

# PMC FB1i

£2,100 per pair ☎ 01582 405694 🌐 www.pmc-speakers.com

Latest version of an established favourite takes on the competition

**B**egun by two ex-BBC engineers in the late 1980s, PMC is quite a young company by hi-fi industry standards, and is unusual in having equal success in both domestic hi-fi and professional audio sectors. Still led by co-founder and designer Pete Thomas, the core philosophy throughout is the use of 'advanced transmission lines' (ATLs) to load the bass drive units.

Originally introduced some ten years ago, the FB1 was actually the company's first floorstander and although the design outline has remained exactly the same throughout, it has undergone a number of detail refinements and two specific revisions since then. In 2004 the '+' version changed the tweeter, crossover and internal damping and made upgrade kits available. In 2008 this latest FB1i version arrived, with even more extensive changes – so much so that upgrading was no longer possible. There's a new 27mm soft fabric-dome tweeter (co-developed with SEAS) substantial improvements in crossover components, in the fit and finish of the cabinet and plinth and in the bass/mid drive unit.

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It's a slim and quite tall two-way design with nicely rounded baffle edges, finished in a selection of high-quality real-wood veneers. A curvaceous black MDF plinth extends the footprint, providing secure accommodation for chunky floor-spikes and improving appearance and stability. Over the decade the price has increased somewhat, from the original £1,275 to £2,100 for the latest version – significantly ahead of inflation, but reflecting the cost of UK manufacturing, European components and the performance upgrades.

The folded, tapered transmission line is three metres long, making cabinet construction both complex and expensive, but also providing considerable stiffening for the enclosure side panels. It has long been debated exactly how a transmission line differs from other methods of loading, such as the almost ubiquitous reflex or the much rarer tuned column, both of which show similar impedance characteristics. There are similarities to be sure, but on balance, the ATL approach seems to offer superior rear radiation-absorption and rather broader tuning.

The main driver here has a 170mm cast alloy frame with a 125mm doped paper cone, while the new tweeter has a 27mm fabric dome. Twin terminal pairs – conveniently close to the floor – provide the bi-wire/-amp option.

## SOUND QUALITY

'Laid back but smooth with it', is a phrase that probably best sums up the character of the FB1i. Happily, this well-established but recently improved floorstander still shows that it can deliver the goods in our listening tests and while image perspectives are a little more distant than most, the overall sound is also smoother and sweeter than most of the competition. Focus is good and the stereo soundstage free from boxiness.

The bass is quite strong relatively speaking, but it's also impressively deep and even, with a welcome freedom from the sort of resonant mid-bass 'thump' and upper bass thickening too often encountered in medium-size speakers. The result is a big sound that brings plenty of weight and scale to the party, without unwanted exaggeration.

Although the new tweeter sounds clean and smooth, the top end is perhaps a shade obvious, while apart from a hint of nasality, the midrange has very little coloration. Since the overall tonal balance has a hint of 'loudness contour' character, the speaker is rather effective when playing at quiet levels. **HFC**

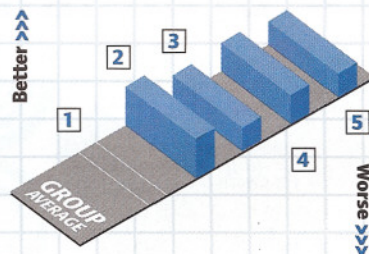


## LAB REPORT

An early sample of this FB1i variation on the long-standing FB1 theme was reviewed alongside its three-way OB1i range-mate in *HFC* 311 and this return visit a year later provides an interesting comparison. Although the impedance is the same, the current sample has rather less midrange output than before and a slightly stronger treble.

Indeed the midrange here is smooth and flat but a shade recessed compared with the bass and the top end, while the bass itself is strong, reasonably even, and impressively deep. The overall response is very well ordered, though the net effect is to provide a slight 'loudness contour' effect, which will tend to favour low-level listening. Although the midrange sensitivity is a modest 87dB, the amplifier load is very easy to drive and bass extension very impressive, thanks to line/port tuning to a low 32Hz.

## HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> 0%
- 2] Bass extension >> +20%
- 3] Ease of drive >> +10%
- 4] Overall frequency balance >> +15%
- 5] Response smoothness >> +10%

## SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	90dB	87dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	8/4Ω	8/6Ω
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	ns	20Hz

## VERDICT

<b>SOUND</b> ★★★★★	Smoother than its predecessors and a little laid back overall, this latest 'i' variation on the well-established FB1 theme continues to set a fine standard in a group test context.
<b>PRACTICALITY</b> ★★★★☆	
<b>BUILD</b> ★★★★★	<b>HI-FI CHOICE</b> OVERALL SCORE ★★★★★
<b>VALUE</b> ★★★★☆	