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Tascam VL-X5 Monitors

November 2, 2006

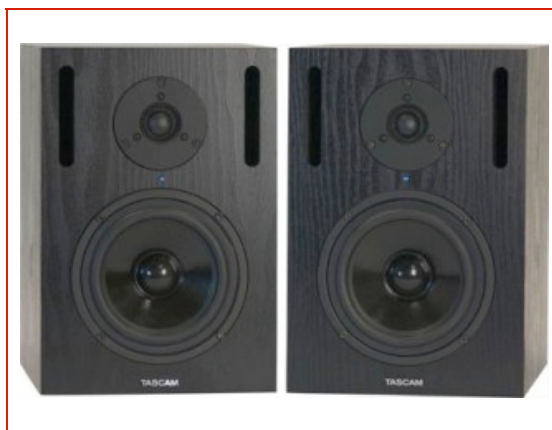
Pro Review by Warren Dent

Introduction:

I gotta admit, overall I'm not a big fan of Tascam. When our rep first brought these speakers by to listen to I approached it like "yeah, whatever man throw them up and I'll humor you"...but quickly found out that they were killing anything else in their price range and eating into some more expensive models as well.

Features:

- 5.25" Woofer
- 1" Silk Dome Tweeter
- 60W (woofer), 30W (tweeter) bi-amped
- Front Ported Design
- Nearly 12" deep cabinets
- HF control 3kHz, 8kHz (+1.5dB)
- LF control 150Hz, 800Hz (+1.5dB)



Specifications:

- Frequency Response: 45Hz - 22kHz (1 W @ 1 m, ±3dB)
- Axial Sensitivity: 103dB SPL (1 W @ 1 m)
- HF Amplifier Power (RMS): 30 W
- LF Amplifier Power (RMS): 60 W
- HF Driver: 1 in. soft silk dome
- LF Driver: 5.25 in.
- Crossover Frequency: 3kHz
- HF Control (±1.5dB): 3kHz, 8kHz (dip switch)
- LF Control (±1.5dB): 150Hz, 800Hz (dip switch)
- Low Cut Frequency: 40Hz, 500Hz (switch) (12dB/oct.)
- System Configuration: 2-way near-field studio reference monitor
- THD: 0.01% (40W, 1kHz, 8 Ω)
- Input Connectors: 1 XLR/1/4" TRS combination
- Input Level: 200mV, 10k Ω
- Power Requirements: 115V/60Hz or 230V/60Hz
- Cabinet: MDF
- Color: Black
- Width: 7.79 inches (198mm)
- Height: 11.45 inches (291mm)
- Depth: 11.41 inches (290mm)
- Weight: 15.43 lbs. (7 kg)

First Impressions:

The VL-X5 are made in Korea, and the build quality appears to be excellent. The finish is pretty much identical to the NS-10M Yamaha from back in the day (black woodgrain finish) and has a blue LED power indicator centered on the face. The tweeter is a 1" silk dome and the woofer is a 5.25". They are bi-amped on board with 60W (woofer) and 30W (tweeter) per speaker for a total of 90W. They are shielded for use close to monitors etc as well.

In Use:

OK...so what's so special about these monitors?

From top to bottom, they sound "real". They sound natural, they sound detailed, and the low end hasn't been hyped up to sound bigger than they really are (but again, the cabinets are almost a foot deep). The midrange is extremely impressive as well, delivering a balanced perspective whether at very low levels or absolutely cranked. Snare drums come cracking through, guitars are well balanced without any kind of "scoop" sound going on. The high end is pleasant but again, real. Not dark, not bright, just very representative of what you need to hear during a mix.

The VL-X5's will also get stunningly LOUD. And I don't mean the whole "small speaker being pushed to clipping the amps" kind of perceived loudness...I'm talking real volume that can be pushed very nicely without noticeable breakup in sound. But at loud volumes they also sound the same balance-wise that they do when played at low volumes. So translation will be much better no matter what the level you monitor at, but if you want to check some pretty extreme levels these are going to kill anything else in the sub-\$300 range (and a lot of stuff in the sub-\$700 range!).

Listening to material that I'm familiar with (major label stuff I've been listening to for years) I find myself hearing lots of detail and also noticing that these speakers would not make me want to change the balance of the mix. On my own mixes I played back one song that had a known flaw in it (a couple of pops I could not completely remove in a guitar track) but it's buried in the mix (nobody but me ever notices it because I mixed it). Well, it was prominent as all get out on the Tascam's.

Hearing the effects of compression was also very easy with the VL-X5 pair, not a lot of low end speakers really deliver that kind of information. I was pleasantly surprised to hear the full dynamic range being represented, and enough detail to hear the pump of certain songs due to vocals kicking in etc. Again I was able to hear it at low end hot volumes.

Pros:

- Natural response top to bottom
- Good detail
- Linear response
- Surprisingly "real" bass reproduction

Cons:

In this price range? I can't make any up.

Conclusion:

So I guess the whole point of my rant here is, there is a new sheriff in town in the sub-\$300 category of active monitors. The VL-X5 is incredible, and could be used by any mixer to get the job done. I cannot say enough good things about these speakers, they look good and feel good and are surprisingly useful tools at any price.

Warren Dent

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