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MACKIE

MR5 Active Studio Monitor

By Mark Nelson



Featuring a 5.25-inch steel frame woofer and a 1-inch tweeter mounted on a molded waveguide, Mackie's MR5 monitors offer a broad sweet spot and surprisingly good bass response above 60 Hz.



Any pro will tell you that your mixes will never amount to anything until you can truly hear your tracks. But the price of professional monitors puts them out of reach for many beginning recordists.

Enter the new MR5 active monitor (\$149.95). Mackie has managed to squeeze a goodly portion of its acclaimed HR824mk2 reference monitors into a tiny package priced for the studio-in-a-bedroom crowd. I recently took a pair for a spin, and I was very impressed.

MR. MR

The MR5s feature a 5.25-inch steel frame woofer and a 1-inch tweeter mounted on a molded waveguide. According to Mackie, the baffle/waveguide reduces diffraction and widens the sweet spot. I can attest to the latter; unlike with some monitors I've used, moving my head or even sliding my chair from side to side did not appreciably alter the soundstage.

Each monitor features biamped Class A/B power amps, 55W for the bass and 30W for the top end. In case you were wondering

whether a 5-inch driver produces sufficient bass (I was), the MR5's frequency response is a healthy 60 Hz to 20 kHz. To protect the drivers, frequencies below 60 Hz or above 20 kHz are attenuated.

The enclosure is made from high-density wood with beveled edges to minimize diffraction and interference. The designers claim increased rigidity and accuracy from specialized interior cabinet bracing; I can only say that they sounded solid when I thumped the enclosures.

SETTING UP

Rear-panel connections include a power socket and unbalanced RCA, balanced/unbalanced ¼-inch, and balanced XLR audio inputs. A rear-mounted switch engages a "soft" power-down cycle to reduce loud bumps. Nice.

Tiny knobs correct for variables in input level. Unfortunately, without hash marks it's difficult to set the two sides equally. Of course, this is something you have to fiddle with only once unless you move the speakers.

Two 3-position switches on the rear panel tailor the speakers' frequency response to your room. One adds either +2 or +4 dB at 100 Hz; the other boosts or cuts by 2 dB at 5 kHz. I salute Mackie for including such a useful feature in an inexpensive monitor.

FIRST LISTEN

I set up the MR5s next to my trusty Alesis Monitor One monitors and listened to some past projects I'd mixed. Even with the tiny drivers, the MR5s delivered a tight low end, though electronics producers may want to add a subwoofer. Highs were clear and smooth, with little of the fatigue associated with studio stalwarts such as the Yamaha NS-10.

As I switched back and forth between the two sets of speakers, I noticed that the hi-hat, tambourine, and other percussion sat back in the mix a bit with the

MR5s when compared with my Monitor Ones. A quick flick of the Hi EQ switch brought things back into focus.

Better, the bass remained tight and well defined, with a hefty low end. The latter was a surprise, as I didn't expect much out of a 5-inch driver running at such low power.

When I cranked up the volume, the little guys held their own—at least until the levels got extreme, at which point I started to hear some graininess. That's not a dig; I would not expect concert volume from such small drivers.

Next, I hooked the MR5s up to my laptop—a typical entry-level setup. In spite of some grunge from the computer's built-in headphone output, the speakers sounded clear and smooth, with plenty of bass. I would recommend them to anyone needing a high-quality speaker for desktop music production, gaming, or even just listening to MP3s. The monitors are shielded to prevent interference with the computer screen.

WRAP-UP

Mackie's MR5 monitors provide very impressive quality at an attractive price. Good mixes sounded good indeed, while the flaws in inferior mixes stood out. That is the definition of a good monitor; I want to know when I need to keep working on a mix. Too many inexpensive monitors aim to make everything sound great. What's the use in that?

Mackie touts the MR5s as companions to the company's larger MR8s in a surround or multimonitor setup. That begs the question of whether it will add a matching subwoofer to the line.

If you're in the market for your first set of real monitors, or if you need a small set of close-fields to augment your existing system, give the MR5s a listen.

Value (1 through 5): 5

Mackie
mackie.com