



Precious metal

Monitor Audio's new Gold 200 floorstander makes great music thanks to clever use of materials, says **David Price**

There's no substitute for decent drivers – and no, I am not talking about piloting the family Mondeo. Loudspeakers need well-engineered, high-quality drive units to have a chance of sounding good. Rather like the engine in the aforementioned car, if these aren't right then the whole of the rest of the package is compromised. Monitor Audio has always known this, and gone its own, slightly unusual way. Admittedly it's less unconventional now, but still there aren't that many speakers around with metal midrange

An extremely able loudspeaker with great depth of engineering

and bass units, and fewer still with ribbon tweeters. The new Gold 200 has all three, and they have a profound influence on the sound, as we'll see.

This loudspeaker's twin RST (Rigid Surface Technology) bass drivers, and its single midrange unit, have unusual dimpled metal cones, which are said to displace standing waves better than conventional profiles. The driver's voice coil has been better damped, too. The speaker is a three-way, but runs the two 130mm bass drivers in tandem from a claimed 35Hz up to the first 400Hz crossover point, when a single 100mm driver takes over and runs all the way up to 2.6Hz. The C-CAM (Ceramic-Coated Aluminium/Magnesium) ribbon tweeter then takes care of treble duties right up to a claimed 60kHz. Monitor Audio says it's done a lot of work to get this ribbon tweeter to disperse better, with a special waveguide being the result. A powerful Neo magnet arrangement yields a higher sensitivity than some tweeters of this type. The company

says it is extended so high up the audio band because this helps with the reproduction of the natural harmonics of instruments.

The cabinet is a work of art; it's very petite for a tallish floorstander, and immaculately finished in a choice of wood veneer or gloss lacquer finishes – as you'd expect from the brand at this price. The beauty goes beyond those 20mm MDF cabinet walls, however, because inside the drive units have been bolted onto the rear of the cabinet for greater rigidity. The cabinet is ported, which aids efficiency and/or bass extension, but is supplied with a foam port bung should you need to use the speaker close to a boundary wall. The rear also features a very attractive terminal panel. Overall, the Gold 200's claimed sensitivity is 89dB/1W/1m, which is a good if not exceptional figure. Inside, the company says that special Pureflow silver internal cabling has been used. Neat grilles with invisible magnetic fixings are also supplied.

Sound quality

Having recently been enjoying the bigger, more muscular (and much more expensive) ATC SCM40 (HFC 389) in my listening room, first impressions of the Gold 200 are a little underwhelming. I start listening with the port bungs in, because almost every floorstander I try sounds better this way in my room. Yet the Monitor Audio palpably does not, coming over as a little weak and anaemic. However, after a day of playing Gregory Isaacs' *Night Nurse* album on repeat at high volume, and removing the port bungs, I come back to find a completely different thing. My experience is that speakers with metal drive units need to sink a good deal of power in order to warm up properly, whereupon they tend to transform into something sounding altogether warmer and more musical. A general rule of thumb is about one

LP side, which is around 20 minutes play, before things come together.

This Monitor Audio floorstander is reasonably efficient, but is not the sort of thing you would pair up with a single-ended triode valve amp. Indeed, further listening tests show that it likes a bit of muscle, so an Exposure 3010S2-D (HFC 397) solid-state integrated is wheeled in and the volume moves towards the halfway mark. After a little further tweaking of the positions, the spikes are installed and I sit down to listen in earnest. I cue up the title track to be greeted with a most impressive sound – snappy, spacious, fast and open. I am also rather taken with the bass. While not over endowed with quantity, the Gold 200 certainly has a very refined bottom end, one which performs just as it should – tuneful, extended and taut, it makes this reggae classic a pleasure.

Bouncing and propulsive the bass may be, but it doesn't win prizes for size. It doesn't strike you as a burly and muscular sort of speaker, and it's possible to get a bigger and boomier bottom end from far cheaper rivals – such as the £900 Cambridge Audio Aeromax 6 (HFC 391), for example. Yet the Monitor Audio does have a

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Monitor Audio Gold 200
ORIGIN
UK/China
TYPE
3-way floorstanding loudspeaker
WEIGHT
22.2kg
DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
170 x 951 x 300mm
FEATURES
• 1x C-CAM ribbon tweeter
• 1x 100mm C-CAM RST midrange driver
• 2x 140mm C-CAM RST bass driver
• Quoted sensitivity: 89dB/1W/1m
DISTRIBUTOR
Monitor Audio Ltd
TELEPHONE
01268 740580
WEBSITE
monitoraudio.co.uk

The die-cast alloy terminal panel has bi-wire binding posts and high-end spade type link cables



wonderfully detailed midband and treble, which seamlessly blends in with its fairly light but well extended bass. The overall effect is really good – there's a lack of lumpiness to its response and the speaker seems to blend in easily with the room. The tonal balance is subtly tilted towards the treble then, but this is no problem at all because it is of such high quality. The tweeter is a work of art and never sears or grates; instead it throws a lot of light on the high frequencies, giving a lively and sparkling sound. The cymbals on *Night Nurse* are sweet, smooth and delicate yet have a realistic bite; by contrast some similarly priced rivals can sound splashy and coarse.

Heavy metal

The clever thing about the Gold 200 is its consistency. The speaker sounds 'all of a piece', like it was cut from the same cloth, so to speak. This isn't always the case, because some manufacturers fit a variety of drivers with different materials, which can be less well integrated. One great benefit is the wide range that the ribbon tweeter works over; it seamlessly sashays down into the midband unit which has a similar tonality. Its metal cone matches the ribbon really well,

giving a largely invisible transition between the drivers and it's this partnership that is central to the sound. Clean and clear – almost translucent, even – its midband and treble drivers provide an open window into the recording.

Prefab Sprout's *Bonny* was brilliantly recorded and produced (by Thomas Dolby) back in the mid eighties, and is a joy to hear again. As the chorus builds to a crescendo, the vocals become enmeshed in a wash of analogue synthesiser and sometimes subsumed, but the Monitor Audio remains composed and allows all the elements of the mix their place. There's an intrinsic rightness and consistency to this speaker that makes even complex productions like this so listenable.

Kraftwerk's thumping *Music Non Stop* presents another challenge. A brilliantly recorded all-electronic track, it's a veritable audio assault course and not all speakers manage to retain their composure. Yet even at very high volumes – and I am impressed by just how loud the Gold 200 goes without showing any real signs of distress, or even compression – this floorstander keeps things together. It shows lightning-fast transients (the ribbon

HOW IT COMPARES

One major contender is Spendor's AGR (HFC 381) at £2,495. This more conventional two-way design looks a little less modern due to its absence of bright trim rings and shiny gloss lacquer finish, but has a slightly more 'mature' sound. The Monitor Audio is fast, razor sharp and ultra revealing, while the Spendor is a little smoother and less upfront, with a more subtle and 'considered' sound that doesn't instantly capture your attention. That's not to say it's boring though; it's just more subtle and pleases by its organic, musical nature. The Spendor gives a more relaxing presentation that beguiles rather than impresses. The Monitor Audio is a little more animated, exciting and explicit.

tweeter really helps here) and it makes for a vivid, seat-of-the-sofa listening experience. I find myself really being pulled into this immersive track. The speaker images extremely well, hanging some elements of the mix far back and pushing others out right at the listener. Meanwhile the vocal track hangs ethereally in between the centre of the speakers, locked into place like it has just dropped anchor.

This song also shows the bass to good effect; as previously mentioned, it's not quite as gutsy as some, but what bass there is, is extremely well controlled and highly precise. Unlike so many floorstanders currently on sale, even at this price, there is no sense that you can hear the cabinets joining in. There's no bottom end boom, even with the bungs removed, and nor does the bass slur the music, dragging behind the midband as many bigger boxes do. Instead, it's lithe and tuneful; and although there isn't that much of it, it goes low and is able to convey dynamic changes. Even at really high volumes, there is little sense that those small drivers are compressing things, which frankly really rather surprises me.

The speaker's sound changes to reflect the character of the amp driving it

I do, however, think the Gold 200 sounds just a little tinselly; every drive unit material has its own characteristic sound (polypropylene can 'quack', Kevlar can be a little hard and 'trumpety', paper can be soft and grey), and Monitor Audio's C-CAM drivers sound naturally a little 'shiny'. Put a typical MOSFET transistor amplifier in front of it, which also has a similar sort of tonality, and forward recordings can seem ever so slightly 'brightly lit'. For this reason I also try it with a Musical Fidelity Class A amplifier, and a World Audio Class A tube amp. In both cases the speaker's sound changes to accurately reflect the character of the amp driving it. It makes Donald Byrd's *Street Lady* (a classic slice of rare groove jazz on Blue Note) noticeably sweeter and more sumptuous, for example. It shows this loudspeaker is not a one-trick pony, doesn't add too much of its own character, and is able to accurately render what is driving it. So for this reason, it makes good sense to audition it with the amplifier you're currently using before buying.



With a 35Hz-60kHz frequency response, the Gold 200 is available in a number of different finishes



- 1 C-CAM ribbon tweeter
- 2 100mm C-CAM midrange driver
- 3 140mm C-CAM bass drivers
- 4 Bi-wireable terminals

DRIVE TIME

The majority of budget and mid-priced loudspeakers are two-way designs, meaning that a single mid/bass driver unit handles all midrange and low frequencies, with the tweeter taking care of the treble/high frequencies. This makes it cheaper to produce, and also requires a much simpler crossover. However, the music has to be divided up in the midband 'presence' region, right where the human ear is most sensitive. This is the worst place to put the crossover, as it can introduce phase problems and peaks or troughs in the frequency domain. For this reason, Monitor Audio Gold 200's three-way crossover splits the signal at 400Hz and 2.6kHz, in a three-way arrangement.

Normally, you would expect the bass driver to be substantially bigger than the midrange driver in a three-way design, but because of the current fashion for slim, small footprint, tower loudspeakers, it is necessary to fit two small bass drivers running in parallel, rather than one large one. This is why this three-way speaker has four drive units.

Conclusion

This is an extremely able loudspeaker with great depth of engineering. It uses excellent drive units from bottom to top, and these integrate brilliantly to produce a realistic and enjoyably musical sound. The cabinet is a little on the small side for floorstanders at this price, yet is still able to deliver convincing bass in most British listening rooms and is stiff and well damped. The overall quality of finish is excellent and it feels very much like the premium product that it is. Highly recommend then, but as ever give it a try before you buy ●

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OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★

VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★

BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★

EASE OF DRIVE ★★★★★

OVERALL ★★★★★

LIKE: Beautiful finish; sophisticated, detailed, musical sound

DISLIKE: Sound lacks physical heft compared with some

WE SAY: Classy, versatile and highly capable floorstander

Q&A

Dean Hartley
Technical director, Monitor Audio



DP: What is new and special about the latest Gold series?

DH: We've introduced a new RST 'dimpled' C-CAM cone to Gold this time, which has been developed to push the break-up point higher in frequency; further away from the crossover region. In conjunction with that, we've refined the connector mechanism between the voice coil and cone to provide increased damping properties. This ensures the break-up peak is subdued to a point where we can use simple second order filters and no ringing in the resulting system. The tweeter is essentially the same design as the previous series, but with a new assembly method to yield tighter tolerances.

Why use a ribbon tweeter when so many rivals use domes?

The diaphragm is a single piece of very thin C-CAM material, compared with a dome made from material typically 50 times thicker, and the additional moving mass associated with voice coil and suspension. This low mass ensures the inherent design is able to extend much higher in frequency and exhibit superior transient response.

What's special about the RST cone?

When asymmetric waves travel across the cone surface, the dimpled RST pattern effectively displaces standing waves that propagate across the cone surface. Although the cone surface is deformed by the dimpled impressions, it has been produced in a regular, predictable manner as to not affect the sound radiation. Metal cones remain rigid within the pass band, creating a uniform and accurate midrange. However, if incorrectly designed, they suffer from break up just above the crossover frequency; introducing distortion and a 'hard edge' to the sound. Over the years, we have made a number of advancements and continued innovations using advanced modelling techniques and design tools. The C-CAM material we use today is far removed from the early aluminium cones in terms of stiffness and damping properties.