

PMCs are an understated talent

STEREO SPEAKERS
PMC FB1i
★★★★★
£ 1909

FOR
Beautifully balanced presentation; transparency; impressive bass performance; build quality; unfussy about positioning

AGAINST
Not the flashiest sounding speaker that you'll hear

VERDICT
These PMCs are great all-rounders. They have real long-term appeal

RARELY DO WE come across speakers that are as easy to ignore as these PMCs. Say that about a person and it would be (rightly) taken as an insult, but in the case of a piece of hi-fi, it's one of the nicest things we can say. You see, we believe hi-fi isn't there to grab your attention. That's the job of the music. Hi-fi should merely communicate sound

"Unlike some rivals, PMC hasn't sacrificed listenability for analysis"

without adding any significant flavouring. The FB1is do just that.

These slender towers are superbly balanced, sonically. The frequency range is even and the balance between attack and refinement is spot-on. Unlike some rivals, PMC hasn't sacrificed listenability for analysis, which is a good thing. This means you can partner these floorstanders with any decent price-compatible kit, and they'll sound good. You'll hear exactly what the electronics are

doing, so make sure that the rest of the system is up to scratch.

The FB1is also have pleasingly powerful bass. PMC has long developed its transmission line designs, preferring these to a conventional reflex port, and have created a speaker that delivers low-end depth with much speed.

Other strengths include excellent integration, decent timing and a solid-sounding midrange, meaning the PMCs sound as at home with the likes of Tracy Chapman as they do with Guns N' Roses.

Speakers that are built to last
For this kind of money we'd expect top class build, and these PMCs don't disappoint. Unusually for a speaker of this type, the FB1is aren't too fussy about positioning. They stay remarkably controlled at low frequencies, even when placed close to a rear wall.

All in all, these are excellent speakers. They may not be the most impressive things you'll hear in a demo, but we have no doubt they're a great long-term proposition.



ALSO CONSIDER ?

DYNAUDIO EXCITE32
★★★★★
£1600
Awards 2008
These are big, brawny floorstanders that deliver a sophisticated sound for the money

SPENDORA5
★★★★★
£1500
January 2009
If the PMCs are too big give these little Spendors a go. They're as insightful as speakers get at this price level

IPOD DOCK
PURE i10
★★★★★
£ 30

FOR
Charges iPods and allows remote control

AGAINST
Emasculates iPod sound

VERDICT
Simple, cheap and easy to use but where sound is concerned, the i10 disappoints

Pure dock ticks few boxes

IPOD DOCKS, OR even 3.5mm inputs, are by no means common sights on budget-orientated equipment.

That's why Pure's i-10 seems such a timely idea – dedicated docks at this sort of price are thin on the ground. After a long stint with it, we're afraid we know why that is.

The i-10 is a stripped-down unit, with a battery-charging cradle, input from the mains and 3.5mm

"When it comes to sound quality, the Pure i10 lets itself down quite badly"

output to your amplifier. There's also a little remote control.

There's not much to the i-10 then, and when it comes to sound quality it lets itself down quite badly. No matter the genre or compression of music we played – everything from an iTunes-purchased, 128kbps file of Elvis Presley's *Way Down to a lossless file of Anne Sofie von Otter's intimate reading of Elvis Costello's Baby Plays Around* – the Pure sounds drab and uninspired.

Timing is ragged, vocalists sound matter-of-fact, and low frequencies are only half-inflated.

For £30, there's a case to be made for the straightforward iPod dock that allows charging and remote control without sticking its oar into sound quality. A dock that sounds inferior to an iPod's headphone output simply won't fly.



Panasonic's wallet-friendly buds beat bundled 'phones

HEADPHONES
PANASONIC
RP-HJE240E
★★★★★
£ 20

VERDICT
They're certainly better than most bundled headphones, but even at £20 you can buy better

WE MAKE NO bones about our dislike for the earphones that come with most portable players, but that doesn't mean you have to spend a fortune replacing them.

Though they feel a bit cheap, these budget '240s fit snugly, and sonically there's much scale and weight. Much of that is due to abundant bass, but as well as being bold, it's also a bit monotonal and overbearing. The rather shouty treble will also grate over extended listening. Still, there's good rhythm and insight given the price, and they're an improvement over most bundled headphones.



It's very easy to achieve a firm and comfortable fit