

Bronzed beauty

Monitor Audio has buffed up its Bronze range to offer even better value for money

PRODUCT Monitor Audio BR5

TYPE Floorstanding loudspeaker

PRICE £400 per pair

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The BR5 is a mid-range model from Monitor Audio's new BR (Bronze Reference) line-up, which replaces the earlier Bronze range. In most cases, the changes are model for model. The BR5, however, is a completely new design, similar in principle to other BR series models, but at a new size and price point. It is, in fact, the smallest of the Monitor Audio floorstanders and costs just a few pence shy of £400, which virtually guarantees it will attract a lot of attention. This before taking any of its other qualities into account.

The original Bronze range was not the most sophisticated of its type in either design or sound quality terms, but it did deliver a solid, dynamic performance at an attractive price. If the model tested here is representative of its kind, the BR range is continuation of the same thinking – it's a kind of super Bronze range on steroids. However you look at it, though, it's clearly an engineer's perception of how a loudspeaker should be, all sharp edges and right angles, (there's a little chamfering around the edges of the front baffle), lots of visible screws, projecting feet and – yes – a decent vinyl wrap enclosure. Close examination shows that the quality of finish is good for the price, and there can be no questioning the BR5's material value for money. Its traditionally shaped, 16.5x85x24.7cm (WxHxD) cabinet may not meet with plasma/LCD TV-led design trends, but it is reassuring from a sonic point of view.

This is a classic two-way design, featuring two 130mm drivers, one for the bass only, the other a mid-bass unit, continuing to the 25mm gold-anodised tweeter. All three drivers are based loosely on the earlier Bronze range designs, but greatly improved in detail and matched to a newly designed crossover. There are also some refinements to the enclosure that have been introduced with this series, including separate internal bass and midrange

chambers. The large driver baskets benefit from more open construction behind the bass and bass/mid cones.

SOUND QUALITY

Try not to judge this speaker freshly decanted from the box. It will sound cold and aggressive in such circumstances, but an hour's-worth of use knocks the worst edges off, and the usual 50-100 hours will do a much more complete job of sorting the BR5 out.

The end result is a well-rounded loudspeaker, adept at handling complex classical music with a degree of polish, fine detail and even a welcome hint of sparkle from the new tweeter. It also has a lean but modestly well-extended bass, which has useful upper bass warmth, though nothing that could be described as excessive. Tonally, the BR5 is as near neutral as you could wish for, and such was the benefit of an initial warm-up in one session that a searching SACD recording of Hayden string quartets reproduced with real warmth, presence and intimacy.

Overall, this newcomer offers good control and strong dynamics, and it works well across of broad spectrum of music genres. That said, we're not so sure the BR5 shows its best side with mainstream commercial and rock-based material, which often sounds on the raw and synthetic side. If you don't already like the Arctic Monkeys, the BR5 doesn't offer the kind of presentation calculated to win you over. On the other hand, it is sensitive enough to live comfortably with relatively low power amplifiers, and it gives every indication of being easy to drive.

Although this speaker has its limitations, it is all about value for money and overall it offers a winning deal. The neutral tonal balance, dynamic ability, amplifier friendliness and excellent new tweeter are particular attractions, as is the range of matching partners within the BR line-up, enabling a variety of multichannel systems to be assembled. **HFC**

Alvin Gold



VERDICT

SOUND >> 83%



EASE OF DRIVE >> 85%



BUILD >> 81%



VALUE >> 94%



PRO

Easy and sensitive amplifier load, neutral tonal balance, bold dynamics and strong reproduction of fine detail. Good value for money.

CON

Too fussy-looking for some settings. Sound veers towards the edgy, analytical side with some material, though extended running in helps. Deep bass is lean in balance.

CONCLUSION

One of the best-value budget floorstanders around – a very good, easy to use compact at a modest price. There are also plenty of similarly voiced companion models, from which a number of bespoke multichannel systems can be assembled.

HI-FI CHOICE >> **88%**
OVERALL SCORE