

A Good Little 'un

The *SRM450* was once the ubiquitous IM plastic enclosure – it may not have been the first, but it was generally accepted as the best for a good while... It was a great performer, and you saw them everywhere. For many people, the quality of the Mackie Bi-Amp design and componentry convinced them of the viability of these types of enclosure. Now, virtually every manufacturer of PA has a 'similar' range and the competition is fierce. However, Mackie have finally got around to expanding the line with the delivery of the '450's little brother, the *SRM350*.

The *SRM350*s are two-way bi-amplified active units pretty much in the lineage of their bigger older brothers, they are packed with a 165 Watt LF amplifier and 30-watt HF amplifier which Mackie reckons totals up to a 121dB peak SPL output, with a frequency response (@ -10dB) of 61Hz to 22kHz. Also like the *SRM450*s they are constructed from injection moulded 'high-impact plastic'. You gotta love Mackie for telling it like it is, there are very few other speaker companies who dare to use the P word – unless it's Polypropylene or similar scientific mumbo-jumbo that means nothing to 90% of musos, so for me it's nice to see a company saying up-front; "these enclosures are plastic, and they sound great."

Behind the sturdy metal grille and Mackie badge is a 10" LF transducer offering a power handling capability of 200 Watts and a sensitivity of 96dB, above it is a 1.4" diameter diaphragm HF transducer – with a 1" throat – that shares the Waveguide Horn design of the '450. Basically, you're looking at a Mini-me. Not a bad thing at all.

This enclosure is asymmetrical like the '450 too, allowing the unit to be used as a wedge monitor – what I suspect will be a very popular application for bands already making use of the bigger units for PA. There's one moulded carrying handle to the side and another – this time made by an attached metallic plate - at the top other the speaker, the latter is extremely comfortable and usable, especially for lifting that 14.5kg onto a top hat pole.

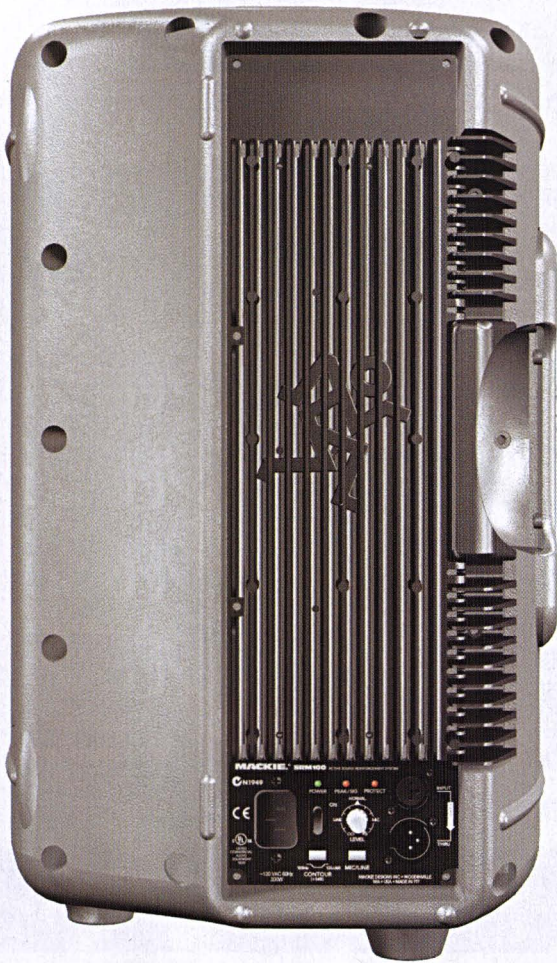
One thing the *SRM350* does have that is unique is an *Active Protection Management System* which employs input limiting and "variable thermal response", constantly monitoring the system temperature and continually adjusting to keep things at the desired operating level... So the system never needs to shut down to cool off!

CONTOUR CONTROL

The rear panel is where everything is packed onto a small recessed metal plate below (or to the side if you're using them as monitors) the heat sink. It's laid out thusly; a standard IEC 'kettle'-type power socket, flanked by a rocker power switch and a push button for 'contour' (see below), next to these are the level control offering up to 45dB of gain (12 O'clock signifies no gain), and a switch to configure the '350 for either a mic or line input, above these are three LEDs denoting Power, Signal and any limiting activity from the internal circuitry. Finally there are Male and Female XLR sockets (thru and input respectively). It's all pretty standard stuff... Well put together, but standard.

Probably of most interest here in terms of control is Mackie's "Dynamic Bass Boost" switch, which effectively





puts a 'smile' EQ onto the input signal, boosting bass and HF response by 3dBs (below 100Hz and above 12k). This is useful if you are installing the SRMs in a bar where full range playback is going to be their duty – but considering that 10" drivers is often a choice for vocal only systems, I would've also liked to have seen a 'mid-boost' type EQ – or at least a hefty low cut filter for work as a vocal only monitor. Still you can't have everything.

PERFORMANCE

The SRM450 were always respected as the Injection Moulded enclosure that you couldn't really tell was IM. So, I'd actually be surprised if the SRMs show much of a drop-off in terms of quality. They don't really. The sound you get from them is lacking some of the gut-thumping ooof you'll get from bigger drivers, but the quality is good. The contour EQ goes some way to re-voicing the '350 in a way more attuned to full-range playback, though I would assume that this is at the sacrifice of some amplifier power being sucked up by the low-end – in the test we never reached a point where this was detrimental. Obviously, for some applications, like vocal-only and presentation PA, this loss of Low/Low-Mid response is nothing to write home about, no great loss... And these are the areas where the SRM350 really shines, with very clear voicing, pretty good projection and great despiration. The pre-amps are clear and give good flexibility and ease of use, with plenty of additional gain for a direct mic input. And at this size and weight they're great for business or school use, as virtually anyone can pick them up and get going easily.

However, they're not really that perceptively loud. Certainly not when side-by-side with their bigger brothers. For a low-key duo in a small bar, things will be fine, but – of course – at the end of the day these aren't a big band's PA system, they're a 10" speaker. And you can't circle a square. But if you want sparkling, cutting vocal reproduction, these may be the better drivers for your cause. This means – of course – their killer app is as a diminutive floor monitor, and in this configuration they are fantastic, Drop them a metre or so in front of your mic stand and enjoy the ride.

CONCLUSION

In terms of sound quality and features, the SRM range is about the best IM speaker you'll come across, and the SRM350 is equal in terms of build and reproduction clarity as it's bigger brother – potentially even more pleasing as a vocal only system, where it's 10" driver really shines. However, it is not a 'let's get more sound into a smaller package system' it is a loud 10" driver, but not a loud system... And that's a big difference that renders it ideal for specific applications such as specific installs - where several units can be used to provide relatively low-level music (bar level, not club levels) across a specific area, presentation – where the ease of set up and use will be a great benefit and - when paired with a couple of good subs - it will make a decent small band PA. If you're only vocal and acoustic guitar, it may be all you need. Be aware of the limitations, and you'll be extremely happy with your purchase, which definitely ranks as a good little-un, with the Mackie eye for design making the best of this bi-amped package.



The Score

KEYNOTES

- 2-Way Bi-Amplified Active Loudspeaker System
- Built-in 165-watt LF amplifier and 30-watt HF amplifier
- 121dB peak SPL output
- 61Hz to 22kHz frequency response @ -10dB
- Active electronics provide built-in equalization, phase alignment, crossover and protection circuitry
- Built-in combination Mic/Line input
- Wave-guide horn and direct radiating woofer for wide sound dispersion
- Contour control for added bass and high-end response
- Power On, Limit and Signal LEDs
- Rugged, lightweight, high-impact plastic enclosure
- Asymmetrical box design for PA and floor monitor applications
- Dynamic Bass Boost for rich, full lows at all volume levels
- Flyable or stand-mountable

Price: £647 RRP each

HIGH NOTES

- ▲ Very clear vocal reproduction, good projection
- ▲ Operates as wedge monitor and normal PA
- ▲ Contour control provides good full-range voicing
- ▲ IM design means lightweight (14.5kg)
- ▲ The Mackie package inspires confidence
- ▲ Stylistically a great partner to the '450

LOW NOTES

- ▼ It is only a 10" driver...
- ▼ Therefore, not massively loud

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