

MACKIE HR626 MONITORS

Bliss and the vertical position

By Roy Stein and Tony Gross

These two-way, THX-approved, active reference monitors set high expectations from the get-go: They're packaged with an ergonomic methodology normally reserved for 6th century T'ang Dynasty vases. After carefully slicing off the packing tape and opening the shipping carton's heavy cardboard flaps . . . handles appear! Yes, handles are included to gently lift these 31 lb. beauties from their slumber. How I wished my posh European studio monitors had been packaged similarly; it would have saved one of the corners from being dented when I excitedly removed them from their packaging.

SPECS-LAND

Once you glide the HR626's out of the box, you'll likely be very impressed with their looks. The front panels are stealth, sleek, and make an immediate visual statement that features two 6.7" die cast aluminum frame woofers and a 1" viscous edge-damped aluminum alloy dome tweeter. On the rear panel are three, three-way switches for acoustic optimization that compensate for listening environment placement, a three-way power mode switch, input sensitivity control, and AC voltage selector.

Also on the rear: Three very convenient, side-mounted sets of input jacks (XLR, phone or RCA) accept either balanced or unbalanced signals. There's also a power cord receptacle for accepting one of the two included standard power cables (US and continental European).

In addition, these monitors boast a rear-mounted 6" x 9" passive radiator slightly hidden under the power amp control section. The two-woofer monitor is based upon the design principles of Joe D'Appolito, which supposedly result in an extended low frequency response and more phase coherency than traditionally designed boxes of the same size. The frequency response, ± 1.5 dB from 42Hz–20kHz, is confirmed by a



signed calibration certificate included with each speaker.

FIRST LISTEN

So far, so very, very good. Our first listening test was in GFI Studio's sweet-sounding "A" room. The HR626's were initially parked horizontally on the console meter bridge about 3' apart and 3' from the mix position, with the rear controls set to the defaults. After about 30 seconds of listening to one of my favorite reference discs (Nirvana's "Nevermind"), it seemed the overall sound lacked a bit of luster — small, and not well-defined. The HR626s were okay . . . but where was the "wow!"?

We checked the effect of the rear speaker switches; not surprisingly, the default positions sounded best. I then placed the HR626s horizontally on sand-filled, decoupled, speaker stands elevated 42" from the floor, behind a vintage MCI636 console and spaced both further away and further apart. It still wasn't as detailed as one would expect from monitors in this price range labeled "High Resolution." Hmm . . . I just couldn't shake the intuitive sense that these monitors were better than what I was hearing.

THE "D'OH!" MOMENT

So I tried something obscenely simple, and turned them to a vertical position. The difference was overwhelming: Far more detail, and extremely well-defined imaging.

With our juices now flowing, we did a tracking session with a female vocalist. The resulting speaker audition was clear, detailed, and the vocal was easy to place in the mix. A previously-tracked

Gibson J100 acoustic guitar was equally detailed. In short, a long session monitoring through the HR626's was a pleasant, non-fatiguing experience.

As context matters immensely, we then tested the HR626s in GFI's Studio B, which was built to emulate most real-world listening rooms. Still trying to make these speakers sound great horizontally, we placed them on the desk, flanking the sides of a Mackie d8b. Again, they sounded a bit dull and not as open as expected. Moving them off the desk and placing them further apart was an improvement, but as soon as we went vertical with the monitors, the "wow!" factor kicked in again. The difference between horizontal and vertical placement was astounding, as surprising the second time around as the first.

The HR626s have now risen to our expectations. You can hear the subtlety in different reverb algorithms and the definition between close knit timbres; placing the vocals in the mix is easy. And, our findings were consistent between two totally different listening environments — not an easy accomplishment for most monitors.

Bottom line: These are darn good speakers, but experiment with the monitor's settings and most importantly, their positioning. The Mackie HR626's monitors are very capable of translating your mixes to the outside world with clarity and definition. They're a good buy for the buck and, oh yeah, did I mention . . . they look mahvelous, too. **EQ**

Product type: Active, two-way monitor speakers

Target market: Higher-end project and home studios

Strengths: Consistent operation in different listening environments. Excellent detail and imaging. Impressive looks and good value.

Limitations: Vertical placement seems preferable to horizontal.

Price: \$839.99 list

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