

# HI-FI CHOICE

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Monitor Audio GS10 speakers strike sonic gold



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# MA strikes gold

*Refinement and clarity from a beautifully made speaker that doesn't cost an arm and leg*

**PRODUCT** Monitor Audio Gold Signature 10

**TYPE** Stand-mount loudspeaker

**PRICE** £1000 per pair

**KEY FEATURES** Size (WxHxD): 20.6x36x27mm

• Weight: 11 kg (each) • Gold anodised 2.5mm alloy dome tweeter • 150mm alloy cone bass/mid driver

Sensitivity: 88dB • Impedance: 8 ohms (nominal)

**CONTACT** ☎ 01268 740580 | [www.goldsignature.co.uk](http://www.goldsignature.co.uk)

**T**he new Gold Signature range from Monitor Audio replaces the Gold Reference line-up, and you'll not be surprised to hear that the maker claims improvements in every area. In most cases, happily, there is no increase in price. In fact, one model (not the GS10 reviewed here), has actually been reduced in price while

construction quality and materials appear to have been improved (this is presumably the benefit of off-shore manufacturing). The GS10 is the smallest stereo model in the new range, if we ignore the dedicated home cinema centre and surround effects speakers.

The GS10 pushes all the right buttons straight from the box. First it's a sensible size,



small enough to fit comfortably on pedestal stands, but big enough to offer the promise of respectable bass extension. Second, finish is clearly a little special. It's wood veneered on all surfaces, but there is no danger that this veneer could be mistaken for vinyl. The GS10 is enhanced further by the radiusing of all the edges and corners, back as well as front.

Third and last is the impressive, though mostly unobtrusive detailing, which extends from the diecast surrounds around the drivers, to the design of the terminal block, the unique rifling of the internal wall of the reflex port, and even the discrete nameplate on the back edge of the top panel. The only criticism, and in fairness almost all manufacturers fall into this trap, concerns the stamped metal plate links that short the bi-wire terminals for mono-wire systems. If this is how you will use the speakers, our advice would be to ditch them in favour of better quality cable links – the difference is surprisingly audible.

Technically, the GS10 hardly sets out to break the mould. It is a rear-vented two-way, based on a 150mm bass/mid unit and a 25mm tweeter, using a metal cone and dome respectively as is Monitor Audio's wont. So far, so so, but a lot of detailed design work has gone into the drivers, both of which are new and not refugees from the old CR range. The bass/mid chassis, and the external clamp that holds it in place on the baffle, for example, are made from cast aluminium and zinc respectively, the different materials chosen to provide mutual damping. The cone has a revised profile and is formed with hundreds of

**“There may be compromises, but on the whole, speakers either sing – or they don't. And this one most definitely sings...”**

concentric dimples, which are said to reduce mass (though it's not clear how), increase stiffness and eliminate the bending associated with conventional metal cone designs (again, how?). The cone was refined using finite area analysis, and legitimised like almost every aspect of the design by its own acronym – in this case RST2, for Rigid Surface Technology 2.

The new gold anodised C-CAM ceramic coated aluminium/magnesium alloy tweeter dome drives frequency coverage to beyond 40kHz, though reading between the lines, the first HF resonance is probably around 25kHz. The rifling of the HiVe reflex port is claimed to aid airflow and reduce turbulence, and according to Monitor Audio, the bottom line is a more powerful bass coupled with superior transient response. We don't doubt these things are so, but it must have been difficult to prove.

The speaker's frequency response is claimed to be 40Hz-43kHz, though this is rendered almost meaningless by the lack of limits. Sensitivity is 88dB/watt at one metre, which is about right for an eight-ohm speaker this size, and nominal power handling is around 100 watts. The two drive units meet at 2.7kHz, which is unexceptional, but implies a tweeter with a low resonant frequency and one that should have respectable power handling.

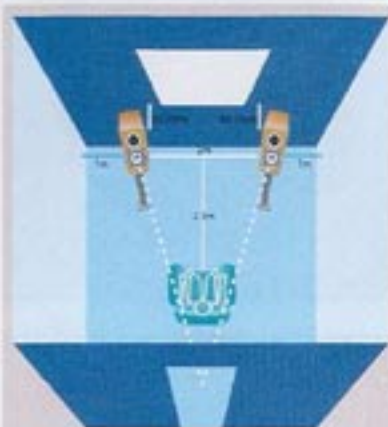
#### SOUND QUALITY

Loudspeakers are a mass of compromises. There is no way that everything can come together perfectly in one design, if only because optimising one aspect of performance is almost invariably at the expense of some other parameter. It's just the way speakers are. But you develop a nose for the good ones. There may be compromises, but on the whole, speakers either sing – or they don't.

This one most definitely sings. It is indeed small enough for a well nuanced playback of, for example, female voice and small-scale acoustic material. But orchestral-scale material, such as a newly arrived Mohler 2 from Boulez, was reproduced with effortless scale and a solid sense of authority from a system that also included an SACD-compatible disc player from T+A, plus the new MA6300 solid state integrated amp from McIntosh that will be the subject of a full HFC test soon.

And it wasn't just these two classes of music that were served so well by the GS10. It delivered a muscular, even exciting, room-filling ride with Marc Cohn, and on a completely different tack we were particularly impressed by Signal's *From Heaven* from Quotation Of Dream (Takemitsu/London Sinfonietta/Oliver Krussen on Decca). This ■

## SET-UP



### POSITIONING

The Monitor Audio GS10 is generally best sited about 60-70cm away from the rear wall. Nine times out of ten it responded better with no foam plugs to damp the bass, though some vocal material did benefit from the extra upper bass/lower mid control, and the greater perceived separation between instruments and voices that the foam allowed. Used without the plugs in a medium-size room, you should achieve a near optimum blend of grace and detail – the overall frequency response is subjectively very close to neutral – and a soundstage with impressive depth differentiation which extends appreciably beyond the left and right speaker baseline laterally. Musical dynamics sound naturally unforced, but have a real sense of power and range.

### SYSTEM MATCHING

The GS10 was used with a number of amps, including the E250, 50-watt Denon PMA-700AE (see review, p54), and the combination sounded entirely at ease, though the overall balance was a little weak, especially at high volume. There was not the power headroom available from more expensive amps, and the balance seemed dry and undernourished. Other amps used for this test were much more powerful, and include the Primare Pre 30 and A32 power amp combination, though much of the time was spent using the McIntosh MA6300 solid state integrated amplifier (as described in the body of the review).

The speakers were used on heavy 50cm stands, with the tweeters at about ear level, and with the speakers moderately toed in so that the inside panels of the two enclosures could just be glimpsed by leaning forward. They worked beautifully with Nordost Valhalla cables, but this represents an absurd price mismatch. From the various wires at our disposal, we found the Supra Sword to be a more cost-effective match that still offers plenty of fine detail resolution and a suggestion of warmth.

## Detail

Gold anodised tweeter is covered in a robust mesh to help prevent accidents

Metal surround acts as a clamp to hold driver rigidly in place

150mm bass/mid driver. Note concentric rings of dimples and fixed pole piece/diffuser

High-quality vertically and radially braced enclosure, real wood veneer

Low diffraction surround also helps to clamp tweeter in position

20.6cm

36cm

Reflex port with rifling on internal surface to help control air flow. A reticulated foam insert can damp port if required

Equipped for bi-wiring. Stamped metal links should be replaced or removed to improve sound quality

Radiused edges and corners give a smooth finish and reduce diffraction

recording has a searing brass section that can really hurt, especially through less than well designed metal dome tweeters and crossover networks. In this case, however, the sound was ripe and full, but with no noticeable loss of detail or bite – a very impressive performance for a loudspeaker at this price.

It is important to take considerable care over set-up, and we procrastinated for some time over positioning and whether to use the supplied foam port plugs. But there isn't necessarily a single optimum to aim for here, it all depends on what kind of music you listen to.

Don't expect the speaker to sound its best straight from the box, either – by some accounts, it needs a full 500 hours before it's fully on song. By the end of our test period we'd given our review pair a very thorough work-out, and if anything the sound was still improving when the time came for their return.

There is nothing serious lacking dynamically, but the speaker was occasionally a little too soft and relaxed when perhaps it ought to

have been spitting blood, and this tended to encourage slightly higher volume replay levels than usual. Coloration levels were low, with just a hint of a broad but very shallow suckout across the midband and the lower reaches of the treble. The power handling capacity is far from prodigious, but there is more than enough muscle to cope without significant compression effects even at uncomfortably high volume levels in a medium size room.

The new GS range includes models to complete a full multichannel system, though we have not auditioned them yet. But the GS10's appeal as a general-purpose, high-performance loudspeaker is obvious. Essentially it is a vice-free, expressive and refined speaker with enough low frequency bandwidth for most types of music, more than enough subtlety and transparency to suit almost any taste, and the resolving ability required to extract the most from high-quality amplifiers and source components. **HFC**

Alvin Gold



## VERDICT

SOUND >> 87%

EASE OF DRIVE >> 84%

BUILD >> 93%

VALUE >> 86%

PRO

Attractive, high-resolution standard speaker suits most good systems and small-to-medium-size rooms.

CON

It's a speaker that needs particular care over set-up and is best with bi-wire cables, or alternatively using replacement shoring leads. Performance is slightly soft centred under duress.

### CONCLUSION

One of the best-balanced Monitor Audio designs to date, the GS10 provides stable imaging, a strong sense of soundstage width and depth, and good image focus, in the context of an expressive though essentially neutral tonality.

**HI-FI CHOICE**  
OVERALL SCORE >> **87%**