



Twenty Tot

Adam Smith takes a listen to PMC's dinky Twenty.21 loudspeakers.

I was recently smitten by the range-topping PMC Twenty.24 loudspeakers, so this review was going to be a bit of a disappointment, wasn't it? My real love is large loudspeakers. Then I recalled that one of my favourite loudspeakers from PMC's older ranges is the DB1i. I remember being impressed at the way PMC's transmission line technology had wrought such an expansive sound from such a dinky box (and yes, that really is what 'DB' stands for!). I was keen, therefore to see if they could pull off the same trick twice...

Initial impressions were very good indeed. The 21s share the same 27mm Solonex soft dome tweeter as the 24s, but this time mated to

a smaller 140mm bass/midrange driver. This driver is loaded by a transmission line of 1.72m effective length (5.6ft in old money) and vents on the front panel below it. This is an unusual step for PMC as their previous standmounters such as the aforementioned DB1i have featured rear-firing lines; however, PMC's Keith Tonge explained that the re-arrangement allowed for a greater effective line length and thus more bass. This would seem to be borne out, on paper at least, by the fact that it is the TB2i in the old range that achieves the same frequency range as the Twenty.21s, from a bigger cabinet.

The two drivers are united by a high quality crossover circuit that utilises the same crossover frequency

of 1.8kHz shared by all models in the range. Ultra thick copper tracking adorns the PCB for minimal signal loss and two pairs of terminals on the rear panel permit bi-wiring or bi-amping once the supplied links are removed. Of course, a standmounter requires stands and PMC have done themselves proud here as well, designing in-house a fine matching stand for the 21s. This consists of a sandwich style top plate with a layer of damping rubber, a feature repeated at on the bottom plate. Two vertical tubes support the top plate. The front one is hollow and can be filled with the damping material of your choice. The rear tube is damped in its own right but not fillable because it has another trick up its sleeve,

namely disguising the cables used to connect to the speaker – which runs in at the bottom either under the stand or into a slot behind it, and out of a second slot near the top. This, combined with the superb finish of the loudspeaker itself and another impressively solid yet fixing-free grille mounting, means that the Twenty.21s are an absolute pleasure to welcome into the domestic environment.

PMC seem to be on something of a design roll at the moment as I love the sloped-back styling of the whole range and the matching stand ensures that sense of style is not lost on the smaller models.

So, the Twenty.21s are a visual and tactile delight, but could they deliver the goods sonically? I was keen to find out...

SOUND QUALITY

Having spent a good deal of time positioning the Twenty.24s to obtain best performance, I found myself repeating the task with the 21s. The rising treble response means that they are best not positioned firing directly at you, as per many speakers, PMC instead recommending that their listening axes cross behind your head. In fact, I brought the speakers closer together than usual and had them firing straight ahead and with this position established, the results were hugely impressive.

Correctly oriented, that rising treble suddenly smoothes out to become a magnificent swathe of upper end detail that grips and times like few other compacts at the price. I actually played the introduction to Steely Dan's 'Jack of Speed' over and over about six times in a row, simply because the cymbals were so crisp, vivid and utterly delightful!

When the track started properly though, Donald Fagen's vocals were captured perfectly centre-stage and the backing bass line propelled the action along with vigour and purposeful intent. The bass from these tiny tots may not be quite up to the task of rattling ornaments off shelves, but it digs impressively deep and without any hint of overblown strain. It is aided in its task by an upper bass that is lithe and blessed with seriously impressive levels of detail. Imagery from the



Twenty.21s was no less of a joy to behold, again once they were positioned correctly. Their generally decent swathe of spatiality suddenly opened up like a flower in the morning sun when that sweet spot was hit and they impressed me greatly with the stability of their central image, combined with the vertical scale and atmosphere that accompanied this.

The introduction to Stevie Wonder's 'Higher Ground' features a lovely big cymbal repeatedly struck in the right channel and the PMCs shimmered this off into the distance gloriously each time.

Equally, they were one of the few loudspeakers I have encountered that kept the background synthesiser work of Underworld's 'Jumbo' vivid even when the main drum and bass lines started; many loudspeakers tend to lose it in the background.

No matter what I chose to feed the PMCs, they absolutely lapped it up, giving everything a highly infectious sense of tautness and musicality. Piles of LP sleeves grew in my listening room late into the evenings during their stay and I never once found anything that would trip them up sonically. They have an unerring musicality and will even play at quite anti-social levels if required, without exhibiting any sense of strain.

CONCLUSION

So the baby of the bunch punches just as hard as the daddy of the range and with even more enthusiasm. The PMC Twenty.21s are an object lesson in how to wring a big sound from a small box with virtually none of the compromises this usually entails.

Yes, maybe others have done similar but nearly all models that I can think of, off the top of my head, wear price tags considerably larger than that of the 21s. If your heart wants big loudspeakers but your head says they must be small, then look no further.

REFERENCE SYSTEM BOX
 Garrard 301 turntable
 Jelco SA-750D tonearm
 Ortofon Xpression cartridge
 Marantz CD94/CDA94 CD player
 Anatek MC1 phono stage
 Naim Supernait amplifier



HI-FI WORLD

VERDICT ●●●●●
 The baby of the Twenty range impresses just as much as the range-topper. The 21s are gifted and accomplished musical performers.

PMC TWENTY.21/STANDS
PMC Loudspeakers
 ☎ +44(0)870 4441044
 www.pmc-speakers.com

- FOR**
- impressive bass weight
 - superb detail
 - musically addictive!
 - build and styling
- AGAINST**
- position carefully

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The twenty-21 has a smooth on-axis frequency response free from unevenness or the common crossover dip, but it does have the usual treble lift of modern loudspeakers. Measuring +5dB at 10kHz, the twenty-21 will sound obviously bright in tonal balance. Our graph shows response 30 degrees off-axis and this lessens treble a little, so the cabinet is best pointed down a room and not straight at listeners. Dispersion was wide and drive unit phase matching good, so a lot of treble energy will be put into a room, but imaging and sound stage should benefit.

The slot port (red trace) extends bass a little, down to 50Hz, but there is little deep bass. Our impedance curve shows it damps the bass unit very well, making the twenty-21 an easy (resistive) amplifier load. However, the bass unit has a high DCR of 6 Ohms and the loudspeaker has a very high overall impedance of 9.5 Ohms. This doesn't help sensitivity, which was a low 84dB from one nominal watt (2.8V) of input power. Amplifiers of 60 Watts or more are needed for high volume.

A 200mS decay analysis shows there is little coloration and few obvious box returns over most of the audio band, and the tweeter looks

very clean. However, there is a strong mode at 80Hz and this will likely help determine bass quality.

The twenty-21 is well engineered. It will have a bright balance and being insensitive it needs power to go loud, but it should sound clean and have controlled bass. NK

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



Green - driver output
 Red - port output

IMPEDANCE

