

NIGEL PALMER finds The Rock MKII a chip off the ol' Boulder. With it's newly extended bass response it might be just what you need.

In the past when I've reviewed a range of loudspeakers from the same manufacturer, I've generally started at the smaller end and worked my way up. Having recently looked at Unity Audio's excellent Boulder active three-

supplied by ELAC, recessed into an attractive Corian front baffle. Cabinet construction, as with the Boulder, is in Baltic Birch, though in this case a thinner 12mm form has been used. The amplifiers, one 100w Class A/B each for high

UNITY AUDIO THE ROCK MK II

Active Studio Montior

way, I'm now going against the tide by covering the smaller Rock. There's good reason for this, however: after more than two years on the market, Unity has tweaked what is already a successful design to Mk II status with some added refinements. More on this later, but for the moment existing Rock owners will be pleased to hear that there's an upgrade path if required.

Overview

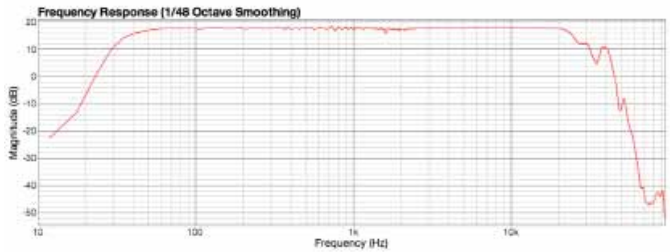
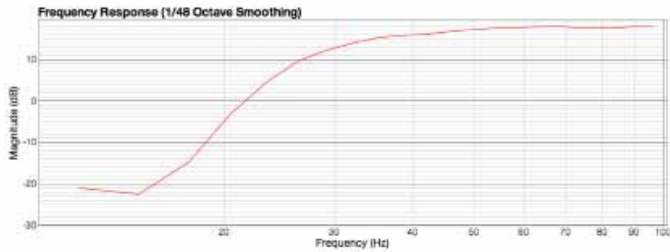
The Rock is an active two-way loudspeaker measuring 325 x 220 x 290mm (HWD), weighing in at 11.2kg and designed by Kevin Van Green. Driver complement is a single 180mm (7") aluminium and pulp fibre-coned woofer together with a folded ribbon tweeter, both



and low frequencies, are again from Esoteric Audio Research's Tim de Paravacini. The enclosure is of the sealed infinite-baffle type, so no ports contribute to the LF response: bass rolloff is a gentle 12dB per octave as opposed to the steeper 24dB one would expect with a port, resulting in meaningful very low frequencies from a surprisingly small box. A look around the back of the loudspeaker reveals an input level control, XLR (balanced) and RCA (unbalanced) inputs plus mains inlet. What's not provided, in contrast to The Boulder, is a means of adjusting The Rock's

THE REVIEWER

NIGEL PALMER has been a freelance Sound Engineer and Producer for over 20 years. He runs his CD mastering business, Lowland Masters (www.lowlandmasters.com) from rural Essex where he lives with his family and two dogs.



frequency balance to suit different rooms - it's an interesting debate in itself as to how far you trust a manufacture to make good decisions on your behalf, but with sensible positioning I found no need to tweak the speaker's response during the review period.

In Use

So what does the 'Mk II' designation mean in practice? To quote the manufacturer: "A significant development has come from the shared low frequency amplifier design that we use in the Boulder. We altered the feedback loop in the LF amp module and saw significant bass extension. We decided to try this in The Rock and it produced the same benefits and so The Rock now has a bass response of 33Hz at the -3dB point instead of 50Hz."

In combination with a -3dB point of 25kHz at the opposite end of the spectrum that's an eyebrow-raising specification for such a small monitor, particularly in the low end, and I had to hear it for myself. I went through the usual set-up procedures to plumb my review set of Rocks into the Lowland Masters system in an approximately 2m triangle (as with The Boulder, a good solid set of stands is a must) and then organised wide-ranging listening tests with both CD and higher resolution material over a period of several days. The review units had already been run-in to loosen up the bass drivers.

My immediate impression was that the speaker's voicing and balance was very nicely implemented, being a long way toward that holy grail of the loudspeaker designer by offering accuracy while being enjoyable and non-fatiguing to listen to. Driver integration was commendable: while I believe I could hear a minor 'something' going on around the 2.7kHz crossover point, this was much less of an anomaly than I've found typical in other two-way designs. Proof of the pudding in that regard was how very well The Rock worked on speech, a useful test for showing up the general presentation and particularly the midrange ability of a loudspeaker - although possibly principally aimed at music recording and mixing, I could envisage The Rock doing a good job in post-production rooms because of this. Imaging was commensurate with other aspects of The Rock's performance, and as one would expect with any loudspeaker dubbed 'monitor' both the good and not-so-good aspects of the audio being played were clearly shown. The Rocks can also play surprisingly loud if required, a tribute

to, among other things, Mr de Paravacini's no-nonsense approach to amplifier design

What of the low-end performance? I think it's fair to say that I hadn't previously experienced as much low frequency information from a sealed box of this size, in fact at first it was hard to believe that something so diminutive could create such a big sound. My usual mastering speakers coincidentally also have a 33Hz -3dB point and although they do sound more refined than The Rocks, Unity's product

comes breathtakingly close to their presentation at just over a quarter of the current model's price - an

outstanding achievement.

Conclusion

In a marketplace not noted for a lack of small two-way active loudspeakers The Rock must be among the better-conceived ones available; the Mk II changes also make a genuine real-world improvement to the performance, and are not some advertising copywriter's invention. Punching notably above its apparent weight, class-leading, well-priced British products such as this are in my opinion just what professional audio content creators need. **AM**

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INFORMATION

- 📍 The Rock MkII £TBC; Upgrade from MkI £TBC
- 🌐 www.unityaudio.co.uk
- 🏢 Unity Audio Ltd, The Elms Barn, Baythorne End, Halstead, Essex, UK CO9 4AF

