



Studio Time

It's not hard to hear the professional pedigree of ADAM Audio's HM3 Monitor loudspeakers, says Adam Smith...

The relationship between the world of studio monitoring loudspeakers and the home hi-fi market has never been a truly happy one. Many people see this as a reasonable thing, after all the two end users require different things from their loudspeakers – the home listener wants to hear their music reproduced in the nicest way possible, sometimes even forgoing a smidgen of accuracy if the result takes the edges off poor recordings. On the other hand, the studio engineer wants to hear exactly how the recording sounds, warts and all, so that corrections can be made in order to make the result sound palatable through that domestic hi-fi system.

The problem is that these two worlds need not be quite so mutually exclusive. After all, isn't it fair to assume that a pair of loudspeakers that pinpoint recording and mastering issues might then reproduce the

corrected and final result rather well? It seems that I am not the only person who has explored this point of view and, as a result, there are more than a few loudspeakers that have successfully made the break from the studio and into the living room. Let us not forget that the classic Rogers LS3/5As originated in this way, as well as Spendor BC1s, B&W 801s, Yamaha NS1000Ms and also the Ferrograph S1s that I use myself – mine started out as the semi-professional version, finished in a hideous shade of grey, instead of a hideous shade of teak!

Furthermore, there are many loudspeaker companies that successfully straddle the professional and domestic environments. The likes of PMC and B&W are well known, but Germany's ADAM Audio are a relative newcomer to this side of the mixing desk, and are gradually establishing a strong presence. Last year I took a listen to one of the models in ADAM's top Tensor Range,

the Gammas, and they left a very strong impression on me.

Now the more affordable Home Monitor range is here, derived from the active 'S' series, and fitting in at the other end of the scale from the Tensor models. The first step on the ADAM ladder, they share technology with their bigger brothers, namely ADAM's ART tweeter, based on the Heil Air Motion Transformer principle, and the Hexacone material used as the basis of the twin seven inch bass drivers. The HM3s actually look like centre channel designs, as they are styled and designed to be used horizontally, but they can be used vertically – best keep the grilles on, though, as the 'ADAM' logos look a bit odd oriented sideways!

The HM3s are a full three way design, with one woofer only coming in below 150Hz. As a result, the loudspeakers are 'handed', although ADAM state that you can experiment with placing the low end woofer to the inside or outside as you prefer.

For vertical operation the speakers need to be positioned so that the lowest drivers are at the bottom, but this leaves one terminal panel at the top of the rear face of one loudspeaker and at the bottom of the other, which is a little odd!

Another tip that ADAM Audio passed on was that, when using them vertically, it pays to unscrew the tweeter and rotate it through ninety degrees so that the diffuser on the front of it is aligned horizontally, which is how the unit was designed. Bi-wiring terminals are fitted and a three position switch offers the option of running the tweeter flat, boosted by 1.5dB or cut by the same amount. The HM3s are available in gloss black or silver, tip the tape measure at 370x220x320mm and weigh a sturdy 14kg each.

SOUND QUALITY

Well run in, I commenced listening and straightaway realised that there is a definite family sound, as I could hear echoes of the Tensor Gammas in the HM3s' performance. Initially however, I felt that they slightly lacked focus across the centre of the soundstage, despite being very spacious and detailed. However, remembering ADAM's advice, I duly popped the tweeters out, rotated them and sat back down again. This was more like it; the central image had now gained impressive stability and everything had snapped nicely into focus – much better! The other thing I noticed during setup is that the HM3s are quite amplifier-sensitive. They never sound unpleasant, but one or two units I put through them really left them slumbering along rather disinterestedly. Luckily, my Naim SuperNait tickled them into life perfectly.

It was interesting to take a wander through my record collection with the HM3s, as they really let you hear into the secrets of the recording studio or concert hall that somehow don't quite seem to make it through other loudspeakers. I found myself shutting my eyes and looking at the aural picture they painted as well as listening to the music, as the HM3s seem just as capable as their bigger brothers at setting up the kind of image you feel you could get up and walk around in, without any trickery like stretching things off to the sides or into the distance unrealistically. After a little experimentation I settled on the -1.5dB setting for the tweeter, as the 0dB was just a fraction too glaring at times, and a brief play with the 1.5dB setting had the cat running from the room! Luckily I had the remote control in

my hand to bring things to a rapid halt, otherwise I wouldn't have been far behind him...

As a result of their intricate nature, the HM3s are quite different to many domestic loudspeakers. Their balance is forward without a doubt, but they are not hard or splashy, just incredibly detailed, focused and forthright. Intriguingly, they almost sound rather bass light on first encounter, but as I listened more, I realised that once again, ADAM have engineered such a solid cabinet and populated it with well designed drivers that you are hearing what you are supposed to without anything playing along. Bass guitars were astoundingly taut, fast and lithe with a swift rhythmical nature that almost had me holding my breath as my ears tried to keep up.

For anyone who still thinks that a loudspeaker with a hole or two in the box cannot start and stop on a sixpence, then they need to check these out - do you hear me DP? [beg pardon? Ed.] However, when a synth bass line came thundering along, or a kick drum pounded out, the HM3s were well up to the task of passing this event to my ears though the air, and also my derriere via the sofa. I suspect real bassheads might still feel the need for a subwoofer (ADAM sell a matching one), but for most of us the HM3s go as low as we could ever need; certainly I never felt short-changed, even though my Ferrographs do go noticeably lower.

Their monitor nature proved adept at detailing all kinds of instruments, and picking up those cheating artists who try and pass off an electronic facsimile as the real thing. This could be something of a mixed blessing at times, however; spinning some Antonio Forcione and Charlie Haden was a delight in terms of capturing the real essence of every single note they played, and

pulled everything perfectly together in a lovely musical parcel. Changing to Ravel's Bolero however, again gave stunning clarity to each of the players but somehow the essential emotion of the piece seemed to take a slight backseat as the HM3s strove to tell you what each individual instrument was doing, seemingly slightly glossing over why they were doing it. Other than this however, the ADAMs romped through dance, rock and some proper Kenny Ball style jazz with alacrity and never failed to put a big smile on my face when the occasion demanded.


CONCLUSION

The ADAM HM3s are an intriguing loudspeaker prospect. They are not as forgiving as their bigger Tensor brothers in terms of partnering equipment, and they can

occasionally lack warmth, but they offer detail, insight and stunning fleet-footedness when fed with a good rhythm. Like good old Marmite, they really will not be for everyone – I suspect the valves 'n' horns brigade will hate them - but I thought they were superb. Audition comprehensively and partner carefully, and you could be wondering how you ever listened without them.



REFERENCE SYSTEM
 Garrard 301 turntable/
 Cardas wired Alphason
 HR-100S arm
 Audio Technica AT-
 OC9MLII cartridge
 Anatek MC1 phono stage
 Marantz CD94 CD player
 Naim SuperNait amplifier

VERDICT  £
 Proper monitors for the home, the HM3s are unobtrusive, beautifully built and capable of revealing things you didn't know your music contained.

ADAM HM3 £1,999
ADAM Audio
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 www.adam-audio.com

FOR
 - taut upper bass
 - insight and clarity
 - spacious nature
 - build and finish

AGAINST
 - can lack warmth
 - need careful partnering

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

As per their larger brothers, the Adam HM3s have a generally even trend to their frequency response, with just a few undulations in the upper registers. None of these are larger than a couple of dB however, so should not give an audibly unpleasant result. The rear panel tweeter adjustment switch introduces a treble lift or cut of 1.5dB in two of its positions and it can be seen that this comes into effect above 2kHz or so. This will allow subtle fine-tuning for rooms or partnering equipment that are a touch too bright or soft, without unduly altering the balance of the loudspeaker.

At the low end, the lower driver commences rolloff around 80Hz and is reinforced by the twin ports that operate over a broad area down to their tuning frequency of around 35Hz. Port output is clean, and the HM3s should have good weight for their size, although the dip of 1dB or so from 300-600Hz may reduce the impact of the upper bass a little.

Electrically, the HM3s have an even response with little to upset a fragile amplifier. Their overall impedance is low, coming in at an average of 4.7 Ohms, and dropping

down to a minimum of around 3.5 Ohms, fortunately at higher frequencies where current draw is less of an issue. Their sensitivity is good however at 90dB, so they will not require huge amounts of watts to sing enthusiastically. AS

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



Green - driver output
 Red - port output

IMPEDANCE

