

Pro Monitors go room-friendly

Design-conscious consumers account for the arrival of the FB1 floorstanding loudspeakers from the Professional Monitor Company. While the design strengths of the existing PMC range are retained for this metre-tall £1100 transmission-line design, the heavyweight black industrial look of much of the line-up is replaced with a variety of wood finishes. Black ash, cherry walnut or oak are available at the standard price, while rosewood commands a £469 premium. Optional plinths (£75)

enhance stability, while it's possible to bolt in Bryston Powerpac 60 amplifier modules, allowing the speakers to be connected directly to a preamplifier.

Biwireable, the speakers use a 17cm doped bass unit with a cast magnesium basket and an aluminium dome tweeter. Impedance is 8ohms, sensitivity 90dB/W/m and power handling up to 150W.

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Legendary speakers replaced

Spendor is replacing its legendary LS3/5As, among the first true mini-monitor speaker designs. The newcomers are the S-3/5s which, Spendor claims, will include the benefits of the old LS3/5As in a new 30cm tall stand-mounting design, while removing known response irregularities as well as sprucing up the styling.

Starting at £499, depending on which of the light cherry, rosewood, burr walnut or bird's eye maple real wood veneers you choose, the S-3/5s are identical to Spendor's broadcast studio range of monitors. The sealed, optimally damped enclosures house a high grade, magnetically shielded 19mm soft fabric dome tweeter, which is ferrofluid cooled for

greater power handling. Below it sits a 13cm filled homopolymer mid/bass driver, developed especially for this model. Covering both are acoustically engineered grilles, which the company claims improve both clarity and detail.

The entry-level designs in the company's Elegance series incorporate gold-plated terminals arranged in a biwireable set-up. While a nominal impedance of 8ohms shouldn't cause amplifiers too many problems, the 84dB/W/m sensitivity could mean, however, that the S-3/5s will not be the easiest speakers to drive at high volume.

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Quad brings a classic up to date

The classic Quad II mono power amplifier, first introduced in 1953, makes a comeback next year fully equipped for modern needs. That means more power: the II Forty, as it will be known, will deliver 40W.

Unlike the previous Quad II revival – the glitzy gold-plated version made under a past owner – the II Forty isn't aimed at the collector, but is intended to revive interest among existing Quad owners and high-end enthusiasts who have never considered the brand. It draws on the original II, but combines modern valve technology with industrial design. Peter Walker's original circuit topology



has been retained, but modern components and materials have been employed, the power supply using a 5U4 rectifier,

combined with KT88 output valves driven by 6SH7 pentodes, to give increased power.

Matching the II Forty will be a new preamplifier, the 24, which again draws on classic Quads of the past – notably the 22 – but which has a modern array of inputs and up-to-date styling. The intention is to sell the 24/II Forty as a package, at a price Quad says will be 'keen'.

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In case you're thinking 'Made in China' means cheap and cheerful, it's time to think again about what those terms mean. Yes, staff costs are lower there, so production tends to be labour-intensive, and that's as true at the Shenzhen factory of IAG, the owners of Quad and Wharfedale, as anywhere

else in the country. But although I've visited many hi-fi factories in my time, I have rarely seen one whose enthusiastic young staff is so focused on its task and the quality of the products it makes.

Then there's the commitment to research and development: not only are two facilities maintained here in the UK, but there's an R&D centre in China as well. Here everything from drive unit design to the tuning of finished products is carried out at a rate I suspect would alarm many an all-British hi-fi company, while a large tool-shop at the factory produces the machinery needed to put the results into production. When I was there in mid-October the tooling was being made for the Quad II Forty power amplifiers, first seen at the London Hi-Fi Show in September, and as you can read in our news report (below left), these thoroughly modern versions of a classic design are due in UK shops early in the new year.

Fast, too, is the way assembly is organised: from empty cabinet to tested, boxed product, it takes a Wharfedale speaker less than five minutes to travel the Chinese production line, and the company reports extremely low rejection rates. It's all a question of drawing on expertise – the factory may be in China and its bosses English and Taiwanese, but the production and quality control are in the hands of management recruited from Japan.

Yes, some areas are not so clean and sparkling – the woodwork shop, where great sheets of MDF become speaker cabinets, is not a place to linger, and the press shop is typical of a heavy industry plant – but nice touches abound. Even standard vinyl-wrap speaker cabinets are cleaned with good old Pledge furniture polish, just to give them the right look and smell when they're unboxed. Excellent real-wood veneer cabinets, available soon on very affordable models, are both sanded and wax polished by hand, while just about everything, from drivers to plastics mouldings and silk-screened labelling, is in-house, so quality is assured.

It was as fascinating as it was heartening, promising a solid future for these famous old names. Quad and Wharfedale, as John Borwick also discovers in his test of the former's 99 series this month, are in good hands.

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