

DYNAUDIO MC-15

Dynaudio MC-15 Loudspeakers: The World's Best Desktop Speakers?



Width: 6.7" Height: 10.2" Depth: 9.3"

Dynaudio bravely saddles their new MC-15 powered speakers with the moniker "multimedia", a term that, to many, conjures up images of the cheaply priced, and even more cheaply made, plastic boxes adjacent to most of the world's computer monitors. To describe most multimedia speakers as awful is an understatement akin to suggesting that Germans like beer. The crafty Danes at Dynaudio, of course, know that speakers meant to be used with computers (and iPods, cell phones, gaming consoles etc.) need not suck. Thankfully, for those of us with an interest in desktop hi-fi, they, along with their Finnish competitors across the Baltic, Genelec, have been producing some of the world's best powered monitors for the pro market for many years and have recently brought that knowledge and experience to bear on more consumer oriented products.

The company is celebrating their 30th anniversary this year and after establishing itself as one of the world's most formidable speaker brands in both the high-end consumer and professional markets, there is a great deal to celebrate. Dynaudio is also one of the industry's leading manufacturers of drivers, their transducers finding their way into dozens of speaker models from other companies. As such Dynaudio is a "full service", vertically integrated speaker manufacturer, producing not just drivers in-house, but cabinets, electronics and passive components (like crossovers). If the art of speaker making lies in the elusive synergy of drivers, cabinets and crossovers then the complete control over the process exerted by making all the bits yourself seems an enormous advantage; one that smaller, boutique speaker companies simply can't match. And so the MC-15 arrives with ironclad credentials, sporting a pedigree that portends a most promising speaker indeed.

Family Heritage

It would be difficult to confuse the MC-15 with anything other than a Dynaudio speaker. On its face is the large and distinctive 1.1" Esotec tweeter, which features a coated fabric dome, super light aluminum voice coil and what the company describes on their website as a "powerful magnet". The 5.9 inch mid-bass driver, with its raised and braced dustcap area, is even more distinctively Dynaudio. This driver also uses a three inch pure aluminum voice coil and features "a special magnesium silicate polymer diaphragm... and extremely powerful magnet built into a rigid aluminium frame". Inside each speaker a 50 watt power amp is dedicated to each driver, for a total per channel power output of 100 watts. The midbass hands over to the tweeter at 1500 Hz via a 6 dB/octave crossover and overall frequency response is rated at 55Hz-21 kHz.

Although they don't specify its wall thickness, the cabinet is very sturdily made with impressively inert sides and top. The baffle is even more impressive, constructed from what appears to be a synthetic stone (like Corian). It's thick, heavy, beautifully sculpted and very, very good at resonance control. On the back of the speaker we find the mail-slot shaped reflex port at top, with the amplifiers' heatsinking, controls and input below. Input is via a single RCA jack on each speaker (additional balanced inputs would have been a nice touch) and power comes from a standard, detachable IEC power cable. The company doesn't go quite as far as saying that the speaker is magnetically shielded, but they do say that "magnetic radiation is relatively low" and that "a certain distance from monitors should be maintained for optimum video and sound quality." With a nod to their pro-audio roots Dynaudio has, very sensibly, included some simple (and subtle) tone controls as well, allowing the user, for example, to shelve the treble a couple

of dB for nearfield listening or roll off the bottom end for use with a subwoofer. They've also built in protection circuitry which should make it pretty much impossible for audio lead-foots to blow them up. One final and highly effective touch are the little angled metal stands meant to point the MC-15's up from your desk to your ears.

Clean and Dynamic Danes



Having spent some time with Dynaudio speakers in the past, my expectations of the MC-15's sonic performance were high. In the course of my day job in feature film post production I'd come across Dynaudio's pro products on a couple of occasions: an editor I worked with used a pair of Dynaudio Acoustics passive monitors driven by a Bryston 4B on his editing system to great effect and I once worked with a music editor who used a fully active Dynaudio Acoustics AIR system on his Pro Tools rig. This latter system, in particular, was spectacularly clean, smooth and articulate, a benchmark in ultra fine grain, high resolution reproduction.

I used the MC-15's for a few weeks with my normal cutting room laptop based system: basically a Apple Powerbook G4 laptop, a firewire drive with about 120 gigs of music (both MP3s and AIFs or WAVs) with either the [Echo Audio laptop sound card](#) or the [HeadRoom Total Bithead USB Dac/Heaphone amp](#). While the MC-15's are no AIR system (and are priced far, far below those products, to be fair) the design philosophy and technical execution that makes the AIR systems sound so good is evident in their sound. These are the children of studio monitors alright, and I mean that in

the nicest way possible. Banish any notions of the infamously bright and edgy Yamaha NS-10 or the Auratone (derisively dubbed the Horrortone by some), or any other cheap and nasty studio monitor. The MC-15's are unfailingly articulate, fastidiously clean, and unabashedly upfront in their presentation; kind of like some non-existent, ideal politician. In the extreme nearfield (ie. on my desk) the forward presentation could be a little too much of a good thing, something that dropping the output of the tweeter 1db using the rear panel controls helped enormously.

The quality and sheer mass of the baffle and cabinet allow the speakers to not only sound clean and very, very quick, they help the MC-15's disappear into a lush and seamless stereo soundstage and place images very precisely within it. Small size and freedom from resonance (which is much easier to achieve in a small speaker) are major advantages when it comes to soundstaging and imaging and the MC-15's do not disappoint in this regard. Befitting a studio monitor, and perhaps unsurprising considering the quality of Dynaudio's drivers, both treble and midrange detail were absolutely first rate. You will hear everything your source is doing from 100 Hz and up with these speakers. The difference in quality, for instance, between MP3s in my library and uncompressed WAVs and AIFs was readily apparent. Delineation of busy and complex musical passages was also first class. With baffle and cabinet resonances so well controlled there is no overhang, no smear, no blunting of transients or wobbly bottom end. The word "clean" appears in my listening notes repeatedly. The tweeter is particularly outstanding, remaining smooth and free from sizzle or edge even at high volumes and in the extreme nearfield, just as a great studio monitor should.

When it comes to reproducing bottom end and the impact of big transients, however, being small and well braced isn't enough. You need to move air, and that takes size. Thankfully Dynaudio has resisted the temptation to try to make the MC-15's sound bigger than they are. To do so would likely have compromised their midrange and mid-bass performance, and, let's face it, a speaker this small is never going to be bass star. So we're left with a speaker very light on its feet with fabulous treble and midrange performance, very fast, and punchy mid-bass, but not a lot going on below 60 Hz. As such they don't have the balls of the [Genelec HT 208](#) (which is a little too big for most desktops anyway, and more than twice the price) and they lack impact and

authority on music that demands it, but they don't suffer from the muddy, sloppy, exaggerated mid-bass that passes for bottom end in almost every other "multimedia" speaker. And if you do want to bring some real bottom end to the party, Dynaudio themselves can sell you a proper subwoofer designed to match the MC-15's, the Sub 250 MC which sells for US \$650. Carefully placed and matched with the MC-15's a sub of equivalent quality will make for an absolutely killer desktop system. Sadly, time, space and location did not allow me to test the MC-15's with Dynaudio's sub, or anyone else's for that matter.

For people shopping for computer speakers in the sub \$300 range the price tag on the MC-15's will likely make them either gasp or laugh. "How much better can they really be than these Logitech things anyway"? Trust me, they're that much better. If you're anything like me you spend a good deal of your waking hours in front of a computer. If you've got a serious audio system at home, ask yourself this: How many more hours per week do you (or could you) listen at work than you do at home? If the balance tips towards the office, as it so often does, the Dynaudio MC-15's could represent a major quality of life improvement. Space efficient, elegant, and capable of truly excellent sound, the MC-15's are the best high-end desktop speakers I've come across. Who cares if they cost more than your computer? They're worth it.

Aaron Marshall

Audio Ideas Guide (diciembre 2007)