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The Making of CHRIS STAPLETON'S FROM A ROOM: VOLUME 1



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Fluid Audio F5 Active Monitor

Small size meets performance that pleases the ear... and the wallet

REVIEW BY MIKE METLAY

We've looked at a couple of Fluid Audio's monitors in recent issues: the FX8 in November 2016 and the FPX7 in March 2017. We found the FX8 to be an exceptional value as an 8" monitor with beautiful imaging and soundstaging, and the FPX7 an intriguing combination of technologies with its folded-ribbon tweeter. Both of those were coaxial designs, with the tweeter mounted in the center of the woofer; Fluid Audio also makes a variety of conventional 2-way monitors as well, and we recently had an opportunity to work with the F5 in our studios. The F5 was actually Fluid Audio's first monitor, and we enjoyed the chance to go back and check it out.

The F5 on paper

The F5 is one of Fluid Audio's Fader Series monitors, so named for the unusual fader-based level control on the front fascia. It's a 2-way monitor with a 5" composite cone woofer and a 1" silk dome tweeter. The drivers are mounted in a vinyl-covered MDF cabinet that's decently nonresonant, with gently rounded corners to minimize edge-related artifacts. In a nod to the fashion-conscious, it's even available in a choice of color schemes: traditional black, or a version with white cabinet and woofer cone and contrasting black faceplate.

It's a biamplified Class AB speaker with 40 W power available for the woofer and 30 W for the tweeter, and the 250 x 176 x 195 mm (9.8 x 6.9 x 7.7 inch) monitor weighs about 11 pounds—hefty and solid without being ridiculously heavy.

The front panel features an inset faceplate that houses both drivers, the opening for the front-facing bass reflex port, and the output level fader (which runs from muted to 0 dB with detents at -3, -6, and -18 dB for ease in level matching). A tiny recessed LED lights up red when the speaker is in standby mode, which it enters after 20 minutes of silence, and blue when it passes audio. The LED is so far back that it acts as a sort of visual guide to indicate when the speaker's pointed straight at the listener; it's invisible even a few degrees off axis.

The rear panel is dominated by a massive heat sink, a common feature on Fluid Audio's monitors, and features three inputs: balanced XLR and TRS and unbalanced RCA. There's also



an IEC power cable socket with fuse compartment, power switch, and voltage selector for US or European power. As was the case on the FX8, there's no rear-panel voicing control on the F5. This omission doesn't concern me very much; there's a lot of potential for misuse of those controls among the entry-level musicians who'd be purchasing the F5, and sacrificing some flexibility in return for a consistent voicing is a sensible choice. It certainly simplified setup!

A few specs are listed in the short but clear owner's manual. The frequency response is listed as 49 Hz to 22 kHz with a tolerance of ± 3 dB; the tolerance is given on the Fluid Audio website, but it's not in the manual (tsk!).

The F5 has a crossover frequency of 2500 Hz, a signal-to-noise ratio greater than 100 dBA, an input impedance of 20 k Ω balanced and 10 k Ω unbalanced, and built-in protection against RF interference (the cabinet is magnetically shielded), output current limiting, overheating, transients at power-up and power-down, and subsonic overload. Input sensitivity is very precisely specified: 85 mV pink noise input produces 90 dB SPL at one meter with the fader all the way up.

The F5 in use

I set up the F5s in *Recording's* office studio in an equilateral triangle of roughly 48" between the tweeters, with the monitors set on IsoAcoustics Aperta isolation stands, and settled down to listening over a period of several days before beginning to work with them in tracking, editing, and mixing settings. Fluid Audio specifically warns against setting up the speakers horizontally, as this will adversely affect imaging, but they're so small that I can't imagine anyone feeling that a horizontal placement was necessary.

The first thing I noticed about the F5 is its remarkably well-imaged midrange. This is a great speaker for listening to the critical elements of a rock mix like lead vocals, guitars, and snare drum. There's a real sense of presence and definition that allows for accurate and detailed examination of those sources. Very impressive! Off-axis listening tended to exaggerate this midrange separation to my ears, but not painfully so. This isn't a midfield speaker, it's meant for a close-in and personal listening experience and does well inside its sweet spot.

I didn't notice any significant anomalies around the crossover frequency, and found the silk dome tweeter very easy to listen to, with smooth high end that had nary a trace of sharpness or spittiness. It wasn't as finely etched as one might expect in a folded-ribbon or metal tweeter, but the

sound blended well in the overall tonal balance of the F5.

As is common on a speaker this small with a 5" woofer, bass tended to roll off very politely below about 60 Hz, but what was there was solid and didn't have any obvious one-note woofiness. This would be a good speaker to pair with a subwoofer for that lowest octave or two. If that's not an option for your listening area, you should make a point of checking your mixes' lows on reference systems for safety's sake.

Conclusions

The overall listening experience for the F5 is more pleasant than clinical. It presents audio with detail and clarity, but there's an overall sense of warmth that makes the F5 a delight to listen to for pure pleasure. There are no rear-panel settings to fiddle with and maybe set wrong, and the front-panel fader is easily accessible for the user who doesn't have a monitor controller. Given all those things, I see it as a very good choice for the casual recording musician whose workspace and budget can't support having two sets of speakers, one for creating music and one for listening to it.

The F5 is extremely affordable, sets up in a hurry, and provides very good sound for the bedroom recording setup right out of the box. At this price, there aren't many speakers that can beat what it provides, and you could do a lot worse than this pretty little monitor. It's easy to see—and hear—how the F5 was so successful in establishing the Fluid Audio line. 🍷



PRICE: \$299.99/pair
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