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Mackie MR5 Monitors

A new monitor series offers affordable sonic power

BY NICK CASARES Mackie has long produced musician-friendly quality gear for live and studio applications. Released about ten years ago, the HR824 was Mackie's first studio monitor aimed at the pro level—it soon gained acceptance and raised the bar for affordable active monitors; its current version is the HR824 mkII (review forthcoming).

As popular as it is, at over \$1200 per pair the 824 isn't affordable for every home-studio user. Mackie now offers a more affordable monitor line with the introduction of the MR series of active studio monitors. Aimed specifically at the home-studio market, the MR series borrows many design elements from the HR lineup.

Details

Available in 5" and 8" versions, the MR is a bi-amplified, rear-ported monitor that features a molded baffle and MDF construction. Aside from woofer size and amplifier power the MR5 and MR8 are identical (I received the MR5 for this review). They have a steel-frame woofer, a silk dome tweeter, and Class AB amps powering the speakers in a 55/30W configuration for the MR5 and a 100/50W configuration for the MR8.

The MR is an attractive monitor that takes plenty of visual cues from the HR series. A black gloss cabinet mated to a matte finish baffle creates a nice contrast, and a single white LED indicates both power and overload.

Rear-panel connections include balanced XLR, balanced 1/4" TRS, and unbalanced RCA inputs, ± 2 dB high- and low-frequency switches, a rotary trim knob with center detent, and an on/off switch.

Listening

I had the opportunity to evaluate these monitors in a variety of listening, tracking and mixing situations and I was surprised by the amount of low end that the speaker produces. Even though the MR5 spec sheet claims a low-end cutoff near 63 dB I found the *usable* low-end range to end around 70 dB. The MR5 produces a clean, clear low end that would likely serve the needs of most home-studio users. Fans of hip-hop, dance, or metal will probably want to mate a subwoofer to these speakers since the small size does limit the low-end output. I wasn't impressed with the results of



the +2 dB low-end boost from the rear-panel switch—it seemed too apparent to my ears and took away from the otherwise balanced response.

For the most part, the MR5's midrange response is even and smooth. All studio monitors have frequency response nuances that take some getting used to. In this case I noticed a dip somewhere in the 200–300 Hz range that seemed to take some of the power and body out of vocals and made balancing guitars difficult at first. However, once my ears adjusted to the midrange response I was able to compensate.

There's not a lot of high-end hype with the MR5, which is refreshing to hear out of a monitor aimed at the home-studio market. The MR5 does a really good job of keeping highs under control without sounding crispy or artificial. I preferred to keep the high-end -2 dB cut engaged, but this is purely a taste decision.

Accurate reproduction of the stereo field is at the top of my list of requirements for any monitor. I was surprised by the accuracy of the MR5's soundstage as I placed sounds in the stereo field. I've used a variety of high- and low-priced monitors and I found the imaging of the MR5 to be quite good. There isn't a huge sweet spot with the MR5, but it's certainly big enough for accurate mixing and listening. Off-axis

response of the MR5 is good. Other than a slight drop in high frequencies there isn't a lot of coloration as you move in and out of the sweet spot.

I found the resolution of the MR5 to be about average. While transient details in cymbals and acoustic guitars were sometimes lost, the overall detail of the MR5 holds up well. Other than compensating for the midrange dip mentioned earlier, there weren't too many trouble spots with these speakers from a translation perspective—mixes on the MR5 translated well to other playback systems.

Overall

Overall, the MR5 is a natural sounding monitor that's well balanced across the frequency range. It's refreshing to hear a monitor in this price range that hasn't been treated with a lot of high- or low-end hype (a.k.a. the "smile curve"). Considering the sound and the modest price of the MR Series, it's hard not to like these monitors.

Price: MR5, \$199.99 each; MR8, \$329.99 each

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