

Unity Audio The Boulder

Unity's first studio monitor, The Rock, was a bold move. This three-way active follow-up, says **Russ Hepworth-Sawyer**, is Boulder...

SOME OBSERVERS might question why a distributor would design its own studio monitors. What's the point when there are so many models to choose from already? And, frankly, what credibility, legitimacy and legacy might that distributor bring to such an endeavour?

Unity Audio's operational history has included the distribution of notable monitor manufacturers Dynaudio and ADAM. Through this, Unity has clearly learnt a thing or two and subsequently cast aside any doubt with its highly acclaimed monitor The Rock.

My colleague Phil Harding gave such a glowing review of The Rock back in August 2011's *PSNEurope* that I could not wait to get my hands on the big brother, The Boulder.

Meanwhile news was spreading that The Rock had ended up in mastering rooms at Metropolis Studio in west London. Surely The Boulder is more suited for that job I thought? Time to phone Unity and request a pair.

Each Boulder is a fairly heavy 23kg and is extremely well built from a plywood exterior and faced in a hardwearing speckle finish provided by the 30mm thick DuPont Corian front panel. Corian is a highly dense material



The Boulder: a three-way active monitor

that can be thermoformed to form smooth curved edges for the Boulder's body, and the attractive scoops either side of the tweeter.

This tweeter is actually a dual concentric mid-range driver and ribbon tweeter designed by Elac. The mid-range is "a ring radiator" made from an aluminium honeycomb with the ribbon tweeter placed in the middle. Meanwhile, two identical woofers to those found in The Rock make this a three-way box despite its four drivers.

Unity Audio enlisted acoustic designer Kevin Van Green for the Boulder cabinet design, and Tim De Paravicini of Esoteric Audio

Research (E.A.R.) for the amplifier. E.A.R. provides four discrete 100W Class A/B amps for each of the drivers with crossover frequencies set at 694Hz and 3.5kHz. This level of power is welcome given that The Boulder is a sealed cabinet design, as with The Rock before it. This is a positive feature as The Boulder has a smooth bass extension at low volumes for the size of both the 7" woofers and the cabinet. At times I was wondering whether I'd left my subwoofer on. The E.A.R. unit also facilitates a midrange cut/boost switch by +/-2.5dB plus a high-frequency EQ shelf switch at 10kHz +/-2.5dB to help keep things matched in challenging acoustic environments.

At the other end the highs were exceptionally clear and mostly smooth, although at higher SPLs I felt a brightness at times that could be a little tiring for some. The Boulder's mid-range unit ensures that the mids, and vocals especially, are delivered with pinpoint clarity. Working at low levels, Unity's new monitor provided solid low frequency response as well as crystal clear highs with relative ease that almost mean you can turn your usual working level down in the control room.

As I tested The Boulder, I tried to compare its sound to that of ported ATC SCM50ASL models. I felt the ATC monitors were less aggressive than The Boulder providing what could be described as a smoother sound, but one I am used to (its my age!). Despite being smaller than the SCM50, The Boulder still had an imposing sense of power. They provide a beautiful sense of clarity and presence that is no better or worse than the ATCs, but of a differing character.

For mastering it is important to have a sharp sense of the stereo field and The Boulder provides this. The placement of the mid-range driver and tweeter together provides solid alignment that provides focus throughout the SPL range. Interestingly I was not pinned down to one sweet spot in the room, as the dual concentric drivers permit a bit of user movement with little effect.

In a desperate search of a fault to report, I drove these in a fairly large room and eventually reached the volume limits of The Boulder but at an unhealthy, painfully high SPL before any distortion could be perceived.

If you're out shopping for a three-way mid-field monitoring solution of this calibre you could look at the ADAM S4X-H which is more expensive in the £5-£6k price bracket, or the ATC SCM50ASL, which is far more expensive. Given this, The Boulder is hard to ignore. ■

PRICE AND AVAILABILITY

• £5,160 (€6,460) inc VAT per pair

Available from Unity Audio
Phone: +44 (0)1440 785843
www.unityaudioproducts.co.uk

TECH SPECS

- Three-way active monitor with coaxial mid-range tweeter
- Crossover frequencies: 694Hz and 3.5kHz
- Frequency response: +/-3dB 39Hz-30kHz
- Maximum output level 113dB (1m on-axis)
- 4 x bespoke Class A/B 100 per Boulder
- Closed cabinet design
- Coaxial 5" mid-range and 50kHz folded ribbon tweeter
- 2 x 180mm (7") woofers

PROS

- Impressively sharp sound
- Excellent rounded bass extension at low SPLs
- Accurate stereo imaging
- Bespoke E.A.R. amplification for The Boulder
- Attractive Corian design

CONS

- Might be a bit too detailed for some listeners
- Equally has a brighter character some may not prefer

Clearly creative.



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Clearly Prism Sound. Clearly creative.

