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Falcon Acoustics' M10
two-way standmount



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DETAILS
PRODUCT
 Falcon Acoustics M10
ORIGIN
 UK
TYPE
 2-way standmount loudspeaker
WEIGHT
 7.5kg
DIMENSIONS
 (WxHxD)
 185 x 316 x 260mm
FEATURES
 • 25mm soft dome tweeter
 • 125mm Bextrene cone mid/bass driver
 • Quoted sensitivity: 86dB/1W/1m
DISTRIBUTOR
 Falcon Acoustics
WEBSITE
 falconacoustics.co.uk



as to how to make them, to the letter. In fact, the company was actually founded by the original designer of the speaker's drivers, Malcolm Jones. He was responsible for the legendary KEF B110 midrange unit and T27 tweeter that go into the LS3/5a.

The M10 sets out to do similar things, but has a number of key differences. The main one being the M10 is slightly more affordable. Also, it's tuned for slightly more 'real-world' conditions; rather than sitting in BBC outside broadcast vans, it is more centred on giving a great sound in normal domestic listening rooms.

The M10 is the entry-level model in the new M series and is a teensy bit bigger than the LS3/5a. It comes finished in a choice of natural Walnut or Rosewood. Star of the show is, of course, Falcon's classic B110 mid/bass driver – as seen in the LS3/5a. This is married to a modern 25mm soft dome tweeter. The cabinet is a good bit deeper than the LS3/5a, but still very petite by normal hi-fi standards. The major departure is the rear bass reflex port; the BBC design is a non-ported, infinite baffle type.

The advantage of this is that the speaker is easier to position in a listening room and more consistent in

Its smooth, slightly plush tonality and abundance of life makes it such fun

a variety of different rooms. It also offers theoretically better midrange focus and tighter, faster bass. The down side is that reflex ports generally confer higher sensitivity and/or more extended bass response – making the speaker sound 'bigger' than it really is.

It's easy to position and doesn't make even relatively low-powered amps break out into a sweat. In my listening room it works best on 24in stands, slightly toed in, about 30cm from my boundary wall.

Sound quality

If you're looking for sharp, incisive, in-your-face sound, turn the page now. The M10 gives none of these; instead it's a smooth, mellow even, little speaker with a larger-than-life sound. It's one of those small speakers that you can sit on a large one and think the latter is playing! This makes it quite different from most of what's on sale these days – which are far more laser-focused in their character. This doesn't have an ultra-etched,

Easy listening

Nick Tate is beguiled by this interesting new mini monitor that sports a little long-lost BBC DNA magic

Our story starts with the BBC-designed LS3/5a loudspeaker. Launched in 1975, it set the blueprint for an extremely small but very high quality 'mini-monitor'. The idea was that it couldn't reproduce low bass in a way that large speakers could, but its midband and treble would be as good, if not better, than some of the best designs in the world at the time.

The LS3/5a was duly licensed by a number of British manufacturers, and gained a big following – it's now

almost the dictionary definition of a compact monitor speaker. But more than this, it kicked open the door to a world where small speakers could be taken seriously as high-end transducers, rather than just being the poor relations of bigger boxes.

Arguably, without it, products such as the M10 before you could not exist. But that's not the only connection to the BBC that this company has, because for a long time it has offered its own remanufactured LS3/5a drive units, following the original guidelines



'chiselled' character where every instrument is right up and at you. But that isn't to say the M10 is soft, fat and lifeless, as it's quite the reverse. It makes all types of music easy to listen to and fun – without giving you the last decimal point of detail. Suddenly you're not fixated about whether your source matches the speaker or if it's too forensic for the recording. Instead, you just get into the groove.

It's this combination of a smooth, ever-so-slightly plush tonality and an abundance of life and emotion that makes it such fun. And you don't need to play Perry Como and Burt Bacharach to enjoy it; even the banging nineties house music of Ultraworld's *Northern Piano* comes across as great fun. Its subtly soft tonality takes away a tiny bit of bite from the drum machine's hi-hat cymbal work and the sampled vocal doesn't sound as harsh as it usually does. Yet you get a lovely, fulsome synthesiser bassline and a deep, thudding bass drum that arrives right on time. The gorgeous piano work is rich and sonorous, with sparkling harmonics, and the synthesiser pads further enrich the sound.

My overriding impression is of the rhythmic piano playing, which is really expressive and emotive. This is the next key character of the M10 – the fact that it's able to whisk you away into the special world of the music. Play something completely different like the Sixties country music classic *Wichita Lineman* by Glen Campbell and it gives you a shortcut



Costing a shade less than the M10, Neat's £2,155 *Ministra (HFC 465)* is a worthy and staunch rival. It's a shade deeper at 170 x 300 x 290mm (WxHxD), but there's little in it in terms of size. That's where the similarities end, as the Neat uses a ribbon tweeter and twin isobaric-loaded mid/bass units – a very unusual combination. It sounds unusually good too, with a bigger punch than the M10 and a more extended treble. But it's a tougher load to drive and more finicky about placement. The Falcon gives nothing away in terms of musical enjoyment, though.

to music's magic. This is an epic production and the M10 carries the profound emotional poignancy of both Campbell's vocals and that masterful orchestration. The violins screech and wail, the brass broods and soars and the voice comes across as tender and affecting. Above all, it's the vocal phrasing that hits you – showing its spot-on innate timing.

Soundstaging is great, as you might expect. Small speakers tend to do well in this respect as they're close to being a point source, because both drive units are very close to one another. Yet the M10 does even better than expected; to my ears it's superior to the LS3/5a in this regard. It just sounds more 'out of the box' and 'off the leash'; there's an effortlessly expansive nature to it that makes *Dance On A Volcano* by Genesis come over in a suitably grandiose way. Large, high-end multi-driver speakers of course do better – but the Falcon is none of the above yet still puts the recorded acoustic into your listening room in a very determined and committed way. The sound doesn't seem trapped inside the box and stereo imaging is very well carried.

Of course, it isn't perfect. In absolute terms, there's a slight 'sweet spot' in the upper bass that's not quite as neutral as it should be – yet there's still very little sense of bottom end boom and/or the cabinet contributing to the end product. There's a very slightly veiled quality to the midband, but only when compared with serious high-end designs that are a good bit

more expensive. Also, the treble doesn't quite have the extension of some of its price rivals that use ribbon tweeters – yet none of this detracts from the overall effect. Here is a dynamic, expressive, articulate and rhythmically engaging small speaker with very pleasing character – one that's hard not to like.

Conclusion

If you want vast amounts of forensic detail machine-gunned at you, and/or to be told about every last imperfection in the recording you're not playing, Falcon Acoustics' M10 is not for you. On the other hand, if you want to relax into the music and deeply feel the emotion contained within, then it deserves an audition. If you fit the latter category, have a smallish room and a decent source and amplifier, this could work very well in your system ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY
 ★★★★★
LIKE: Sweet tonality; expressive, fun sound

VALUE FOR MONEY
 ★★★★★
DISLIKE: Lacks a little transparency

BUILD QUALITY
 ★★★★★

EASE OF DRIVE
 ★★★★★

OVERALL
 ★★★★★
WE SAY: Charming, affordable mini monitor