

ADAM Audio S1-A Active Studio Monitor

An out-of-the-ordinary tweeter design yields extraordinary sound

It's no bigger than many other nearfield monitors, except for its price. Is the S1-A from German manufacturer ADAM Professional Audio a big-league player?

Front

It only measures 17 cm wide, 29.4 cm tall, and 26 cm deep (roughly 6³/₄" x 11⁵/₈" x 10¹/₄") and it comes in unobtrusive black. There are two port holes at the bottom corners, below a 5" woofer that's topped by a square tweeter visible through a window measuring 1¹/₈" wide by 1³/₈" tall, surrounded by a rectangular mounting plate that's roughly 1" wide all around.

Rear and specs

The line input is XLR. There are recessed trim pots for room eq, ±6 dB shelving below 150 Hz and above 6 kHz. Two more trim pots take care of overall gain (±10 dB) and of separate tweeter gain ("High Gain" ±4 dB). All pots are set to zero for flat response and medium gain at the factory before shipping. Then there is the IEC AC socket with an on/off toggle switch.

The weight of each speaker is 8 kg (about 17 lbs), reflecting the fact that there are separate power amplifiers for woofer and tweeter, each listed as 100 W (rms) with a crossover frequency of 2.2 kHz for a maximum

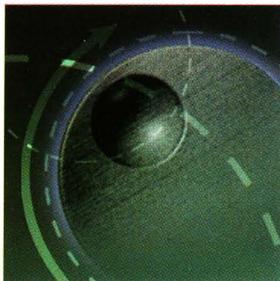
The ribbon tweeter is resilient and capable of astounding subtlety in delivering percussive and sustained treble, while the bass and overall tonal reproduction is of superior quality.

The woofer is made from a honeycomb structure coated on both sides with Kevlar that ADAM calls HexaCone, and looks fairly standard. But the tweeter with its horizontal bands (see product picture) attracts attention. Turns out that the tweeter technology is named A.R.T. which stands for Advanced Ribbon Technology, an interesting procedure using pleated (folded) diaphragms—check the company's website if you're as intrigued as we were.

SPL of ≥103 dB/W/m. The unit's frequency response is listed as 40 Hz–35 kHz ±3 dB.

Setting up

The manual uses charming Berliner English to suggest upright positioning if at all possible, at least 40 cm (about 16") from walls, with the tweeters at ear level. It also suggests listening for quite a while before altering any of the pot settings on the rear. All excellent



review

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advice—I would only add that the recommended minimal 16" distance from walls is probably much closer than optimal. Several feet is surely preferable to avoid, quoting the manual, "early reflections that will "smear" the sound in time."

Setup is a breeze, as long as one has line-level connections from mixer to monitor on XLR, or an adapter solution. Once in place, the speakers deliver excellent imaging, allowing the listener some useful lateral movement before the stereo field begins to wane.

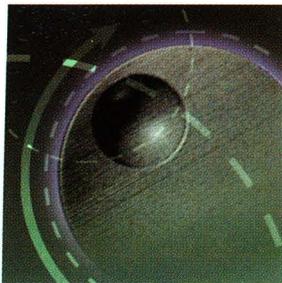
But what about the sound?

If first impressions count, this reporter got off to a good start. As it happens, the first record I put up had drummer Peter Erskine play intricate cymbal patterns, and it sounded like a whole new experience from a beautiful track I had heard many times before (*The Music of Eric Van Essen, vol. 1,*

www.cryptogramophone.com). The nuances of sticks hitting already ringing cymbals, in different locations, done with the subtlety of one of the world's best drummers, were uncanny. There is so much sonic information there that I had never heard before that I immediately zeroed in on Dave Carpenter's upright bass and was equally rewarded, although with fewer surprises.

This called for an extensive listening session. I put the well-stocked 5-platter CD changer into shuffle mode and tackled some other work. Three hours later I had experienced not the slightest ear fatigue; instead I had made many more discoveries from records with which I'm very familiar. Time and again it was the tweeters that delivered the surprises. Transient response and clarity is excellent in the crucial range where brass needs to bite, and bite it did, on the splendid recordings of Maria Schneider's *Evanescence* and





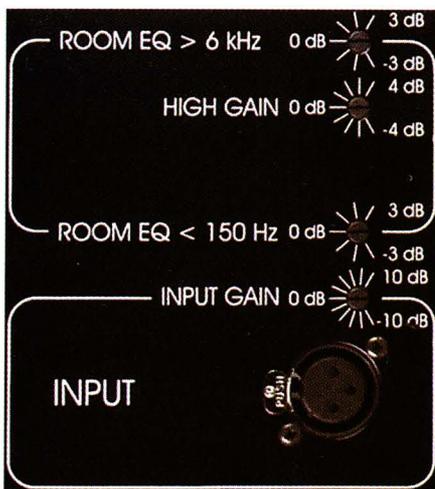
Coming About (both on Enja) among many others.

Piano recordings vary greatly in the shadings that are possible from different instruments and individual miking and mixing choices, and never more so than when heard on really good speakers. All the variety of engineering approaches was clearly evident from records like Eliane Elias' *Kissed By Nature* (RCA/BMG) and from Emanuel Ax playing Strauss and Britten sonatas for piano and cello (with Yo-yo Ma, on a CBS Records Masterworks CD). The always enthralling cello tones of Mr. Ma came across with stunning beauty.

Voices like cool and calculated Tierney Sutton (*Something Cool* on Telarc Jazz), exuberant Claudia Acuña on *Rhythm Of Life* (on Verve), and other songbirds only sounded harsh when the recording contained harshness—the S1-A disguises nothing. The Acuña tracks are full of busy percussion, and it was great fun to detect the many colors on repeated listenings. When a swishing bell-tree sounds like dozens of individual and pure high-pitched sound sources then you know you're listening to a very special tweeter.

After listening to a number of contemporary rock and pop tracks where it is never easy to divine just what is really supposed to sound like what (is it the instrument or the sample or the processing?), I resorted to a piece I heard Esa-Pekka Salonen conduct in concert some years ago, the L.A. Philharmonic playing Lutoslawski's 3rd Symphony that stretches the boundaries of modern music. It is on Sony's all-digital recording of *Lutoslawski Symphonies Nos. 3 & 4*, two works with extremely subtle and brutal orchestral colorings that challenge any playback system. The way the tweeters in the S1-A delivered the intricately overlapping orchestral voicings and the recurring percussive slams convinced me that this is an exceptional design.

Bass on the S1-A is adequate in quantity and quite exquisite in quality. I listened to my usual suspects, from Victor Wooten's quirky electric bass excursions to many acoustic Jazz bassists to the double basses opening Stravinsky's *Firebird*, soon to be



joined in octave-unison by the celli, a telling moment when evaluating bass response of playback systems. The S1-A excelled in all departments, including kick drums, although there the small size of the woofer limits impact. For clients needing to hear realistic club mixes and the like, a subwoofer will have to do the trick.

Finally I put up some samples and synth sounds I'm currently working

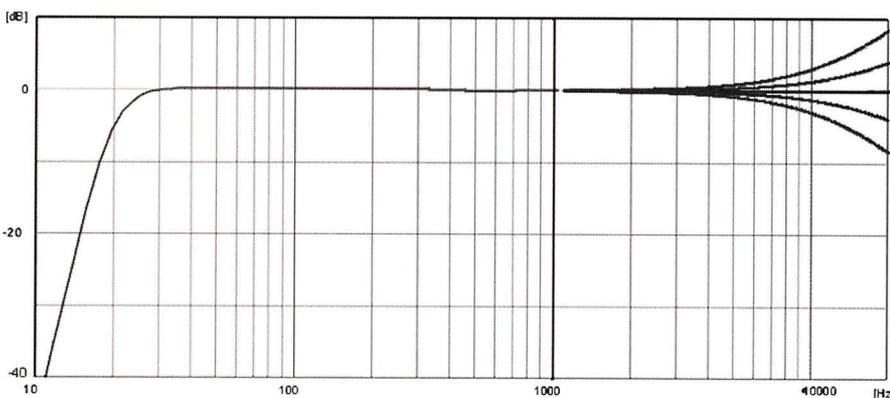
with, including Gary Garritan's excellent orchestral string samples (www.garritan.com), and I was further convinced that the S1-A is of exceptional quality.

It's only money?

The S1-A is a highly accurate design that speaks the truth without causing listener fatigue. The ribbon tweeter is resilient and capable of astounding subtlety in delivering percussive and sustained treble, while the bass and overall tonal reproduction is of superior quality. I wish I could answer the obvious question, namely whether the considerable expense in getting the S1-A would guarantee a commensurate increase in a purchaser's creative output. Maybe not. But those with that kind of budget should give the S1-A all due consideration—they will not be disappointed.

Price: \$2300/pair

More from: ADAM Audio USA, 3717 E. Thousand Oaks Blvd., Westlake Village, CA 91362. 805/413-1133, fax 805/413-1134, www.adam-audio.com.



A few sample curves available from the shelving eq above 6 kHz (above) and below 150 Hz (below).

