

Heavy Mettle

If ever there was a high end loudspeaker built to last and dressed to impress, it is Monitor Audio's giant PL300 floorstander. Noel Keywood listens in...



Audio's new Platinum 300 range topping loudspeaker was the first thing that caught my attention. I know what Monitor Audio like and thrive on and guessed that the rest of their vast PL300 had been voiced to match this new tweeter, to sound equally fast, engaging and deeply revealing. I wasn't

far wrong, it turned out...

The PL300 is quite a monster. It stands over one metre high (1,113cms/43ins) and weighs a whopping 43.2kgs (95lbs) because it is so massively built. So it stays firmly where it is put, a large area plinth spiking in to the floor to make the whole feel very stable. Monitor Audio are the BMW of the loudspeaker world, giving all their products a level of detailing and finish that's a clear cut above price rivals. Even the rear ports look good - they're not just cheap plastic push-ins - and the connection terminals are lovely. Quite why I don't know, but there is even a leather covered front baffle, and a grill to hide it if you so wish.

I was happy to run the PL300s without the grilles. Their drive units look intriguing - well, to me at least - and grilles do nothing for stereo imaging in any case. Another small point is that ribbon tweeters are smooth, intense and directional in

their output; it isn't a good idea to put things in their way. The huge cabinet has a deep gloss finish and the whole assembly looks very smart.

The PL300 has been designed to be not only technically effective, but also something of a sonic piledriver. Those two 8in bass drivers each have their own chamber and can transmit enormous acoustic power I found, to give a massive bass blow. I was going to say "a sledgehammer blow", but it isn't quite that, on which I will elucidate later. Their shallow concave cones are formed from a lightweight aluminium honeycomb, Monitor say, optimised using Finite Element Analysis to give a very light and stiff cone that acts as a "lightning-fast piston for a clearer more natural sound". They work smoothly up to 550Hz. Measurement suggested the chambers are identical and not stagger tuned.

Above 550Hz a midrange unit comes into play. It too uses the same lightweight concave cone made from Monitor Audio's lightweight aluminium honeycomb, again with no central dust cap over the magnet. Monitor Audio say it uses high strength Neodymium magnets for high sensitivity, to match that of the bass units. The midrange unit works up to a high 4kHz, meaning it crosses over at a very short wavelength to the tweeter. Crossing over here is difficult, a common drawback to using ribbons. Potentially, this affects vertical integration, making seating height more critical, but measurement showed this has been handled well and in use there was little phasiness as I moved vertically.

Few midrange units reach smoothly to 4kHz without breakup,

I've always had a partiality for ribbon tweeters since living with the Tonigen in the Heybrook Sextet. Think incisive treble that's cuttngly clear, yet at the same time supremely even, correct and uncoloured. There's always a hint of Wilkinson Sword to the ribbons I've heard, yet at the same time they've revealed detail no dome could manage and have proved impressive and untiring over time. So the new ribbon tweeter in Monitor