

Live Wire... The Adam HM2 Loudspeaker

by Jason Kennedy



Adam Professional Audio is a loudspeaker brand that I've previously come across at the Munich show; you can't miss its humungous OSS system with its four cabinets per channel and sixty drive units per pair. But it would seem that this is just the tip of the iceberg in terms of its range, which has both professional and domestic sections, including active systems, subs et al.

Adam is in fact an acronym for advanced dynamic audio monitors, but it still has a digital apple as its logo. Apart from the unusually shaped cabinet all Adam speakers feature a distinctive tweeter, which it says is built using ART, an acronym for Accelerating Ribbon Technology. This is Adam's take on the Air Motion Transformer (AMT) design created by Oskar Heil in 1972. While it looks similar to a ribbon transducer it actually operates on a principle that's rather like an accordion, as sound is produced when a signal passing through a track on a corrugated polyester diaphragm causes the corrugations to compress together. As with ribbons, the AMT design requires very powerful magnets and is not very efficient, and John Borwick (in his *Loudspeaker and Headphone Handbook*) pointed out that "the uniform output over the whole diaphragm causes difficulties in achieving a suitable directivity characteristic."

According to Adam its advantage is that the principle achieves a 4:1 ratio of air to transducer, or fold, movement and that for this reason it is a better impedance match to air than a traditional piston driver unit with a 1:1 ratio. The company claims that its ART tweeters have 93dB sensitivity and an impedance of 3.2 ohms (+/- 0.05 ohms). I note that it describes directivity as 'reasonable' which might suggest that this is a weak point, as manufacturer's claims are usually on the optimistic

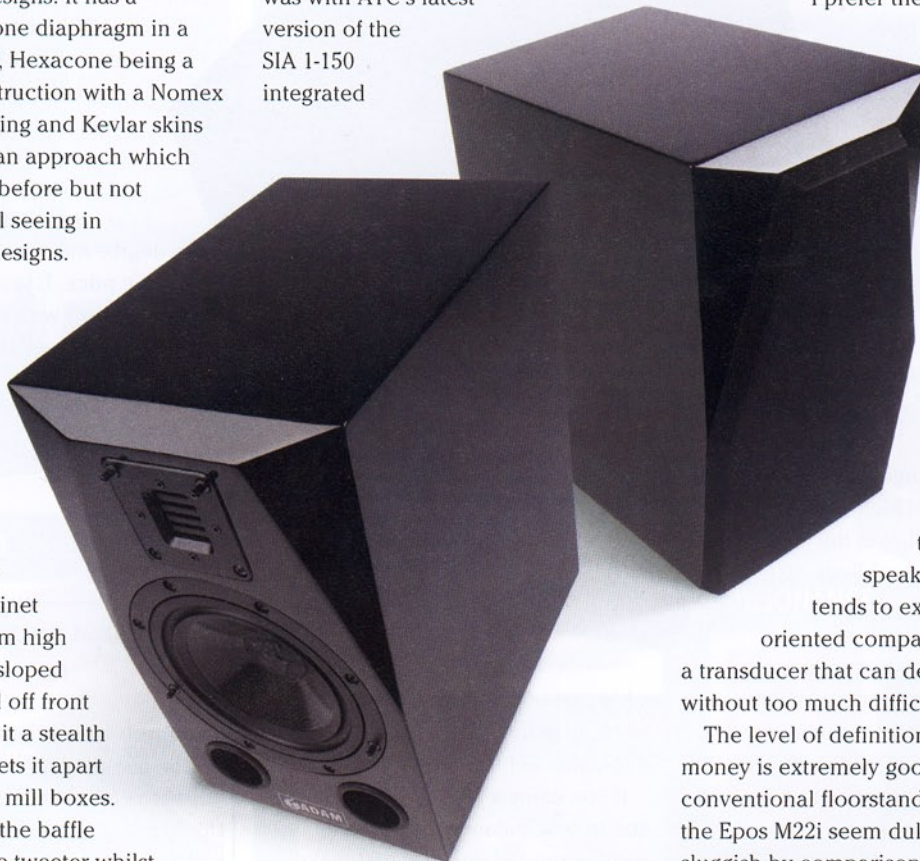
► side, even in Germany. Adam also builds a midrange ART driver with a bandwidth of 600Hz – 3.2kHz, but that is reserved for bigger speakers than the HM2.

This is the larger of two stand mounts in the Home Monitor range, but this series lies at the entry-level end of Adam's extensive catalogue of designs. It has a 120mm Hexacone diaphragm in a 177mm chassis, Hexacone being a sandwich construction with a Nomex honeycomb filling and Kevlar skins on both sides, an approach which has been used before but not one that I recall seeing in many current designs.

Essentially it should create significant stiffness in the cone, in much the same way that Rohacel foam does in some of B&W's cones. The cabinet is a decent 37cm high and features a sloped top and lopped off front corners to give it a stealth aesthetic that sets it apart from run of the mill boxes. It also reduces the baffle area around the tweeter whilst placing sound diffracting corners close to the driver.

The standard of construction is very slick and the piano black finish beautifully shiny, offsetting the polished stainless finish of the binding posts on the back. Out of the box these bi-wire terminals are connected with speaker cable jumpers rather than the usual gold plated bus bars, a very encouraging touch that suggests Adam has listened to the effect of the popular solution and coughed up for something superior.

Above the terminals there is a switch that adjusts treble output by plus or minus 1.5dB, which should make it easier to balance the speaker to suit a given room. I started out using it in the 0dB flat position but ended up selecting the down tilted -1.5dB option, but I do prefer a smoother top end. Initial listening was with ATC's latest version of the SIA 1-150 integrated



amplifier, a £2,203 powerhouse from a brand that has similar pro/domestic tendencies. This pairing produced a good, open sound that escapes the boxes well and has a good sense of pace. It also revealed that the Adam needs a bit of wall reinforcement if it's to deliver low frequency grunt, those two forward firing reflex ports do little to discourage this and in my room they worked best with only about four inches behind the closest corner of the speaker when they were toed in.

The HM2s have a pretty lively sound that brings out the vibrancy in music and makes speakers like ATC's own SCM19 seem restrained across the mid and top. When playing at normal and lower volume levels this helps to bring out detail and makes the music feel more intimate, material allowing. At higher levels however

I prefer the control on

offer from the more expensive (£1,495) ATCs as they are a lot calmer under fire. This could be because the room is a little big for the Adam but it's not that small a

speaker and one tends to expect a pro oriented company to make a transducer that can deliver level without too much difficulty.

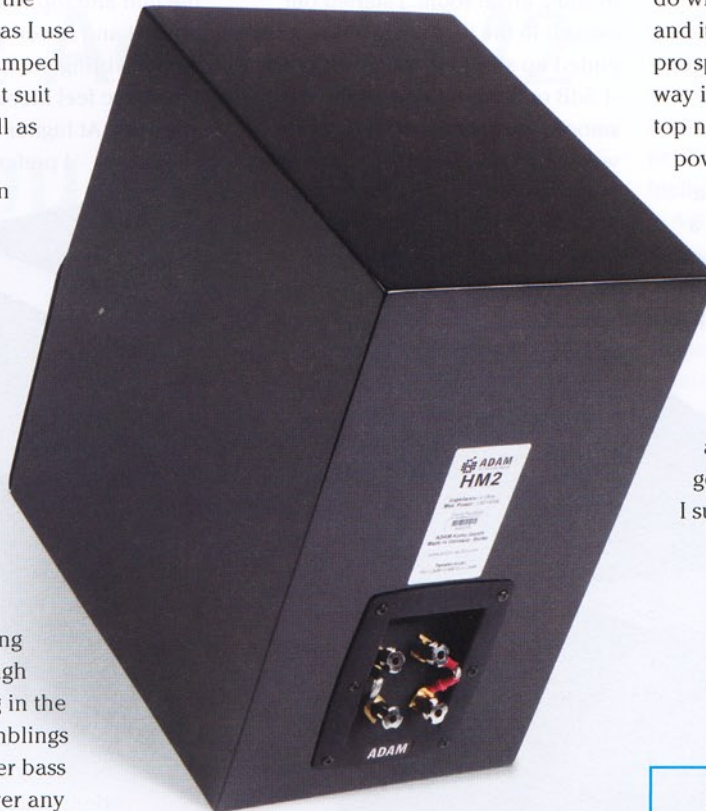
The level of definition for the money is extremely good; more conventional floorstanders such as the Epos M22i seem dull and a little sluggish by comparison. Of course the other side of that coin is that they are easier to live with and deliver greater bass extension. But the life force that the HM2 can pull out of most recordings does make it a more thrilling speaker and one to which you are more likely to pay attention. Another floorstander in this price sector is the PMC GB1i, this offers a fuller bass and a sweeter top end alongside a better sense of timing but is again slightly lacking in the detail department next to the HM2. Of course neither of these speakers costs as much as the HM2 when you ►

▶ factor in a good quality stand and this is something you need to get decent results. I would recommend something heavy to solidify the bass and calm the treble; the Atacamas I use are not filled or damped and probably don't suit this speaker as well as they could.

Taken on its own merits the HM2 is well suited to luxurious recordings, MeShell Ndege Ocello's *Peace Beyond Passion*, with its chunky bass lines and super smooth production sounds superb, the speaker bringing out the detail of high bells and revelling in the low frequency rumblings emanating from her bass guitar. There's never any shortage of scale either. In fact this is a distinct strongpoint, with all manner of material the sound easily escapes the boxes and expands to fill the space both between and beyond the speakers. Imaging is expansive rather than particularly precise but this would probably be improved if the speakers were pulled away from the wall, albeit at the cost of body in the bass.

I thoroughly enjoyed listening to Zappa's *Punky's Whips* on these, despite the degree of compression that affects it and its slightly raucous, live nature. This speaker lets you hear what his large-scale band is doing and brings a vivacity to the brass and guitar that is particularly convincing. It doesn't, however, let you play it quite as loud as one would like in a comfortable manner, even with a

Classé CA-2200 power amplifier in charge. This with the treble turned down. I tried different degrees of toe in but the room is always



a big part of the picture, presumably because of the good overall dispersion achieved by the speaker.

If you enjoy a slightly bright and upbeat balance they offer a combination of qualities that make them extremely competitive in a market of rather safer sounding alternatives in more domestically fashionable packages. The fact that there isn't a floorstander in the Adam HM range would suggest that the German market has not fallen prey to a trend that reveals how difficult it is to put a decent loudspeaker in the average British living room these days. Stand mounts do seem to have an advantage in many respects, largely because there is less cabinet to flap about and muddy the picture, something which is clearly

not happening here. That stealth shaping not only affects dispersion but enhances the rigidity of the front baffle. The ART tweeter has much to do with the resolution on offer here and its inclusion in the company's pro speakers, which have found their way into Abbey Road among other top notch studios, would suggest that power handling is not an issue.

The HM2 communicates very well and that's what you need from an audio component. Thanks to the amount of detail coming out of the speaker you can hear into recordings to a degree that's quite unusual at the price. If you want to get involved with your music I suggest you seek them out. ▶+

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Type:	Two-way bass reflex
Driver Complement:	177 mm HexaCone bass/mid A.R.T. tweeter
Freq.response (± 3 dB):	40 Hz - 35 kHz
Efficiency:	87 dB/W/m
Impedance:	4 Ohms nominal
Dimensions (WxHxD):	220 x 370 x 320 mm
Weight:	10 kg ea.
Warranty:	10 years
Finish:	Piano black, glossy silver
Price:	£1295

Distributor:
Unity Audio Ltd
Tel. (44)(0)1440 785843
Net. www.unityaudio.co.uk

Manufacturer:
Adam Audio
Net. www.adam-audio.de