

EQUIPMENT REPORT



Bowers & Wilkins Prestige Monitor 1 Loudspeaker

Easy To Like

Kirk Midtskog

Bowers & Wilkins

I had the pleasure of reviewing the B&W 805 Diamond for Issue 210 and, as a fan of good stand-mounted speakers, was pleased to receive the review assignment for the less expensive Prestige Monitor 1—PM1 for short. B&W felt that a meaningful price point was vacated when the former 800 Series line's least-expensive model changed from \$3500 (for the older 805 Signature) to \$5000 (for the new 805 Diamond). Enter the PM1, a beautiful, mocha brown and black mini-monitor that costs \$2800 per pair and \$550 for a pair of matching stands. Rather than “hot-rodding” an existing model to fill the void left by the discontinued 805 Signature, B&W developed a whole new speaker from the ground up.

The PM1 is much more than the culmination of a shrewd marketplace calculation, though; it is unlike any other B&W

speaker in its appearance and in some of its technology. First, it is considerably smaller than the 805 but delivers bass extension similar to that of the 805 Diamond; it also packs considerable dynamic punch for its size. Second, the PM1 has a rubber-covered bottom plate, arched top, and front baffle, whose top edge and sides are more rounded than the 805D's equivalent surfaces, presumably to reduce diffraction. (This also gives the PM1 a softer appearance compared to the more muscular combination of harder-edged and curved surfaces of the 805D.) Third, a new carbon-ring-braced aluminum tweeter—housed in a shorter version of B&W's characteristic tapered tweeter pod on top of the cabinet—makes its debut in the PM1. And, finally, the long-throw 5" Kevlar mid/woofer employs a new stiff, EVA polymer, foam-like center plug to reduce cone resonances better than a traditional dust cap. The

EQUIPMENT REPORT - Bowers & Wilkins Prestige Monitor 1 Loudspeaker



cabinet is larger and heavier than I normally encounter for a speaker with a single 5" mid/woofer, which makes B&W's claims of extensive resonance-reducing internal bracing and substantial construction materials plausible. The small size and attractive appearance of the speaker, together with its very nice looking stand, should make the package easy to integrate in a wide variety of living situations. I listened with the mid/bass grilles off, but left the tweeters' protective caps in place.

The sonic characteristic I first thought of when I began to get a sense of the PM1's sound was "fullness for its size." In my setup, it had an inviting warmth and rhythmic drive, and this carried through whether I used the Hegel H200 integrated amp (\$4400, Issue 211) or my normal preamp-power combo. The PM1 does not have bass much below the upper-40Hz zone, but my rather small and solidly-constructed room does not require a speaker to produce a lot of bass output to fill it, and thereby lay down a sense of musical foundation. A room that tends to drain bass energy will most likely tax the PM1 beyond its limits, because you may be inclined to turn up the volume in an attempt to produce bass energy it simply cannot deliver. In actuality, though, most listeners who would be interested in the PM1 in the first place would be well aware of the usual caveats concerning appropriate speaker and room (and amplifier) matching. The pairing amplifier should be fairly robust, as I found the PM1 somewhat difficult to drive. I had to turn it up to the same levels I do with my Dynaudio Confidence C1 speakers (also a difficult drive) to allow the music to "come alive."

Compared to the 805 Diamond, the PM produces about the same bass extension, or perhaps even a bit lower—a remarkable achievement from the PM1's 5" mid/bass unit and smaller cabinet vs. the 805D's 6.5" driver and larger cabinet. The PM1 also sounds slightly warmer and fuller in the midbass. If the somewhat trickier-to-position 805D is not set up optimally, it can sound just a hair bass-shy. With less-than-optimal positioning, the 805D can sound more fleshed out in its upper frequency range than in its lower end, and this can make you wish you had a subwoofer to fill in the bottom end more. Not so with the PM1, which may bump up the midbass just a bit to help give listeners the impression of fullness and help mitigate that sense of "small-speaker bass-shyness" we sometimes perceive. In my opinion, B&W made a wise voicing decision in this case. The 805D is a noticeably more accomplished, transparent, and refined transducer over all, but I would not be surprised if the PM1 has

greater appeal to some listeners for its more easily integrated, "comfortable" personality. Please don't get me wrong, here; the more I have worked with the 805D over time, the more I admire its coherency, resolution, and planar-like refinement. Also, the 805D's dynamics, pitch definition, and resolution in the bass are noticeably better than those of the PM1, as is the 805D's overall resolution. It just took me more set-up experimentation to extract all the positives from the 805D, but when it's set up properly, it is a very transparent and musically engaging speaker.

On its own terms, the PM1 has a coherent voice, favoring a rich, lilting musical portrayal over a sparkling, crystalline one. The PM1 does not suffer from a rolled-off upper end or lack of resolution, though. Its upper-frequency output is actually well fleshed out, extended, and smooth, but the PM1's slightly elevated midbass shifted the overall tonal balance to the warm, lush side rather than to the cool, lean side—or to the strictly neutral one, for that matter. The PM1 may have a more even-handed balance in many other rooms (mine tends to accentuate the bass with some speakers) and may just be the ticket for many listeners. Again, its bass output level is remarkable from a mini-monitor with a single 5" mid/bass driver.

Compared to live music, the PM1's general mix of detail and warmth produce a mid-hall to rear-of-the-hall listener perspective. In contrast, some speakers with warm tonal balances

SPECS & PRICING

Type: Two-way, vented-box system

Drivers: One 5" woven Kevlar mid/bass, one 1" carbon-fiber-reinforced aluminum dome tweeter

Frequency response: 48Hz-22kHz +/-3dB

Sensitivity: 84dB (2.83V, 1m)

Impedance: 8 ohms

Power handling: Not stated

Recommended amplifier power: 30W-100W into 8 ohms

Dimensions: 10.6" x 13" x 11.8" (height with dedicated stand, 25.6")

Weight: 20.5 lbs. each

Price: \$2800, Mocha Gloss finish; PM-1 stand, \$550 (pair)

ASSOCIATED EQUIPMENT

Analog Source: Basis Debut V turntable with Vector 4 tonearm, Benz-Micro LP S cartridge

Digital Source: Ayre C-5xeMP Phonostage preamp: Ayre P-5xe

Linestage preamp: Ayre K-1xe Integrated amplifier: Hegel H200

Power amplifier: Gamut M-200 monos

Speakers: Dynaudio Confidence C1, Aerial 7T, B&W 805 Diamond

Cables: Shunyata Anaconda signal cables and power cords, Wegrzyn power cords

A/C Power: Two 20-amp dedicated lines, Shunyata Triton power conditioner

Room Treatments: PrimeAcoustic Z-foam panels and DIY panels

B&W GROUP NORTH AMERICA

54 Concord Street
North Reading, MA 01864
(978) 664 2870
marketing@bwgroupusa.com
bowers-wilkins.com



EQUIPMENT REPORT - Bowers & Wilkins Prestige Monitor 1 Loudspeaker

attempt to goose up the “presence range,” which accents leading edges and registers more like a seating position closer to the musicians. The two competing characteristics—warmth and hyped-up leading edges—come across as incongruous and therefore artificial. Fortunately, the PM1 does not have a hint of such a schism. Soundstage width did not extend much beyond the outer edges of the cabinets, another contributor to the mid-to-rear-hall perspective. Recording permitting, the PM1 has some airiness, but favors making images sound more solid and weighty, which I consider to be more reminiscent of live music than a more indistinct, gossamer-like presentation. Individual images are not as three-dimensional as they could be, but they are certainly competitive with those of the Music Culture R21 [\$2800, Issue 215], for example.

The PM1’s overall resolution is good, but not quite good enough to really carry some recordings to the level that sweeps you away (as the 805D can). Tord Gustavson’s “Draw Near” [*Being There*, ECM] is an intimate Third Stream Jazz piece. The trio lays down the progression, but Gustavson, in particular, alters his piano phrasing by gently softening some of the notes (or leaving some out) so that you, the listener, are drawn into the performance by filling in the missing elements in your own mind. The effect makes the music more intimate, in my estimation, than if the trio had played the work more straightforwardly. The PM1 gets some of the “Draw Near” magic, but leaves some behind. Perhaps it is unfair to ask so much from a \$2800 speaker.

The PM1 makes a lot of music sound enjoyable, even flawed recordings, and this should make it appealing to many listeners looking for an easy-to-use speaker. Alanis Morissette’s voice on

“That Particular Time” [*Under Rug Swept*, Maverick] will veer toward brightness (or even shrillness) through some speakers, but the PM1 kept Morissette’s upper register from painfully popping out in the mix. Rather than attempt to push the resolution envelope at its price level, it artfully integrates musical details with sonic solidity so that one is more likely to listen to the music for its tunefulness rather than for the documentation of a musical event: “art reproduction” over “archive retrieval,” if you will. Please do not assume that the PM1 is a soft-focus, pillow-like speaker. It has plenty of resolution; it just doesn’t hurl details at you. The new carbon-filament-braced aluminum tweeter apparently extends the dome’s breakup frequency (B&W claims it to be 40kHz) far enough beyond the limits of human hearing to allow a linear and smooth response. Such an extended response supposedly removes tweeter breakup effects from influencing the part of the spectrum we can hear—at least in theory. The new tweeter is impressive, but...it is no 800 Series Diamond, either. Of course, one has to shell out another \$2200, over the price of the PM1, to buy a pair of 805 Diamond speakers, and the 805 Diamond’s superior performance comes from a lot more than merely its diamond tweeter.

While its limited absolute bass output and dynamic range prevent it from portraying a large orchestra with gusto or rocking out with abandon, the PM1 nevertheless has enough resolution, dynamic life, and bass presence to make many recordings viable and enjoyable. I spent many an hour simply listening to music for its own sake and not really worrying about how much better it could be. The PM1 gets more right than not. As a speaker/stand package, I found the PM1 easy to like, and I daresay it will appeal to many other listeners as well. **tas**