



PMC Fact 8

Elegant design, studio heritage

Jason Kennedy

Once in a while a component comes along that really twists your melon as some hop heads from 'Manchester' once proclaimed. These things realign your expectations and make life rather dull when the manufacturer wants them back again. January is a long dull month with a tax bill to pay at the end of it and a deficit of sunlight, but this year my January was enlightened in no small manner by two pieces of equipment, the Rega Isis CD player and the PMC Fact 8. Now, I like PMC speakers, they are usually good if not very good for their given price points and some - specifically the pro models - are near the top of the 'if I won the lottery' wish list. But it's been a while since a pair of those has come my way and you forget what you're missing after a while and adjust to the far from scrappy results of coming out of the regular speakers. Then PMC brings out a new a rather different speaker, something that is distinctly more elegant than most thanks to the cleanest cabinet design to hit this business in a long time. It's also different because of the way it sounds, which is quite hard to put your finger on until you hear another good speaker and wonder why it sounds a bit thick.

The Fact 8 is a new breed of PMC, it has the company's trademark ATL or advanced transmission line but in other respects does not resemble anything that Luton's finest audio equipment manufacturer has built before. For a start it has a perfectly rectilinear, sharp edged cabinet which doesn't sit on a plinth but rests on two chrome plated bars. These extend the footprint to provide greater stability and are threaded to accept equally shiny 6mm spikes, but not ordinary examples of the breed. The spikes have a rounded end as well so that you can place them on a hard floor without leaving holes. And if you really want to protect the floor there are plastic caps to put over the 'spikes'.

The all important drive units do not seem all that special at a glance but look at a whole bass driver and you will see that the 140mm bass unit has an unusually substantial magnet on the back of its cast alloy chassis. The cone itself appears to be about 95mm in diameter and is coated with what PMC describes as a 'feather light stiff-matte doping process', this is combined with an 'excursion braking system' (a spider?) that controls maximum excursion. Despite the existence of three drive units the Fact 8 is a two-way, itself quite unusual because this sort of configuration is generally used in two and half way designs. More unusual, in fact downright radical is the 1.7kHz crossover point that

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designer Pete Thomas has chosen. This is around a kilohertz below the norm and leaves the tweeter with a lot of bandwidth to cover, it's not therefore your run of the mill 25mm dome. Rather it's a drive unit with a 19mm central dome and a large roll-surround that brings the overall diameter up to 34mm, a combination of characteristics that when combined with high quality engineering allows it to go wide and to cope with power handling that PMC expects of its designs.

While PMC doesn't manufacture drive units it does all the R&D work on them and has them built

to its specifications so the tweeter on this speaker is not one you'll find elsewhere. It has a large enclosure on the back that damps any resonance and the dome itself is made of Sonomex. Putting that name into Google brings up the SEAS Excel range of tweeters which have a similar construction but different specs alongside prices that start at £84, which is already expensive, factor in the custom build requirement and the margins for distributors and dealers and it becomes apparent why this speaker costs what it does.

The crossover has to be pretty cleverly put

together to cope with the challenges of taking the tweeter down so low, it runs a 24dB/octave slope as a low-pass roll off for the bass units and a 32dB/octave one to bring the tweeter in above them. The latter is not a slope I've heard of before but is presumably required to take the tweeter low enough without letting it get to its resonant frequency. The actual crossover board sits on a lozenge shaped PCB behind the terminal block on the speaker. Alongside the beautiful fact Ag silver plated binding posts there are switches that allow you to control the output of the bass and treble sections of the speaker. Treble or HF can be increased or decreased by 2dB while bass can be reduced by 3dB or 6dB. If you want to increase bass output you merely put the speakers closer to the rear wall. I found them pretty easy to site, results did vary and it was fairly easy to tune the bass output to a desirable level with the wall about half a metre behind them.

As is the PMC way bass output is augmented by an ATL or advanced transmission line that starts behind the bass drivers and vents through a slot at the front in phase with the output from the drivers. In the fact 8 an extra chamber has been added above the vent and behind the front baffle, thanks to a cunning choice of aperture size this chamber absorbs any upper bass harmonics that remain and damps them out. It looks and sounds simple enough but if the speed and resolution in the bass on this speaker is anything to go by it works rather well. In fact the whole thing works rather well.

This is the most open box speaker I have ever encountered and it's phenomenally revealing, to call it a wolf in sheep's clothing is an understatement. How can something this elegant produce both high precision imaging in all three dimensions as

well as proper bass. The latter is perhaps the most impressive give the box and driver size, after all a narrow baffle and compact drivers are proven quantities if you want great imaging, but it's rare to hear such well extended, well timed and effortless low frequencies from something so discreet. But it shouldn't be a surprise, PMC is renowned for getting its speakers to deliver uncannily clean



SPECS & PRICING

PMC Fact 8

System: 2-way ATL

Tweeter: 19mm Sonomex dome with 34mm surround

Bass driver: 140mm paper cone x2

Sensitivity: 88dB

Impedance: 8 ohms

Dimensions HxWxD: 103x15.5x38cm

Weight: 20kg

Bass and treble output level switching

Magnetic grille

Finishes: rich walnut, natural oak, tiger ebony, graphite poplar

U.S.

Price: \$9999/pr

U.K.

Price: £4,600/pr

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and effortless bass and in the fact 8 it has refined the ATL system that is largely responsible for this reputation. It's not a wall shaker in the style of the EB and PB models I've tried but it certainly delivers gravitas, and unlike its bigger stable-mates does so in an unusually unboxy fashion – this cabinet is clearly stiff where it needs to be.

The degree of resolution on offer makes it very easy to differentiate between partnering components, it was clear for instance that the Rega Osiris amplifier is not as high in terms of fidelity as a Classé pre/power. The latter delivering a lot more of the space, depth and realism of a recording while the integrated Rega times rather better and draws you into the music more effectively. When combined with the Isis CD player this system is uncannily musical, drawing out the tunes from all manner of material in effortless fashion. The result with Mimetism's 20.1 CDP and 15.2 integrated was far more dynamic, extremely fleet of foot and natural. This pairing comes in at about £10k yet seemed very well matched to the fact 8s which fight well above their weight in terms of imaging and coherence. I didn't have any of the Bryston amplification that PMC distributes to hand but imagine that it's bigger amps with their effortless power would really get this speaker jumping. Power handling is good as you'd expect of PMC and better than you expect of the drive units. But appearances are deceptive, this may be a smooth looking design with normal looking drive units but if you've read this far you'll know better.

The combination of qualities on offer here is significantly greater than the sum of its parts, the phenomenally open character reveals nuances and details that more expensive designs miss and these combine to give a far fuller musical

and more three dimensional picture than most. More importantly it lets guitarists like Henry Kaiser deliver his licks in truly blistering style.

Make no mistake this speaker is the real deal, the fact (pun only slightly intended) that it looks so good is a just a distraction. But, a very nice distraction nevertheless. The days of studio brands making studio-derived speakers with what's enthusiastically called a 'business-like' finish are fortunately a thing of the past, judging by the facts of the Fact. +

