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AUGUST 2006 UK £3.60

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## HEAVY METAL

Monitor Audio's new GS60 loudspeaker

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HI-FI QUERIES ANSWERED • CLASSIFIED ADS

AUGUST 2006



# Rock with

**R**ight now, there's no shortage of £2,000 loudspeakers on the market, so competition is strong. At this level, you're moving out of 'jack of all trades, master of none' territory and into speakers designed to do particular things particularly well. In the case of Monitor Audio's outgoing GR60, it was about a big, powerful, punchy rock sound, with visceral speed and power that made it a joy with modern popular music. The brand new GS60 is its replacement, and has much to live up to...

This, MA's flagship model, is a real eye catcher. Standing 1080mm high on its plinth, it isn't an object to be missed, and in modern homes I guess the styling is going to go down well. I like it - and the standard of finish is superb too. Those bright metal surrounds are slickly finished castings and the front port at bottom has intriguing internal vanes, designed to control air flow, Monitor Audio say.

The veneer is conspicuously real, with a deep grain that can be felt when touched. Monitor Audio apply a high gloss finish that doesn't smooth over this surface, so the loudspeaker survives close inspection. It looks good from all angles too. Weighing 27kgs (60lbs) the 'speakers are heavy, but moveable. The big cardboard packing cartons contain cast alloy plinths that bolt on, into which are screwed adjustable spikes or feet, accompanied by a small toolkit.

What you see here is basically a two-way loudspeaker, comprising gold C-Cam tweeter allied to a bass/midrange driver, augmented by twin fill-in bass units sited just below. The bass unit within the upper two-way assembly is loaded by a sealed cabinet. The two bass drivers are loaded by offset tuned reflex enclosures, each with its own port. One sits on the rear baffle, the other on the front. Monitor Audio's drive units are well developed, the tweeter having a dual layer dome whilst the three 6in RST2 mid/bass drivers have dimpled surfaces to add stiffness and disperse surface waves, benefiting from Finite Surface Analysis, the company say.

This type of drive unit arrangement is becoming increasingly popular, for good reason. The upper

# You

Monitor Audio's Gold Reference 60 loudspeaker garnered a fine reputation as a clean, fast and punchy rocker, aimed at those who want a modern sound from modern recordings. Now, the new GS60 promises more of everything. Noel Keywood listens in...

two way is easy to optimise, giving great results across the audio band, together with focused imaging. I prefer a two-way like this to the more diffuse sound of a D'Appolito.

The main drawback is bass power handling. To generate high levels cleanly, and survive high power inputs, a lot of cone area and coil area is needed respectively. Having said that, the GS60s are pretty sensitive our tests showed, managing 89dB from one nominal watt of input. In small to medium sized rooms, of 16ft maximum approximately, 60W should be more than enough, whilst 100W will do for bigger spaces. I used a 40W Quad II-40 in a 28ft square room and had plenty of headroom to spare, but whilst I sometimes play loud I don't play deafeningly loud. The rear carries two pairs of stout gold plated terminals, with removable links for biwiring. The screw terminals accept bare wires, spade connectors or 4mm plugs.

## SOUND QUALITY

Warm, soft and laid back the GS60s are not; our measurements show they have an upper midrange lift and treble peak that, respectively, give great forward presence, plus a wispy top end that doesn't sting so much as add obvious emphasis to cymbals, hi-hats and metallic percussion instruments in general. The upside is that Monitor's drive units have a sparklingly clean, clear delivery

"wide open and spacious sounding, there is little that will get past them in any comparison..."

that puts it all together in a way that makes most rivals sound dull and challenged in just about every respect. I heard right into recordings, detail being thrown into my lap. The sudden muting of ride cymbal in Scissor Sisters' 'Lover in the Back Seat' was suddenly a major event, and in the following track my attention was drawn to the way the drummer again used short stabs on cymbal.

Vocals were beautifully clear too, with very precise enunciation that gives the GS60s a sense of precision that is impressive. The balance suits clean modern rock; James Blunt's performances on 'Back to Bedlam' were wonderfully presented, full of detail and life. In spite of this basic balance the GS60s have a smooth dynamic that brings life and scale, whilst at the time sounding analytically clear. At times I heard a small amount of box character, likely provided by the front port, but it was small, to the point of being barely detectable. There also remains a slight amount of cone colouration too, barely consequential with rock but more apparent with classical, where the GS60s are a little less convincing.

As the large choir enters

in grand manner at the start Beethoven's Missa Solemnis (Berlin Philharmonic) it's obvious that the presentation is both forward and seemingly a little compressed at higher frequencies; I heard much the same effect with massed strings of the Berliner Philharmonic again, this time with Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto No.2. Vivid the GS60s certainly were, and smooth too, but a tad more forward than I believe is real or convincing once you sit down to listen to an orchestra. The drama of the GS60 was a little overplayed here. Piano had a slightly light ring too, the expected richness of tone being a little muted. Here, I felt the balance of the loudspeaker wasn't especially appropriate to the music; they're voiced for rock and are vivid with it; classical listeners may have reservations. In the history of loudspeakers this is

## THE EDITOR SAYS:

By the time you've got to the stage of paying two thousand pounds for a hi-fi loudspeaker, you've earned the right to know what you like and go out and get it. For this reason, those looking for soft, soothing jazz loudspeakers should look elsewhere. Likewise, classical music listeners seeking unremittingly uncoloured, characterless boxes wouldn't be best pleased with the GS60s. Fans of good old fashioned rock music however, and indeed not-so-old fashioned techno and electronica, look no further. The old GR60 was big, bad and tremendous fun, and the GS60 adds a dash of extra detail, sophistication, depth and finesse – plus (interestingly) an ever-so-slightly brighter, more challenging sound. It's superb – I love the GS60 – and it is a genuinely capable, high resolution tool that has the power and poise to extract the drama from music. But don't be complacent – you'll have to get the ancillaries right, and that means a very smooth front end and a 'big game playing' power amplifier. I personally would also add vinyl to equation; this takes the MA's pronounced upper midband down a touch (after all, CD has the very same characteristic) and really lets the GS60s get into the groove. Matched with care, these are superlative rock transducers. DP





I picked up straight away, having spent countless hours in this aspect of loudspeaker design myself and knowing the benefits. The GS60s display the company's grip on engineering here.

A promise fulfilled comes from the bass performance of this big and visually assertive loudspeaker. The bass drivers knit smoothly together, measurement showed, and there is no low frequency boost to warm things up. What you do get is massive low end heft and a good sense of grip, almost vice like in fact, depending upon amplifier, I found. There's an almost dry quality, a lack of slop and waffle, that's going to be appreciated by most listeners, but that is not to say there's any restraint of dynamic. Quite the reverse, the GS60s are fluid and dynamic at low frequencies, but also well damped and controlled; this is the sort of sound so many audiophiles crave, I believe; fast, tight and punchy. They go low too, but remember that I used a 28ft x 28ft room that allows this. Only big Tannoys do it better. Large solid-state amplifiers, like the NAD M3 I used, work well, although for most listening I relied as usual on a Quad QC24 pre-amp and II-forty power amplifiers, which the GS60s worked well with.

It is fairly obvious the GS60 has a very high quality crossover, making it translucent to amplifier quality and revealing of same, so it needs to be partnered carefully. There's little masking of source and budget amplifiers are not a good choice, as

I found the greyness, flat imaging and tizzy top of solid-state was all too apparent when a budget jobby was hooked up. Best not to use a sharp sounding CD player too; an Eastern Electric Minimax worked well at the inexpensive end, and Chord's DAC64 at the top end. I used both.

## CONCLUSION

Monitor Audio's GS60s are clear, fast and detailed like little else. Wide open and spacious sounding, there are few that will get past them in any comparison. Better, in spite of their slightly enhanced balance, shall I say, they have a smoothness, togetherness and sweetness that allows long term listening. I had no problem here, where often treble emphasis persuades me I have other things to do. With strong, tightly controlled bass that reaches down low, coupled with a supple dynamic and you have one of today's finest rock speakers at the price. From my own experience designing loudspeakers I know the GS60s are very thoroughly developed, not just from measurement but by their subjective sense of smooth 'oneness'. With classical music their balance is less convincing perhaps, but this is best assessed personally during audition.

Like the GR60 that went before, but more so, the GS60 is a class act that I can only award top marks for the totality of its engineering, superb finish and great price. If you want to hear one of today's best fast rockers, this is the one. Its an addictive listen, and at the price a snip too.

## MEASURED PERFORMANCE

hardly uncommon of course: it's a dilemma every speaker engineer faces; accuracy can be improved upon - and if you don't do it then your rivals will...

The GS60 will shade most price rivals in any straight comparison using rock because of its astonishingly vivid upper midband, but it isn't strictly a neutral performer.

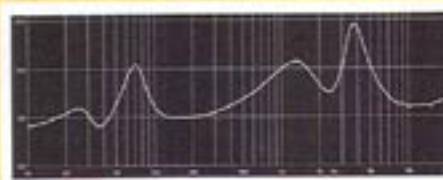
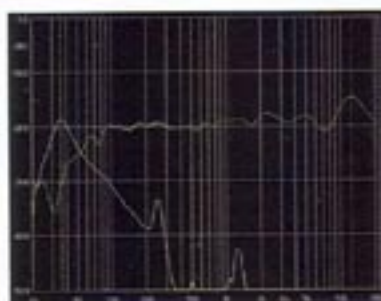
Measurement shows the drive units have been knitted together tightly by the crossover and this fact, allied with the use of similarly voiced materials in cone and dome make for a sense of smoothness and cohesion that again leaves rivals gasping. Top marks to Monitor Audio here too; you will hear this as a sense of tidiness, something

As expected from Monitor Audio, the GS60 has been tightly engineered to offer an even frequency response right through the audio band. It stays within tight limits of a few dB from 100Hz up to 20kHz, although there is plateau rise at high frequencies that will introduce brightness. Additionally, a peak in treble output of +4dB at 12kHz that is liable to add some hiss or wispieness to treble. There is no bass lift to add warmth to the sound; on the contrary, bass falls away to -5dB at 40Hz, but the lower port works down to 30Hz. In larger rooms bass will likely sound dry, well controlled and deep.

Impedance measured 5.5ohms overall, a fairly low value. The impedance curve has the usual rise due to voice coil inductance and is not too reactive. Sensitivity was good, as hoped from a large floorstander, coming in at 89dB from one nominal watt (2.84V) of input, so amplifiers

of modest power, no more than 60W or so, should normally be adequate.

The GS60 is neatly engineered and measures well. It should sound tight, bright and clean, with fairly dry, unemphasised bass. NK



### VERDICT

Surely the best rock loudspeaker at or near its price point - lucid, fast and revealing like few others.

**MONITOR AUDIO GS60 £2,000**

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### FOR

- clear, fast sound
- tight, deep bass
- great imaging

### AGAINST

- forward tonal balance
- music dependent