

# M-Audio EX66

When you think professional studio monitors it is rare that you might consider M-Audio, whose product range veers more towards the consumer.

Additionally, the company, which is owned by Avid, is competing with sister company Digidesign (also owned by Avid), which recently launched its own studio reference monitors in association with PMC, the RM series. This, according to M-Audio, is neither here nor there and the company's range has been steadily growing over the years with the most recent addition being the arrival of the EX Series EX66 Reference Monitor.

These loudspeakers were originally launched and subsequently withdrawn due to a component manufacturing problem: "We discovered a potentially faulty component inside – essentially it happily passed all initial testing and QA but there was the possibility of it failing at a later stage. The decision was made that it was probably better to replace it in all units straight away than take a chance on the few that had already shipped," explains David Atkinson, UK marketing manager for the company.

But they're back and this time, they're ready for action. Sold individually at a RRP of £449 inclusive,

the EX66s are the flagship of M-Audio's studio monitoring range. The cabinets use a midwoofer-tweeter-midwoofer vertical array configuration, which the blurb states, creates an "extraordinarily versatile sound radiation pattern." As the monitors are designed to operate vertically purchasers need be sure they have the height, or more to the point that the height of the titanium dome tweeter is in line with the listener's ear, in order to make proper use of the monitors. This configuration of drivers also means that the monitors do not have to be 'toed in' to point directly at the listener; the sound radiation pattern does indeed negate this. In fact, the first thing that was noted on powering the cabinets up and throwing some Metallica down their necks was that the sound stage is excellent when the boxes are positioned correctly.

Set up, as you would expect is straightforward. With options for analogue XLR and S/P-DIF input, with the necessary power cable you are up and running. However, one little niggle is the input trim, which is located on the rear. Even though the marked reference level of 0 (where a reference level of pink noise -10dBV produces 90dB SPL at @ 1m, C-weighted) it took some time to get both monitors set exactly the same. A simple notch on the trim would help, as would having this control on the front instead of having to potentially move the monitor every time to reach the control on the back.

The EX66s also come with two and three position switches to control high, mid and low frequencies. The high frequency adjustment comes in the form of +/-2dB boost, cut or flat response at the crossover frequency of 2.56kHz. Initially, the inclination was to pull the 2dB as some of the highs sounded a little to metallic for my ears. However, after cycling through a variety of audio sources it was left flat. It is all a matter of ears, rooms and impulse response tests at the end of the day!

The midrange adjustment is two-way, flat or +2dB centred between 1kHz and 2kHz. If anything, the mid from these monitors was found to be slightly lacking, especially for those overdriven guitars, but the 2dB boost certainly did the trick.

In general the monitors have a nice rounded sound and the ported enclosure provides reasonably tight bottom end with the low cut switch

providing a high pass filter at 37, 80 or 100Hz. The monitors have a frequency response specification of 37Hz-22kHz and this is more than acceptable. However, the bass does appear to muddy slightly towards the bottom end – but then these are only 6-inch woofers so it is not a complete surprise when driving them hard. Experimenting by pushing the filter up to 80Hz was unsuccessful inasmuch as it was felt the overall response of the monitor was compromised. Better, to leave it where it lies and turn it down a bit – then again, my background is live and loud is best!

The final adjustment that can be made with is to the Acoustic Space. This comes in full, half and quarter settings to allow for positioning that can affect bass resonance (up against walls, on meter bridges, on shelves, in cupboards – not advised) and activates a shelving filter to avoid build-up of low frequency energy with 0, -2 and -4dB attenuation respectively.

The EX66s are certainly well suited for near field applications and their magnetic shielding will make anyone still using CRT monitors



The EX66's cabinets use a midwoofer-tweeter-midwoofer vertical array configuration, which creates an "extraordinarily versatile sound radiation pattern"

## Tech Specs

### EX66 active loudspeaker monitor

- » DSP tuned cabinets
- » Driver alignment provides wide 'sweet spot' and excellent soundstage
- » 2 x 104W amplifiers into 4 ohms
- » Selectable Acoustic Space to compensate for speaker positioning
- » Input trim on rear
- » Balanced and unbalanced XLR in addition to as SPDIF inputs
- » Hi, Mid and Low selectable filters
- » Manual packed with useful facts and figures!

Set up for the EX66s is straightforward. With options for analogue XLR and S/PDIF input, and the necessary power cable, you are up and running



very happy. The bi-amped designed coupled with the two 6-inch woofers and 1-inch titanium dome tweeter, complete with wave guide, deliver as much punch as you would need, 115dB peak for a pair at 1m, with THD+N quoted at <0.1%.

Their physical size (HxWxD) 482mm x 209mm x 241mm may not make them suitable for all applications, as does the fact that lying them on their side is not recommended, yet apart from their slight foibles the monitors would offer a good choice for a small to medium sized establishment.

Finally, the manual offers some interesting 'Did you know?' boxes providing hours of fun with questions about Bill Clinton, Pete Townsend and information on how to mathematically model what will happen to the acoustic image when the position of the EX66s are changed in a given room! Paraphrasing the mathematician Fermat, I just wish there was a bit more room on this page, because then I would show you the equation... [ ]

ROB SPEIGHT

CONTACT » M AUDIO

WEB » www.m-audio.com