverb tails and recorded room acoustics become clearer, deeper and lengthier. There's no straining the ears to hear the last gasps of that reverb tail or the melody in that second electric guitar and the detail in the stereo image prevents the 'now you hear it, now you don't' effect – the one where you have a subtle instrument under your finger on a fader, and as you attenuate it in the mix, it suddenly disappears altogether. The monitors empower you by providing all the sonic information you require, rather than forcing you to make an 'educated guess'.

Boxing Above Their Weight

Being transmission line speakers – which utilise a sophisticated internal architecture that supports the main driver and evenly increases the bottom end extension relative to conventional bass ports [see more on transmission lines in Issue 23, page 93] – the TB2S-As produce more useful and coherent bass frequencies (effective down to 40Hz) than other speakers of the same physical dimensions. The bass generated inside the TB2S-As (which exits from a rectangular rear slot below the 150W digital amp) makes them sound a little larger than appearances might suggest (actual dimensions being 40cm high, 20cm wide and 35cm deep – about the size of an NS10, but a little taller, thinner, and twice as deep) which is good for anyone who, for whatever reason, can only work with nearfields. The bass response is impressive for their size – don't expect them to match heavier hitters like the Quedsted 2108 or Meyer HD1 in the bass department – but they still box well above their weight. Anyone who really wants to hear fully represented bottom end can couple the TB2S-As with a sub cabinet like the PMC XB1-P.

The dynamics of the TB2S-As are also impressive. Sibilance is frankly revealed so that you can do something about it, rather than have it conveniently concealed from you by the slower response times of most other transducers, and vocal ticks and clicks are plainly audible. The Flying Mole amps, to that end, provide good instantaneous power and breaking power, and seem to possess none of the brittleness or shallowness for which digital amps are often criticised.

Physically, the TB2S-As come with speaker component screens – which are the exception rather than the rule these days – and these do tend to knock off a bit of the extreme top-end. I actually ended up with the covers removed in the studio, which I was reluctant to do, having grown somewhat sick of looking at speaker cones recently. Covers felt good and left me listening more and looking less – but on or off is entirely

up to the user and either way sounds fine. The absence of a conspicuous 'on' light on the front panel also made a pleasant change, the power LEDs being next to the On switch which is located at the top of the amp, at the rear of the cabinet. The only thing I've never really liked about PMCs is their 'black' finish, which is easily marked and tends to make them look a bit tired and scuffed up despite your best efforts – obviously not a big issue though...

TB Contagion

The TB2S-As are elegant and competent mid-sized monitors. They're accurate and revealing with an overall smoothness that will surely allow them to work well over extended listening periods. A word of warning though: these speakers expose weaknesses well – and some people don't like hearing weaknesses. Indeed, some of the worst sounding mixes I've ever heard were revealed during the time I spent with these monitors. So if you don't like hearing distortion or sibilance, or your recorded spaces sound crap when they're audibly revealed to you or your clients, avoid these monitors like the plague. As with any speaker purchase, listen to them for yourself, compare them in your own environment if it's at all possible, trust your instincts, and take other opinions with a grain of salt, especially the one offered here!



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• Neotec Audio
Phone: (02) 9516 4135
Email: info@neotec.com.au
Web: www.neotec.com.au

Price

• TB2S-A with Flying Mole amplifiers: \$5,450; TB2S+PP60 with Bryston amplifiers: \$5,480; TB2S+ passive speakers: \$2,300.

