



FutureMusic



Focal Shape 65 £600 each

Do Focal's latest monitor speakers sound as good as they look?
Joe Rossitter cranks them up and throws some shapes...

CONTACT WHO: Focal **WEB:** www.focal.com **KEY FEATURES** I/O: Balanced XLR or Unbalanced RCA **DIMENSIONS:** 14" x 8.6" x 11.2"
WEIGHT: 8.5kg **FREQUENCY RESPONSE:** 40Hz - 35kHz **AMPLIFIERS:** Class A/B; Midrange, 80-Watt; High-Frequency, 25-Watt **EQ:** +/- 3dB for mids and highs; +/- 6dB for bass; High-pass filter at 45, 60 or 90Hz

THE PROS & CONS



Guide you towards mix decisions that translate fantastically

Accurate transient detail facilitates subtle changes in EQ, compression and dynamics

Easy to tweak them to your room thanks to the rear EQ controls, and the passive radiators give you flexibility



Sub bass response is slightly lacking compared to bigger monitors

Automatic bypass function is annoying, can't be disabled

Very subtle 'hi-fi' homogeneity from recording to recording compared to mastering-grade monitors



The included spikes (four per speaker) are helpful for acoustic decoupling and firing angle adjustment

Unveiled at Musikmesse 2017, Focal's new Shape range of monitors replace the French manufacturer's popular CMS lineup. Available in 40, 50 and 65 flavours, the latter of which I'm reviewing here, the Shapes now sit between their budget-friendly Alpha series and the Solo6 Be – another 6.5" two-way monitor – in terms of price.

Aesthetically, the Shapes are an interesting departure from Focal's

other designs. The main speaker cabinet is black-painted MDF with a luxurious walnut veneer, appearing less 'studio spaceship' and more 'hi-fi connoisseur' – in fact, they'd look just as at home in a domestic cinema setup as in a production environment. On the underside, the included spikes (four per speaker) are helpful for acoustic decoupling and firing angle adjustment.

The 65s are a two-way design, with a 1" aluminium/magnesium inverted dome tweeter and 6.5" "flex sandwich cone woofer". Interestingly, the Shapes are non-ported, with dual

6.5" passive radiators (one on each side of the monitor). Like many, I generally prefer the tighter bass response and positional flexibility a non-ported speaker provides, and it's interesting to see Focal implementing this in a unit that's priced within reach of the 'dedicated prosumer'. The downside of the side radiators is that the monitors *must* be placed vertically, but that won't be a dealbreaker for everyone.

Once set up, and after auditioning some reference material I'm familiar with, I felt the low-mids and bass regions were a little lacking in my studio for my liking, so I reached for the plentiful rear EQ controls. There's a 12dB/oct high-pass filter for subwoofer integration, low-shelf

boost/cut (+/-6dB at 250Hz), high-shelf boost/cut (+/-6dB at 4.5kHz) and low-mid bell boost/cut (+/-3dB at 160Hz). A +1dB low-shelf lift dialled in a touch more weight required for my room.

The subjective sound of a monitor speaker varies from brand to brand, and hearing differs from person to person, which is why most audio professionals tend to align with a particular speaker manufacturer. And this makes perfect sense – after all, one person's 'shimmering top-end' may be 'ear-shedding' to another. I'm already a fan of the trademark Focal sound, which I'd describe as somewhat 'mid-forward', guiding you towards a balanced mix in those all-important midrange areas. And the

THE ALTERNATIVES



HEDD Type 07

£525 each

Designed by an ex-ADAM engineer, these new kids on the speaker block definitely deserve your attention

www.hedd.audio



Genelec 8040BPM

£929 each

Another 6.5" monitor at this price point, this time with the signature Genny clarity loved by many

www.genelec.com



PreSonus Sceptre S8

£650 each

Need the heft of an 8" driver within a similar pricerange to the Shape 65s? These DSP-wielding coaxial monitors deliver the goods

www.presonus.com

Shape 65s more than deliver in this regard, as after a couple of test mixes, I felt they were indeed shaping (pun intended) my decision-making in the right direction. As far as translation is concerned, what you hear is what you end up with on other systems.

As you'd expect from a monitor of this price, the overall frequency balance is exceptional. The highs are sparkling and revealing without sounding overly 'metallic' or 'plastic' like other monitors. And that midrange is balanced and true to source. Something I like about Focals is that they don't have that sterile ruthlessness that makes more clinical monitors a bit uninspiring to work with, but they still give you more than enough transient detail, depth and accuracy to facilitate critical decision-making in terms of EQ and dynamics. To be fussy, though, when compared to more expensive monitors from Barefoot, Neumann, HEDD et al, I do feel the 65s have a very subtle 'homogeneous' quality to them. Differences between different recordings and tracks aren't quite as night-and-day as with pricier mastering-grade alternatives. But this is high-end nitpicking here, and the 65s more than make up for that with their personality and character.

When it comes to the low end of the spectrum, the 65s don't kick out an overwhelming amount of sub bass in comparison to heftier monitors, which makes sense due to the physical limitation of a 6.5" woofer. For the first couple of sessions, I found the Shapes' 40Hz-35kHz frequency response lacking in the bottom octave for my personal taste,



NOT FLAT These two-ways are slim and attractive, but the dual passive radiators on the sides prevent horizontal orientation.

GOOD WOOD Black MDF cabinet combined with walnut veneer gives the Shapes a luxurious 'hi-fi' aesthetic that sets them apart.

EASY ON THE EYE 6.5" flax cone woofer and 1" inverted dome tweeter not only sound terrific, but are a pleasure to look at

and sub-bass junkies will definitely want to pair these with a subwoofer. However, after getting past that, it became clear that there's enough low information to work with: tuck in and balance your sub frequencies on the 65s in comparison to well-produced reference tracks, and your mix will translate perfectly to the outside world (perhaps alongside the odd headphone check for sanity's sake). What's more, that supreme midrange representation – specifically the low-mid area – really helps you nail your low-mid EQ and dynamics, which is where important low-frequency harmonics live, and often clash with other sounds.

The Shape 65s' stereo image is also second to none. Positioning mix

elements around the stereo field is as easy as it should be. Focal claim the tweeter's low directivity allows for a flexible listening position, and rightly so: I found the accurate stereo image remained consistently good when reaching for synths and gear at various off-axis positions around my room – more so than more directional monitors I've used.

In summary, the Shape 65s punch far above their weight, and are a serious contender for the best-sounding and effective monitor speakers at this price point. Their sub-bass response won't smack you in the chest, but this might be exactly what's needed for a smaller, less treated home studio. Most importantly, they really do guide you towards simply fantastic mixes that sound as they should on other systems. If you're planning a serious monitor upgrade, the Shape 65s definitely deserve a test drive in your studio. **FM**

POWER SAVING

Just like Focal's Trio6 Be monitor, the Shapes feature an automatic bypass function. If no signal passes through them for 30 minutes, the green light on the front turns red, and the speakers put themselves into 'bypass' mode, indicated by a firm click sound. It's a neat power-saving idea in theory, but proves annoying in practice, as that two or three second wait for audio when you hit play again is a bit of a pain – and if you're used to monitoring quietly, you may need to turn up your levels a bit more before sound comes back on. It'd be nice if there was a way to turn this mode on or off.

FM VERDICT

9.2

Delivering delicious frequency balance, terrific transient detail and crystal-clear stereo, this is a worthy monitor upgrade for the price