

MISSION

SM6A Active Monitors

Active monitors are becoming so popular it's starting to have a real affect on amplifier sales. Will the new SM6As accelerate the process? **Bob Dormon** is on a Mission to find out...

SM6A ACTIVE MONITORS

Manufacturer **Mission**

Price **£599**

Contact

Sound Technology
01462 480000

www.missionprofessional.com

Mission has been catering for hi-fi buffs for decades, but the pro-audio marketplace is relatively new for the company and the Mission Pro range of speakers is quite distinct from the living-room designs that the UK company has built its reputation on.

The SM6P nearfield monitor speakers were introduced in 2003, but upping the price by some £250 is the latest model, the SM6A. It features the same basic speaker configuration, but includes a built-in amp in each enclosure plus controls at the rear to tailor the response according to listening environment.

Missionary position

At 14.4-inches high, 8.1-inches wide and 10.5-inches deep, the SM6A monitors are sizeable without being too imposing. Housed in 'structurally braced' MDF enclosures, magnetically shielded (so nearby CRT displays don't suffer) and weighing in at 12kg

they're each a third heavier than the passive SM6P models. Mission states that they should be used standing on their bases with the treble units at the bottom.

This inverted driver geometry means that the angle of the front baffle is not critical to the listener,

that, when active, puts the speakers into standby mode if there's no sound input for 15 minutes.

There's a column of three knobs for bass contour, mid EQ and volume. The four contour settings (Flat, Wall 1, Wall 2 and Extended) alter the low-frequency response to suit the

Offering excellent performance and real versatility, these monitors certainly aim to please.

though the tweeter is supposed to be at ear height for optimal listening. That said, Mission concedes that it anticipates few users abiding by these installation instructions precisely. If placed on their sides, the company recommends that optimum performance is achieved by angling the speakers towards the listener.

The back of the speaker is more interesting than the front – albeit not so pretty – and the 2.5-inch bass port is tapered to reduce turbulence. Above it is a metal panel bolted onto the speaker housing with Allen screws. This is home to the amplifier and at the bottom is an IEC mains socket and power switch. There's also a smaller Auto Power on/off switch

position of the monitors. The mid EQ has two settings: Studio and Hi-Fi. The Studio position delivers a flat power response for accurate monitoring. By contrast, the Hi-Fi setting is designed to recreate the performance of typical domestic loudspeakers by introducing a dip in the frequency range between 1–3kHz. The thinking behind this is that users can master in Studio mode and then switch over to the Hi-Fi position to check the mix.

The volume control has a rotary action (with detent) for more accurate matching of the two levels between the active speaker pairs. This control also puts a limit on the maximum playback volume as, tempting though it is, it isn't necessary to crank them up full and use the mixer to take care of monitoring levels. In fact, backing off a bit will give more control over intermediate listening levels.

The SM6A includes a phono input and also features a balanced combo jack accommodating both XLR plugs and ¼-inch TRS jacks. Each amplifier is IEC rated at 80W (LF) and 50W (HF) with peak performance quoted at double these levels. The paramid bass driver describes the cone's sandwich as aramid fibres and pulp paper – a combination designed to deliver low resonance and high rigidity.

The treble unit is a one-inch (26mm) ring radiator soft dome design. Both are mounted on a 38mm front baffle within silver trims; the woofer uses a mineral-loaded plastic surround, and the tweeter includes a

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★★★★★





metal plate. Tucked away at the bottom-right corner of each cabinet are two LEDs. One glows amber in standby mode, changing to green for power on. The other LED indicates if the speaker is being overloaded.

Image conscious

Even with the volume cautiously set to just over halfway, the SM6As prove to be plenty loud enough and distinguish themselves by their excellent definition. The robust bass response is complemented by a clean mid range and crisp top end. There's a hint of the low/mid resonance that you'd expect to find in speakers of this size and design, but it's not particularly noticeable. In fact, efforts to find any significant faults in the sound of these speakers ultimately comes to nothing and leaves you conceding that these are particularly good active monitors.

Mission claims its Pro monitors are not 'position dependent' and give the listener the freedom to move around and still hear their full range and 'spatial coherence'. Indeed, it's this latter quality that you really notice, as the monitors precisely map the stereo image of mixes and bring panning movements to life.

METHOD SPOT Dual response

For hi-fi applications, speakers are designed to enhance frequencies at the bottom and top ends of the spectrum and reduce mid-range sensitivity. The Mission Pro range offers the flat response required for studio applications, but also includes the option of delivering a 'domestic' hi-fi response with its EQ and extended bass contour settings.

Standby me

One area of concern was that the setting of playback level appeared to cause problems for the Auto Power function, which seems to lack sensitivity. In fact, with low-level signals it can begin its countdown to enter standby mode during playback. Obviously, the speaker volume setting will have some bearing on the perceived input playback level, but still, for A/V applications (where Mission hopes the Pro range will be welcomed) long passages of silence followed by cues slowly fading up may become truncated or fail to wake the Auto Power function. The solution is to use the manual power switch.

The four bass contour positions do make subtle differences to the output. Flat is the best all-rounder, and the Extended setting exaggerates the bass response for the monitors' Hi-Fi mode. By contrast, the two Wall settings make slight reductions to the bass response to compensate for the effects of placing the speakers close to walls.

With powered speakers now becoming de rigeur in A/V and project studios, the SM6As seem well placed to take on the likes of Yamaha and Genelec. When

shopping for active monitors you will, of course, need to listen to several models – just make sure the SM6As are on your list. [MTM](#)

SUMMARY

KEY FEATURES

- Discrete transistor amp design
- 80W (LF)/50W (HF) output (IEC rating)
- Frequency range: 58Hz–28kHz
- Dual, independent PSU for HF/LF amps
- Clip-detect circuit
- Balanced and unbalanced connectivity
- Bass contour controls

WHY BUY

- Loud and precise monitoring
- Robust and even response at all levels
- Active monitoring convenience
- Bass contour and EQ options to suit environment
- Magnetically shielded

WALK ON BY

- Auto on/off sensitivity can occasionally be problematic

VERDICT

Offering excellent overall performance and real versatility, these monitors certainly aim to please. But remember to experiment with the bass contours – they're there for a reason...

