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# Twenty twenty vision



Has PMC's twenty.22 standmount loudspeaker got what it takes to break the sound barrier?

**Jason Kennedy** finds the angles...

**P**MC makes loudspeakers for both the professional and domestic markets, a state of affairs that could mean that you are able to listen to an album that was made with PMCs through PMCs! I have been to a couple of studios that use the things however, and never have I been able to replicate the results I encountered there. But then again neither do I have such a carefully treated listening room nor such substantial active PMC loudspeakers...

The principle that the sound of a record made in a studio is the sound that the engineer heard through the monitors is a good one however – so to begin to approach that particular absolute you need a loudspeaker with the same characteristics. It would be useful to know which albums have been made with PMCs, the company lists the organisations and artists, but not the precise albums concerned.

The twenty in this speaker's name is an indication of the years that PMC has been making loudspeakers, a period that started with co-founder Pete Thomas making prototype pro monitors in his garden that soon found favour among domesticated audiophiles. The twenty.22 is the larger of two standmounts in the twenty series, a range that's distinguished by sloping cabinets and two-way operation. They also incorporate PMC's advanced transmission line (ATL) venting that's claimed to use the rearward output of the main driver to produce extended bass, while making the drivers easier for the amp to control.

The trapezoidal cabinet is not merely a styling exercise; it brings a variety of advantages to the product, along with the inevitable increase in cost of manufacture. These include natural time alignment of the drive units, the tweeter's motor system is closer to being directly above the woofer's when viewed from the side.

The shape is inherently stiff and though the internal surfaces are parallel they are dislodged so that in a reflex speaker, at least, you would get less internal reflection. As this is an ATL, the bracing that forms the line stops any reflection and kills all but low frequencies prior to them getting into the room.

The twenty.22 incorporates a 6.5inch mid/bass driver that's based on the design created for PMC's Fact models; it has a cast alloy chassis and a lightly doped natural fibre cone. Although there is another speaker in PMC's catalogue with this basic spec, the TB2i, that's where the similarities end as this driver was created specifically for the twenty series and works into an ATL that's 33 percent longer and crosses over at 1.8kHz, rather than the 2kHz of the TB2i. The crossover is a fourth order type with steep 24dB/octave slopes, so there is very little overlap of output between drive units.

The tweeter is a 27mm soft dome developed in cooperation with Norwegian driver mongers SEAS,

## DETAILS

**PRODUCT:** PMC twenty.22  
**ORIGIN:** UK  
**TYPE:** standmount loudspeaker  
**WEIGHT:** 8kg  
**DIMENSIONS:** (WxHxD) 184x410x367mm  
**FEATURES:**  
• tweeter: 27mm Sonolex soft dome  
• woofer: 170mm doped cone  
• quoted sensitivity: 90dB  
• quoted impedance: 8 ohms  
• 20 year warranty  
**DISTRIBUTOR:** PMC  
**TELEPHONE:** 0870 4441044  
**WEBSITE:** pmc-speakers.com

and has the challenging task of providing output all the way from 1.8 to 25kHz, according to the specs. The metal grille is a key part of the design and not merely a protector, it helps to achieve consistent dispersion across the audio band, a quality that PMC considers extremely pertinent to achieving good results in differing rooms and for listeners outside of the sweet spot.

The twenty.22 is available in one of three real wood veneers or diamond black and, while it can be happily accommodated on most 60cm stands, does look rather better on the dedicated stand that PMC has had made for the purpose. This is raked to match the speaker for greater aerodynamics, not that there's much danger of them taking off. There are two pairs of terminals for bi-wiring/amping purposes and the speaker is supplied with magnetic grilles

## Sound quality

To my ears, PMCs always sound open next to conventionally aspirated loudspeakers and the twenty.22 is no different – possibly down to the ATL system which seems to let the speaker breathe in a fashion that reflex ports do not. In practice, this means that many others sound compressed by comparison, even those that are pretty impressive by the standards of the genre.

## There are few standmounts that offer the degree of musicality that the 22 can deliver

The twenty.22 has little in the way of cabinet colouration that I can detect; the sound it produces seems to have a greater freedom of expression and this means you hear more variety in recordings. But it takes a bit of acclimatisation, initially the concern is what's happened to the bass? You get used to the sound of reflex cabinets and take their version of low frequency sound as the norm, but it ain't necessarily so. Going back to such a speaker after this PMC makes the bass sound thick and congested. True enough, it sounds heavy, but has relatively little vitality, speed or texture.

The twenty.22 does not appear to have a hump in the response to give you the sensation of low bass, an approach employed in many small reflex designs. Instead it focuses on delivering an exceptionally clean, fast and revealing sound that doesn't



high quality biwirable binding posts adorn the back panel...



## Q&A

JASON KENNEDY SPEAKS TO PMC'S PETE THOMAS ABOUT THE TWENTY.22...



**JK:** Can you name a few albums that were made using your monitors?

**PT:** Just out of the current 'top twenty' you can include Emeli Sande – *Our Version of Events*, Adele – *21*, Ed Sheeran – *+*, Lana Del Rey – *Born To Die*, *Keep Calm and Relax*, Katie Melua – *Secret Symphony*, Adele – *19*. Then there are countless historic albums, which include the entire Genesis and Elton John back catalogues and so many more...

### Why 22?

The launch of a new range in our twentieth year gave rise to the 'twenty series' and the 22 is the second largest in the range.

### What are the main differences between this and a TB2i?

The physical differences are the drive units, cabinets, crossovers, terminals, grille fabric and badges... in fact every element is different. Sound wise, they are far more transparent, produce a deeper, cleaner soundstage and the bass timing is really on the button.

### Why go for a 4th order crossover, surely 1st order types are simpler and thus more transparent?

Quite the opposite, simple crossovers don't allow perfect tailoring of the frequencies which means the drivers receive frequencies that are not suited to their individual responses, causing an unnatural and coloured sound. Sophisticated steep order crossovers also increase the driver's power handling and widen dispersion. There is a drawback, they take far longer to design and are far more costly to build, but the rewards speak for themselves.

### You have used traditional driver technologies in the twenty series, no beryllium or metal, etc. Is this a cost consideration?

No, it's a performance consideration. Paper and fabric are still amongst the best cutting edge materials for moving coil speakers... and paper has the benefit of ninety years development in its application for speaker drive units.

## HOW IT COMPARES

**THIS LOUDSPEAKER** sounds quite significantly lighter, faster and more open than the vast majority of the competition, but the downside is that the bass doesn't have the weight of some of the better examples of the reflex ported breed.

A B&W PM1 costs £1,995 and has a rather more slick overall finish, albeit with considerably less real wood veneer. It can't compete with the dynamics and speed of the PMC, but does deliver rather more precise imaging. Its slimline tweeter enclosure avoids baffle edge problems and produces a solid, three-dimensional rendition of voices and instruments that few can compete with. It also has a deliberate low-frequency hump in its response to offset its relatively small volume.

The twenty.22 has an immediacy and freedom from boxiness in the bass that makes for a more lifelike overall sound. It produces a wide and high soundstage of electrifying vivacity, but you will need one of the floorstanders from the twenty series if you want trouser-flapping low end.

## IN SIGHT



- 1 27mm Sonolex soft dome tweeter gives crisp highs
- 2 angled front baffle gives a degree of time alignment
- 3 back panel sports gold plated speaker binding posts
- 4 PMC's advanced transmission line venting
- 5 170mm doped natural fibre coned mid/bass driver

attempt to plumb the depths or shake the floor, but gives you all the texture and shape of bass notes.

This was apparent with Meshell Ndegeocello's *The Way*, a track that often sounds thick and overly heavy, but with the PMCs gained a new lease of life because the music wasn't being bogged down in bass. It's an extreme example, but possibly also a reflection of the monitors used during recording and mastering, either way it was nice to hear it in such nimble and vital form. Vital is the word; everything has a bit more life and energy. It's a bit like a horn speaker in this respect, but without the tonal variations that accompany most examples of the breed. What I enjoy is the unfettered nature of the sound, it seems to be free of the usual constraints which means that there is more of the acoustic from the recording and less box character.

Live music benefits hugely from this approach, you can feel the tension in the atmosphere and the way it effects the performance, Keith Jarrett's *Testament* disc being a case in point. It's almost as if the presence of the audience pushes him to express himself with greater eloquence and clarity than on studio recordings, where there's no emotional feedback.

Another live piece is Paul McCartney's rendition of *Mother Nature's Son*.

This has an immediacy and naturalness that's uncanny with this PMC; everything about it is effortless, from the melody to the phrasing. It's almost enough to get me digging out my Beatles LPs! But not quite, instead I lined up another vintage classic, Muddy Waters' *Folk Singer*, another very simple recording of three

musicians from before the time when limiting/compression was used on vocals. When the vocals are coming from someone like Waters through this loudspeaker you do need to be careful with the volume control; the dynamic range is alarming and this speaker is easily fast and open enough to let you know it!

## Conclusion

The second loudspeaker I have auditioned from PMC's twenty series, it has reinforced my opinion that Pete Thomas is among the very best designers in this field. There are very few standmounts which offer the degree of immediacy, openness and musicality that the twenty.22 can deliver. It's a style of presentation that might not initially appeal to those in love with reflex style bass, but after half an hour of familiar music you will have great difficulty tearing yourself away. If you're in it for the enjoyment of music in any or all styles then this angular beauty is one fine conduit to happiness ●

## HIFI Choice

### OUR VERDICT

#### SOUND QUALITY



**LIKE:** Immensely open, dynamic and fast with massive musicality

#### VALUE FOR MONEY



**DISLIKE:** This is a tough one, but a bit more image precision would be nice

#### BUILD QUALITY



**WE SAY:** Highly capable and entertaining speaker that gets straight to the heart of the music

#### EASE OF DRIVE



#### OVERALL

