



PMC twenty5 22i Hi-Fi Review

By Simon Wilce

This is my review of the rather attractive and classic looking PMC twenty5 22i standmount speakers. They are part of PMC's twenty5 range that sees the series progress to twenty5i; the 'i', comments PMC, represents an improvement. The full range includes a slightly smaller standmount, the 21i, a compact floorstanding speaker, the 23i, and two further floorstanding speakers, the 24i and the 3-way 26i. The range benefits from the thinking associated with the highest specification Fact Fenestria speakers, all fifty thousand pounds worth of them; feels like good value to me. Speaking of price, the PMC twenty5 22i is priced near £3,295 and the stands to match are a further £395. The 21i is priced near £2,195 and from the floorstanding 23i, the prices increase from £3,850 to £8,995 for the flagship 26i.

Design

Across the twenty5i range, the 21i and the 23i have a smaller 140mm woofer. This is a long-throw g-weave cone with cast alloy chassis that has been developed by PMC. The 22i, 24i and 26i have a larger woofer at 170mm made of the same g-weave material. All of the twenty5i speakers have the same tweeter, a 19mm SONOMEX fabric soft dome that is ferrofluid cooled, with 34mm surround and dispersion grille. The 26i has an additional driver in the mid-range consisting of a 50mm chambered soft dome.

PMC Advanced Transmission Line

The key element of PMCs design is their dedication to Advanced Transmission Line (ATL) technology in the twenty5i range. PMC's ATL technology uses the resonant air in the cabinet to direct the lowest frequencies through the front panel vent. The passage of this rearward energy from the voice coils passes through the folded cabinet passages lined with custom-designed acoustic materials that absorb unwanted rear radiated distortion allowing the lowest frequencies to pass through.

Cont.

Verdict

Love

Bass control
Open soundstage
Precise and clean resolution
Beautiful sound

Like

Aesthetic style
The shape of the cabinet
Front vent

Specification

Available finishes: walnut, diamond black, oak and white silk
Crossover frequency: 1.7kHz
Dimensions: H 410mm (16.1") x W 192mm (7.6") x D 373mm (14.7") incl. binding posts (+9mm grille)
Drive units: LF PMC 6.5"/170mm long-throw g-weave cone with cast alloy chassis; HF PMC/SEAS, 19mm twenty5i series, SONOMEX fabric soft dome, Ferrofluid cooled, with 34mm surround and dispersion grille
Connectors:
One pair 4mm binding posts
Effective ATL Length: 2m (6.5ft)
Frequency response: 39Hz – 25kHz
Impedance: 8ohm
Sensitivity: 89dB 1W/1m
Weight: 10kg (22 lbs ea.)

“ These are proper, grown-up speakers... ”



There is a huge amount of technology and formulae involved in this design, for example, the length of the folded line in the cabinet has to be calculated correctly, to a quarter of the length of the lowest frequency. This design characteristic ensures the bass frequencies are perfectly presented to the listener giving the clean detailed bass that is delivered through their Laminair vents, which project the bass straight forward. The effect is like having a second bass driver.

Oliver @ PMC

I was fortunate to have a conversation with Oliver Thomas who is one of PMC's research experts and he certainly put me straight on PMC's ATL technology. We had a wide-ranging chat that started accidentally with me asking Oliver what equipment they use to listen to their speakers as they develop them. It turns out PMC use a variety of amplifiers at with different impedance characteristics to ensure the speakers can work across a variety of systems. Bryston amplifiers, it seems, feature heavily in the development as a 'neutral amplifier'. As PMC is the UK distributor for Canadian electronic component manufacturer Bryston, it is no surprise that its amplifiers feature heavily in product development. Naim amplifiers and other 'middling' amplifiers are used as well. Oliver pointed out, however, that there is no electronic reason why PMC speakers should perform any better with Naim electronics despite the adulation PMC receives regularly on the Naim forums.

I was interested to understand why PMC speakers came with just the two terminals rather than offering a bi-wired input.

Oliver was clear that there were only subjective advantages to bi-wired speakers, I would not disagree unduly, and a good quality cable is a fundamental requirement in any case. I was also keen to understand who the speaker range was aimed at, and after consideration, Oliver suggested that of course, it was the pursuit of accuracy and the true sound that was PMC's aim, no focus groups at PMC then, thank goodness.

Quality

Out of the box, the first thing I noticed, pulling on my cloth gloves, was that out of the box the speakers smell really nice, I mean really nice, it is almost like they've just been sanded. The lovely wood smell in the box demands care and attention to the speaker extraction from the boxes.

The 22is are pretty weighty, at 10kg apiece. The first thing you notice is the unique trapezoidal shape of the speaker that is angled back, revealing the tweeter at the top and the Laminair vent at the base with the woofer in the middle. The trapezoid shape lines up the voice coils in the speaker cabinet, ensuring accurate timing.

On handling the PMC twenty5 22i and placing them into position, I get a satisfying feeling of craftsmanship from the PMC's beautiful edges, the weight and the lovely feel of the wood and the all-round fine engineering. The terminal blocks are substantial and take the QED Supremus cable I'm using, comfortably, with a twist, gripping the cable in place. The speakers come with very attractive grilles, but are unused here.

Performance

The PMCs are placed on Focal's Kanta No. 1 stands and I'm driving them from T+A's MP 2000 R integrated amplifier connected via the aforementioned QED loudspeaker cables. I'm using an Auralic Vega G2.1 streaming DAC as my main source, playing Qobuz Studio and Tidal Masters music services. I'm also using Melco's N100 network server with an external PSU.



First Impressions

My first impressions of the speakers, that were slightly tighter out of the box, were of volume (space) and control. Using the newly arrived Melco N100 server my 24-bit copy of *A Moon Shaped Pool* seemed to hold increased weight and atmosphere, my beloved track *The Numbers* has never, ever, sounded better or meant so much to me, I just suddenly had a wave of emotion wash over me as I realised I was listening to something really pleasurable! As a first impression, I was hooked. I searched for a few other personally important albums, Ryan Adams' *Gold*, *OK Computer*, etc. and found the same emotional reaction, control and attention to detail from the speakers.

With T+A Electronics

In my main listening space with T+A Electronics, I have a beautiful and clean presentation with fine control. I would suggest this control is matched only by the beryllium led Paradigm speakers I also have at the moment, they are floorstanding at well over three times the price. The soundstage I have, around 3 or 4 meters away with the speakers the same apart is deep and wide, there is an openness to the instruments once the system was up and running after a few days. The standout feature of the speakers, for me, is the bass control in the speakers through the front vents which really do seem to act as a second bass driver, it is a lovely sound. I have a strong affection for my old slightly fat and loose KEF R700s but this is real bass control in action.

Turning to the 24-bit download of *Some* by Nils Frahm the crackle and energy of the track are similarly mesmerising with a deeply atmospheric, wide-open presentation. The fall of the hammer is there and is captivating. A quick check-in with *The Pyramid Song* confirms that the PMC speakers are loving the piano notes and the mid-range is being presented cleanly.

For a bit of bounce and 'Pop' music, it is time for ABBA's *Chiquitita*, the Spanish guitar introducing the detail of the song perfectly. As the piano takes over the resolution is wonderful and when the vocal kicks in with the familiar bounce of the chorus, the speakers just excel with ease. Finally, just to hear that bass control again, it is time for *Everglow*, Chris Martin's departing love letter to Gwyneth Paltrow. That word of the day, control, comes to mind yet again.

With Naim Uniti Star

Hoping to hear the fabled synchronicity of PMC and Naim Electronics, I plugged the 22is into the Naim Uniti Star that is our source, as a family, in our living space. The soundstage is wonderful at this point and this system draws you in. The Chromatics' double bass-led version of *The Sound of Silence* is such a beautiful recording and the resolution through the 22i is just so detailed. Unfortunately, I tend to get a bit lost at these moments when you're listening to something wonderful and a full run-through of a 24-bit 96kHz copy of *OK Computer* seemed to be in order. The result is spectacular. What an album and what a system!

A slightly quieter listen, in volume terms, to London Grammar's *Rooting for You* yielded a surprising conclusion. At lower volumes, the vocal was still crystal clear and the ending rumble as the song fades is still noticeable; even our snoozing dog looked up wondering where the noise was coming from.



“ My beloved track *The Numbers* has never, ever, sounded better or meant so much to me ”



With Naim NAP 250 & NAC-N 272

I've had the opportunity of putting the speakers on my own system, the overall sound is wonderful. My NAP250 is not DR'd, though I've had the DR and it works for me. Nevertheless, this is a spectacular sound and a newly energised sound emerges from my NAC/NAP combination. The fabled Naim/PMC synchronicity is here. The sound is thunderous at volume, the 22is are a perfect size for our lounge, which is approximately 12 x 8 meters.

I am more likely to listen to music while relaxing at a lower volume in the house and at these levels I have found the sound is just as energetic. For example, a quieter listen with my *HF&MS Slow and Low* playlist on Tidal, revealed a wonderfully open feel to tracks like *Me+Mine*, by American Aquarium, and *Oil Rigs* by Delines. Alt-J's *3WW* is fantastically detailed and just mesmerising with the thumping bass line, the detail in the guitar strings has me looking up and turning my head. I feel these speakers are a good deal softer at lower volumes, but probably better for it, I'd love to hear the 26i with this system, I think that would be quite a special sound.

Overall

It is clear, these are proper, grown-up speakers compared to some I've heard recently. My floorstanding KEF R700 speakers, that I really love and am very used to, are just sounding a little amateurish in comparison to these 22i standmount speakers, yes, standmount. I would suggest the progression and improved technology in these PMC speakers represents the development of consumer sound in recent times. They are precise and have a clarity that is exceptional, the bass control is exquisite. The recurring words in my listening notes are of control, openness, clean vocals and the softer atmosphere created by the speakers. I have fewer notes on dynamics or tonality, mainly because I have been marvelling at these wonderful speakers and their sound, which will stay with me for such a long time. The PMC twenty5i 22i standmount speakers are outstanding, as I thought and hoped they would be.