

# Monitor Audio Bronze 200

This slim floorstander has million-dollar looks but a wallet-friendly price, and aims to sound bigger than it seems  
Review: **Mark Craven** Lab: **Paul Miller**

**M**onitor Audio's close-to-entry-level Bronze series wants to offer something for everyone – the full range runs to eight models, including various multichannel options – but it's perhaps the Bronze 200 floorstander that many potential buyers will investigate first. A slim two-and-half-way tower speaker priced £569, with attractive finish options (white, walnut, urban grey and black), plus driver technologies borrowed from pricier models, it appears at face value to offer performance potential and that hi-fi holy grail: value for money.

There are, of course, myriad more affordable floorstanders for anyone making the step up from bookshelf models or building their first stereo system. The Bronze 200 therefore has its sights set on music-lovers seeking something better than budget, but still without taking up too much floorspace. Those with excess carpet can consider the flagship Bronze 500 (£770), another two-and-half-way model with larger bass/mid drivers. At the other end of the scale are the standmount Bronze 50 (£260) and Bronze 100 [£320, *HFN* Aug '20] – although the latter is hardly 'small'.

## ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Monitor Audio is into its sixth generation of Bronze speakers, launching the first model in 1998, and most of us are now familiar with the brand's hierarchy. Platinum takes the top spot, with Gold, Silver and Bronze offering progressively lower prices, smaller cabinets and less opulent finishes. Yet all but the premium Platinum loudspeakers feature the same proprietary C-CAM driver technology [see PM's boxout, p73].

The Bronze 200 has two such mid/bass units, both 140mm in diameter. This size

is far more typical around this price point than the 200mm units found on the Bronze 500 and big-boned Bronze 100, and allows this speaker to be extraordinarily slender. One of the bass/mid cones touches base with the C-CAM tweeter at 2.4kHz while both reinforce the low-end below 700Hz.

## KEEP IT CLEAN

The slim nature of the Bronze 200 makes it hard to imagine it upsetting the feng shui of any environment. In fact, as tower speakers go, it's possibly the smallest I've seen – only 909mm tall (with its outrigger feet) and shallow at 265mm. Naturally, MA promises a 'surprisingly large sound'.

The C-CAM units have been upgraded for this sixth generation, with revisions to cone geometry and FEA optimisation of the surround overlap (something the company calls Damped Concentric Mode technology). While this hasn't changed the look of the bass/mid drivers drastically, the 25mm dome tweeter now gets a flush-fitting protective grille, all part of the new 'Uniform Dispersion' waveguide said to improve off-axis listening further.

When I auditioned the Bronze 100 last summer, I was quite smitten by the loudspeaker's fit and finish. Happily, the Bronze 200 continues the good work, with its silver mid/bass cones, ornate tweeter grille and outrigger feet adding up to a stylish-looking package. The cabinet itself features 15mm internally braced MDF walls and a 21mm front baffle (which on our white sample gets a light grey paint job),

**RIGHT:** Available in Black, White, Walnut and 'Urban Grey' finishes, the Bronze 200 hosts a pair of 140mm C-CAM bass/mid drivers that cross over to a 25mm C-CAM 'Gold' dome tweeter (with 'UD Waveguide') at 2.4kHz

'They painted a swirling, fluid and expansive picture'



## PUSHING THE LIMITS

Monitor Audio's gold-coloured 25mm C-CAM tweeter is just visible through the honeycomb perforations in its protective cover. This precise pattern is part-and-parcel of MA's 'Uniform Dispersion' (UD) waveguide, and acts like a sophisticated phase plug. But the real *technology* is in the 'Ceramic-Coated Aluminium Magnesium' dome itself. It employs an alloy core, the material chosen for its lightness, to which is applied a ceramic layer – aluminium oxide – to enhance rigidity without significantly increasing the dome's mass. This combination of low density and stiffness is essential for a rigid tweeter that lacks the 'lossiness' of a soft dome type, here pushing the primary breakup resonance to as high an ultrasonic frequency as possible.

Alloy domes of this size will typically extend to 25-30kHz before breakup and MA's C-CAM design reaches 29kHz before delivering a high-Q +12dB resonance [see response and waterfall graphs, p75]. We saw a similar result with the Bronze 2 model [*HFN* Feb '16] and partnering Bronze 100 standmount [*HFN* Aug '20]. Pushing the primary resonance to even higher frequencies means employing less dense, and typically costlier, materials that offer a higher Young's modulus. A 'carbon' dome may work up to 48kHz [*HFN* Sep '20], beryllium to 51kHz [*HFN* Oct '20] while a deposited 'Diamond' dome, as employed in B&W's 800 series, pushes its resonance out to 75kHz. PM



and is a feast of right angles. However, I'd agree with Monitor Audio's insistence that this gives it a 'clean and modern look' – particularly in comparison to the rather homely styling of the previous 5G models. If this loudspeaker wasn't so compact, you'd swear it cost a lot more.

Half-height magnetic grilles are supplied, plus a pair of foam bungs for the twin HiVe II ports. The bungs, says MA, are to be used if the loudspeaker can't be positioned at least 20cm from a rear wall, which to my mind seems unlikely. I expect far more buyers will struggle to adhere to the recommended side-wall clearance of ~90cm.

## BRIGHT SPARK

With recollections of the stockier Bronze 100, I was interested to hear how this towering sibling sounded. The result – unsurprisingly, given the divergent approaches to bass and midrange – was markedly different in some respects, similar in others. The same wide-open treble was always present, ensuring playback had a sweet, sparkly air which left me with the sense that nothing at the top-end was being carelessly thrown away. There was also energy and excitement, proof that Monitor Audio hasn't just paid lip-service to the 'real crowd pleaser' idea the Bronze series literature espouses.

Yet where the standmount model was a compact heavyweight, this floorstander had greater bass subtlety and filled the

room better, though perhaps not with quite the same punch.

Let me explain. With the Bronze 100, I found its 200mm bass/mid unit and porting something of a dangerous animal that worked best when kept on a tight leash. Placed close to the rear wall, bass took on a big, boisterous air, and even when moved out into the room it remained enjoyably forceful. Here, the two 140mm units and the two-and-half-way crossover brought more refinement to the low-end – arguably too refined until I moved them nearer that suggested 20cm minimum, and I still couldn't provoke the Bronze 200 into matching its smaller sibling in terms of bass aggression. So the two speakers have different characters, and this model shouldn't just be seen as a bigger alternative to the Bronze 100.

## LITTLE AND LARGE

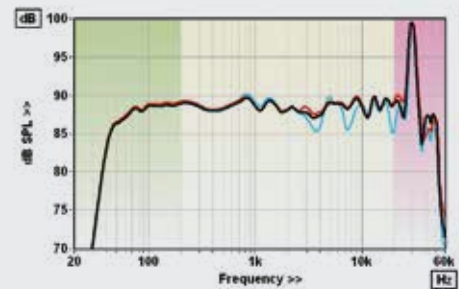
Mental housekeeping over, I settled back to admire what this loudspeaker could do, and that's to deliver a wide, detailed, full-range sound from small cabinets, with little strain on partnering amplification. The rockabilly riff on Bryan Adams' cover of Eddie Cochran's 'C'mon Everybody' [*Tracks Of My Tears*; 96kHz/24-bit FLAC] enjoyed a solidity and warmth, the vocal had a lovely texture and raspy edge, and the guitar solo sliced through the midrange with ease.

The cabinet height means the Bronze 200 doesn't lean its soundstage over you, but a wide-flung treble and good pair matching [see PM's Lab Report, p75] →

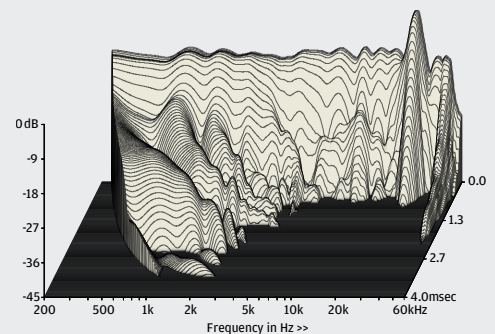
## MONITOR AUDIO BRONZE 200

Competing in the 'slimline' floorstander bracket, MA's Bronze 200 employs the brand's smallest C-CAM mid/bass driver, a pair of these 140mm units enabling a narrow 166mm-wide baffle. (The 231mm-wide Bronze 100 standmount [HFN Aug '20] employs a single 200mm C-CAM unit.) The loudspeaker's rated 88dB sensitivity was met on test at 88.5dB just as the specified minimum 4.4ohm impedance was confirmed at 4.35ohm/219Hz, although this implies a 6ohm rather than 8ohm nominal value. The largest swings in impedance phase are also relatively modest at  $-36^\circ/100\text{Hz}$  and  $+38^\circ/27\text{Hz}$ , with a mild 'worse-case' of 5.55ohm/ $-24^\circ$  at 130Hz not proving especially burdensome for any likely partnering integrated.

The forward response shows a series of undulations between 500-1.8kHz and 7.5kHz-20kHz – the former also revealed as resonances on the CSD waterfall [see Graph 2] – but the trend is inherently 'flat' so the response error is a mere  $\pm 1.4\text{dB}$  (200Hz-20kHz) and the pair matching a tight  $\pm 0.7\text{dB}$  [see Graph 1, below]. Fitting the grille [blue trace] causes a slight disruption in presence/treble output but there's no escaping the 'C-CAM Gold Dome' tweeter resonance at 29kHz/+12dB [pink shaded region, Graph 1], even if the CSD waterfall [Graph 2] indicates this is swiftly quelled. The diffraction-corrected nearfield measurement [green area, Graph 1] suggests a bass extension of 40Hz ( $-6\text{dB}$  re. 200Hz) – close to ideal for two 110mm-effective diameter drivers, reflex-loaded at  $\sim 43\text{Hz}$ . However, the rifled port output also exposed two box/pipe modes at 180Hz and 800Hz, the latter, again, reflected on the response and waterfall plots. PM



ABOVE: Response inc. nearfield summed driver/port [green], freefield corrected to 1m at 2.83V [yellow], ultrasonic [pink]. Left, black; right, red; w. grille, blue



ABOVE: A potential cabinet pipe mode is revealed at 800Hz as is the strong 29kHz treble dome breakup

## HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

<b>Sensitivity</b> (SPL/1m/2.83V – 1kHz/Mean/IEC)	88.5dB / 88.5dB / 86.3dB
<b>Impedance modulus: minimum &amp; maximum</b> (20Hz–20kHz)	4.35ohm @ 219Hz 16.8ohm @ 81Hz
<b>Impedance phase: minimum &amp; maximum</b> (20Hz–20kHz)	$-36^\circ$ @ 100Hz $+38^\circ$ @ 27Hz
<b>Pair matching/Resp. error</b> (200Hz–20kHz)	0.7dB / $\pm 1.4\text{dB}/\pm 1.4\text{dB}$
<b>LF/HF extension</b> ( $-6\text{dB}$ ref 200Hz/10kHz)	40Hz / 52.6kHz/50.9kHz
<b>THD 100Hz/1kHz/10kHz</b> (for 90dB SPL/1m)	0.8% / 0.65% / 1.1%
<b>Dimensions</b> (HWD) / <b>Weight</b> (each)	886x166x265mm / 13kg

**LEFT:** Bronze 200's crossover is split at 2.4kHz with two sets of gold-plated terminals for bi-wiring/bi-amping. Note rifled 'HiVe II' ports and bracing bolts for the two bass/mid drivers that operate in parallel below 700Hz

with the title track from Carbon Based Lifeforms' *Interloper* [Blood Music BLO154]. As this electronic composition ebbed and flowed, the speakers seemed right on song, offering plump bass, crisp percussion and rich synth chords.

### PLAYING DETECTIVE

At this wallet-friendly price, you'd expect me to find something to pick at in sound quality terms, so I went looking. First was Luciano Michelini's exhilarating instrumental soundtrack for 1975 Italian crime thriller *Silent Action* [*La Polizia Accusa...*; Tidal 44.1kHz/16-bit], where the Bronze 200 had no centre-stage vocal to frame its performance, but worked well with the staccato strings and low-octave piano notes, attacking them with relish and unearthing timbral subtleties.

Slightly less impressive, perhaps, was its handling of the piano-backed ballad (and Marantz demo favourite) 'The Moon Is A Harsh Mistress' by Radka Toneff and Steve Dobrogosz [*Fairy Tales*; Tidal Master]. Toneff's astonishing vocal is the star of this show, not just in her expressive delivery but the quality of the recording, and while the speakers gave her space to perform and sounded sweet, I wanted it silkier, smoother and with greater in-the-room presence. But I guess you have to pay a lot more for that. ☹️

### HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

Monitor Audio's Bronze 200 may be a 'budget' speaker, but it's not a budget performer – it offers too much scale, clarity and nuance, while being lively and easy to drive. While it's been voiced to please, it's also styled to appeal thanks to a modern aesthetic and super-slim cabinet that should fit in anywhere. The more affordable, bigger driver Bronze 100 two-way provides strong in-house competition, though.

Sound Quality: 83%



created a well-spaced image that easily expanded beyond the cabinets themselves. With The Police's raw-sounding 1979 live performance of 'Can't Stand Losing You' [Live!; 88.2kHz/24-bit FLAC], these floorstanders did a decent job of conveying the scale of the recording and the players on the stage.

Better yet was the swirling, fluid and expansive picture they painted