



Revel yell

It may look unremarkable but **David Vivian** reckons this starter standmount conceals a rare sonic talent beneath that quiet facade

Here's the problem. You're a respected high-end brand entering arguably the most overcrowded market segment for hi-fi loudspeakers on the planet, the domain of the classic two-way standmount packing a 165mm mid/bass driver and a 25mm dome tweeter. There's traffic here. It's the Hyde Park Corner of hi-fi. Everyone's jostling for position.

What to do. Depending on the asking price, how about a spot of convention subverting trickle-down tech? An eye-catching ribbon tweeter to replace that oh-so predictable dome, for example. Or a novel slot-style reflex port instead of the usual circular exit. What else to stand out from the crowd? An exotic composite or weave for the

What's remarkable is the way clarity and focus is maintained as the decibels rise

main driver cone is usually a sure-fire hit, a visual tease of sonic rewards yet to come. Of course, there are things to avoid, too. Certainly an enclosure with curved side walls that taper to a narrow back panel – everyone's doing the 'boat back' these days. And surely no one's impressed by glossy black or white lacquer finishes in 2016. It's so very yesterday.

What sort of company would actually have the nerve to produce a new two-way standmount that conforms so exactly to the archetype – the dome tweeter and nondescript main driver, the round rear-firing port, the curved cabinet, the glossy black or white finish – that it simply wouldn't warrant a second glance in a well-stocked showroom containing rivals toting ribbon tweeters, woven cones, atypical porting arrangements and conspicuously flawless finishes for hundreds of pounds less?

Time to introduce the Revel Concerta2 M16. It costs £950 and is made in the USA. Despite its almost wilfully conformist appearance, there

are good reasons not to walk on by. First, the little plastic badge at the bottom of the magnetically fastened grille. Revel is not a name you want to ignore. Part of the vast Harman Group, it has the resources to ensure the reputation for sound quality and doing things right earned by its more expensive products is carried through to the second-generation refresh of its entry-level Concerta range which, as before, consists of six models: two floorstanders, a centre speaker, rear surrounds, an 800W subwoofer and this, the M16 standmount.

Secondly, the M16 looks a lot more at home where its clean-cut absence of driver bling works distinctly to its advantage if you want a speaker that blends in with its surroundings rather than a conversation piece. And thirdly, appearances are most definitely deceptive in this case. It might look plain and simple, but the engineering behind it is anything but.

As you'd expect, numerous cues are taken from the next performance tier up, as represented by the Performa3 range. Most obvious, perhaps, is the handling of the 25mm aluminium dome tweeter, which sits in a waveguide that, in turn, merges elegantly with the gasket for the mid-bass driver. This 'fourth-generation Acoustic Lense Waveguide', as Revel has it, boosts the tweeter's sensitivity and helps integrate its dispersion characteristics with those of the 165mm mid-bass unit. This driver uses an aluminium/ceramic composite cone, the deep anodising treatment increasing rigidity and internal damping without adding significant mass. The claimed upshot of the acoustic tethering of the drivers is smoother and more comfortable off-axis listening. No visible screws or nuts, either – very neat.

In fact, the enclosures are extremely sleek and slick. Constructed from 19mm-thick MDF, the fashionably curved sidewalls are, of course, the way they are for a reason (to minimise internal standing waves), and the edge-to-edge 'window pane' style bracing attends to resonance and the

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Revel Concerta2 M16

ORIGIN
USA

TYPE
2-way standmount loudspeaker

WEIGHT
7.3kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
218 x 375 x 270mm

FEATURES

- 25mm aluminium dome tweeter with integral phase plug
- 165mm anodised aluminium coned mid-bass driver
- Quoted sensitivity: 86dB/1W/1m (6ohm)

DISTRIBUTOR
Karma-AV

TELEPHONE
01423 358846

WEBSITE
karma-av.co.uk

cabinet-induced colourations that can result if left unchecked. Although the rear-firing reflex port doesn't look anything special, its 'aero' performance has been optimised through analysis to eliminate 'chuffing' when the speakers are being driven hard.

At 7.3kg apiece, the M16s aren't particularly heavy for their size but they do feel solid and 'knuckle-rap' inert, and the high gloss finish is very nicely done. It all goes hand in glove with Revel's meticulous application of computer modelling to optimise driver positioning and integration of the nine-element, high-order crossover, the results of which are then put to the rigours of double-blind listening sessions at the Harman Listening Lab in Northridge, California. A satisfactory subjective performance is the final arbiter as, of course, it should be.

Sound quality

If all of this leads you to think you'll be getting the M16's A game straight out of the packing carton, think again. Factory fresh, it'll sound a little forward, bright and uptight to begin with. As with many speakers that employ metal drivers, a degree of patience comes in handy while the units are run-in. Although a prolonged hammering with Biffy Clyro's back catalogue will probably do the trick, hiding the speakers away in a closed room for at least 24 hours with the burn-in tracks of a test disc ▶

Don't be fooled by the middle of the road looks, the performance is anything but



Q&A

Kevin Voecks

Acoustic technologies manager,
Harman Luxury Audio Group



DV: The M16 looks rather plain and unassuming, but sounds anything but. What's the secret?

KV: Our exclusive double-blind, position-independent listening tests are the last word on sound quality, as our ears are the final arbiter. Our engineering priorities are based upon thousands of such listening tests, which have provided irreplaceable insights, allowing us to know where to spend budget in a manner resulting in the best bang for the buck. Knowing the relative sonic importance of the many relevant areas in transducer and system design, while using the most sophisticated tools such as the Klippel analyser results in unbeatable sound quality.

How has the tweeter waveguide evolved, and what exactly do you mean by 'acoustic lense'?

Our research scientists discovered some time ago that the large difference in dispersion between tweeters and woofers (or midranges) in their crossover range results in serious sonic consequences. Some think that this is only impactful for listeners well off-axis, but that is only a small part of the advantage of our advanced waveguides and acoustic lenses. Indeed, since our researchers discovered the critical importance of the far off-axis response of speakers – especially in the crossover range – on sound quality for listeners on-axis, we have designed all of our speakers from the start to optimise a smooth transition between the tweeter and woofer or midrange. In blind listening tests, only speakers with good-performing waveguides are capable of sounding seamless, and the lack of being able to identify that there is a tweeter is critical in providing sound that is realistic, and plausibly real. The M16 dome profile and waveguide work together with the acoustic lens to smooth the response both on- and off-axis, providing yet another audibly significant refinement.

IN SIGHT



- 1 25mm aluminium dome tweeter
- 2 Rear-firing reflex port
- 3 Multi-way binding posts
- 4 165mm aluminium-coned mid-bass driver

on repeat is maybe the better bet. I opt to use my Cambridge CXC CD transport (HFC 401) and Monitor Audio A100 streaming amp/DAC (HFC 388) for this and feel no urgent need to substitute more expensive front-end components when the time for serious listening arrives.

So here's the first bit of good news: high-quality budget kit will work just fine with this £950 standmount. Take a potently produced recording like Corrine Bailey Rae's *Been To The Moon* from *The Heart Speaks In Whispers* album. Here the M16 is sensitive enough to make the A100's 50W a side sound like more and a benign enough load to showcase its best traits (soundstage air, imaging and resolution) without drawing attention to the amp's slight lack of grip in the low bass. And that's telling because, just as Revel claims, the M16 does a mighty good impression of a full-range speaker for a box of such relatively compact dimensions.

With the Cyrus CD Xt Signature transport (HFC 386), Chord Hugo DAC (HFC 386) and ATC CA2/P1 pre-power amplification (HFC 397) in situ, things move up a couple of gears, the track gaining scale, air, soundstage depth and a room-filling presence. The album's very lowest bass notes – and we're really talking about the subwoofer-category room shakers here – are understandably absent, but the lower registers are full bodied, tuneful and well timed. Add to this first-rate coherence and focus – an orderliness that lets you hear into the recording's multi-layered structure without fuzzy edges and sense of approximation.

The Cyrus transport and Chord DAC have an unerring ability to be truthful and unearth detail right down to the noise floor, and it's a tribute to the

Revel that you're left in no doubt as to the combo's communication skills. In short, the M16 can keep up and really does have a deft touch with rhythms. Can it play loud? Can it ever, but what's remarkable is the way clarity and focus is maintained as the decibels rise. No, there isn't the thudding overkill headbangers might seek, but you'll be amazed how vivid, dynamic and muscular this standmount can sound. The recently remastered CD of jazz legend Oscar Peterson's most dazzlingly virtuosic studio album, *Walking The Line*, is a riot with the great man's impossibly fast and elaborate two-handed keyboard runs reproduced with sparkling precision and weight.

Conclusion

Thankfully, the aesthetically self-effacing Revel doesn't sound anything like as plain and understated as it looks. Easy to drive and live with, it turns in a superbly open, detailed and dynamic performance that makes budget components sound great while still allowing higher-end kit to properly express itself. Warmly recommended ●



HOW IT COMPARES

Although £950 is affordable by Revel standards, it's a little hot compared with alternatives from Quad, Wharfedale, Monitor Audio and KEF who can all field circa-£600 models that hold their own with the M16. Two contenders from IAG – the Quad S-2 (HFC 408) and Wharfedale Reva-2 (HFC 412) – are certainly tempting, the Quad offering an excellent ribbon tweeter and the Wharfedale a superb performance and comparably solid build and finish. Closer in price, the £795 Quadral Chromium Style 2 (HFC 408) delivers a similarly clean and dynamic musical performance to the M16, but it can't quite match the US speaker's bass weight and extension.

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY



LIKE: Clean, precise, open sound with great bass. System friendly

VALUE FOR MONEY



DISLIKE: Rather 'generic' appearance

BUILD QUALITY



WE SAY: The M16 faces stiff competition and is a little pricey, but is a hugely likeable performer

EASE OF DRIVE



OVERALL

