

Test: Mackie CR3-Series

Mackie aims to manage the balancing act between consumer sound, mixing tool, and Bluetooth speaker with the third generation of their Creative Reference series. The price-performance ratio is sometimes astonishing, and a test candidate stands out. *by Laura Emiliano*

The CR series of multimedia monitors for smaller budgets was launched 10 years ago and is now in its third edition with new features. The models are aimed at home studio users, music listeners, gamers, podcasters and content creators. The series is based on digital Class AB (CR3.5, CR4.5) and Class D (CR5BT) power amplifiers and is graded according to speaker chassis size. All models have a 0.75 inch dome tweeter. There is also a "BT" version of the 3.5 and 4.5 models featuring Bluetooth 5.0.

We tested the CR3.5BT, CR4.5, and CR5BT variants. All speakers have an active box with an amplifier and all control options. The second passive box is connected via speaker clamps and cable. A new feature is the "Location Switch" to compensate for sound differences at greater listening distances. "Desktop" is for near-field placement, 'Bookshelf' optimizes playback at a greater distance. The "L/R" switch is used to swap the stereo pair and there is a power switch. On the front, there is a Tone control, which continuously changes the sound between Work and Play. Work is the linear operation as a studio monitor, Play offers a bass and treble boost like in hifi systems including a loudness function. The power amplifier delivers 50 watts peak for the smaller models, the CR5BT model features 80 watts peak. Cushion pads for placing the monitors are included.

A digital input for sound card signals would have been desirable in view of the digital output stages to avoid additional conversion. With the Bluetooth models, digital signals can at least be played in directly, even if Bluetooth codecs have not yet achieved loss-free transmission.

CR3.5BT

The background noise behavior is discreet, a slight hiss is only perceptible with the ear directly at the tweeter. The measured frequency curve largely corre-



Overall, Mackie has put together a package with the new CR monitors that allows proper monitoring and music listening.

sponded to Mackie's presentation. In linear operation, the frequency response varies by around +/- 5dB above 100 Hz. Not much is to be expected below 70 Hz. The "Desktop" setting offers a more linear reproduction at close range, while "Bookshelf" results in a slight boost below 250 Hz and above 5 kHz. At low volumes, the speaker sounds homogeneous and the stereo image is decent. At higher volumes, the hi-hats can pinch the ear. Bass is, naturally, not as present.

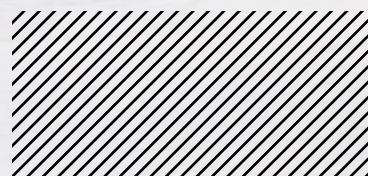
The CR3.5BT is well suited for anyone looking for a compact set of active loudspeakers for the near-field range to make rough signal assessments or to use them for gaming and listening to music at manageable volumes.

CR4.5

With the 4.5 model, enthusiasm spreads: voices are more vivid in the room, the bass seems more tangible. The decay behavior of short impulses remains well defined. The monitors benefit from being positioned close to the wall in order to achieve a "natural" bass response. Even higher listening volumes remain pleasant in terms of frequency reproduction. The CR4.5 is suitable for far more than just multimedia - not only for gamers and occasional listeners, but also for discerning tastes.

CR5BT

The CR5BTs go lower in the frequency range and deliver more fullness. The-



re is more ripple in the treble range between 5 and 6 kHz, so that the overall picture appears brighter and less balanced than with the 4.5 model. Voices appear less vivid and the fine dynamics are reduced. The CR5BT are primarily suitable for anyone who wants to listen to music in an "straightforward" way and who can live with less precise impulse reproduction in this case. Lower frequency components can also be "felt" well when gaming.

Verdict

The CR3.5BT are particularly useful for near-field reproduction at low volumes. The CR4.5 are recommended for those who focus on mixing and want the most balanced sound possible when listening to music. The CR5BT deliver more "muscle" in the bass range. For mixing, however, the CR4.5 remains a clear favorite. ::



More Info

Features

Two-way active-passive monitor system

0.75 inch silk dome tweeter (all models)

3.5 inch (CR3.5BT)

4.5 inch (CR4.5)

5 inch woven woofer (CR5BT)

70 Hz - 20 kHz (CR3.5BT)

55 Hz - 20 kHz (CR4.5)

51 Hz - 20 kHz (CR5BT)

Facts

Manufacturer: Mackie

Web: mackie.com

Distribution: Hyperactive

Pair prices: 99 Euro

(CR3.5), 129 Euro

(CR3.5BT), 139 Euro

(CR4.5), 159 Euro

(CR4.5BT), 219 Euro

(CR5BT)

▲ Sound

▲ Near-field playback

▲ Versatile use

▼ Boost not adjustable

▼ Hissing highs in play mode

Features: ■■■■■■

Workmanship: ■■■■■■

Sound: ■■■■■■

Total: ■■■■■■

Alternatives

ADAM Audio T7V

190 Euro

adam-audio.com

Yamaha HS5

164 Euro

yamaha.com