



Pure XTZ

A distinctive shape and a distinctive sound make the new M2 loudspeakers from Scandinavia a winning combination, says Jon Myles.

Swedish audio company XTZ has forged an enviable reputation for producing well-engineered, great sounding components at real world prices since its inception just over 11 years ago.

Founder Ollie Eliasson has almost 30 years experience in the business and an unbridled passion for loudspeaker and electronics design as well as providing value-for-money products.

The policy has proved a big success with XTZ expanding its range over the years to include headphones and earphones, amplifiers, CD players and measuring equipment as well as its core range of loudspeakers.

The latest model to join the

stable is the new XTZ Master Series M2 standmount – which in typically uncompromising fashion the company describes as “a truly unique product in the audio world: a compact loudspeaker designed under all aspects as a real high-end speaker but at a price point that is rare in this industry. Master M2 is built without compromise that comes close to the perfect high grade 2-way speaker within its dimensions”.

That's quite a claim for a 'speaker costing a relatively modest £1400. But unbox the M2s and you immediately realise a significant amount of engineering has gone into their construction.

The cabinet, for a start, is a teardrop shape and constructed from a new composite material consisting

of epoxy, polyurethane, potassium carbonate and organic gas bubbles which is said to be 40 per cent denser than MDF and so better able to control resonances. Added to this is significant internal bracing which accounts for each 'speaker weighing more than 9kg each from what is a relatively compact 231mm x 424mm x 374mm (H/W/D) cabinet.

The main mid/bass driver is a 165mm polypropylene unit developed by Norwegian specialist manufacturer SEAS to XTZ's own specifications, while the tweeter is larger than average at 30mm and is deep set in its own waveguide to improve efficiency and provide better high-frequency dispersion.

Round the back are two pairs of gold-plated terminals to facilitate

bi-wiring, for which provide full one and a second (later).

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bi-wiring if required, and a reflex port for which two bungs are supplied to provide different room tuning – a full one to give sealed-box response and a semi-open variety for those wanting more bass (more of which later).

Fit and finish is extremely good with the high-gloss black finish and unusual shape making the M2s stand out from the run-of-the-mill box design of many rivals.

SOUND QUALITY

As befits the attention to detail put into the design of the M2, it requires a good degree of care from the listener to get it sounding at its best.

That's because it is essentially highly revealing and so positioning, the use of the bungs and partnering electronics are all vital – more so than in many other loudspeakers around this price.

Setting them up initially with the full bung in place and situated close to a rear wall they sounded fast and detailed but rather dry in the low-end. Switching to the semi-open sleeve and bass response became decidedly fuller and more rounded – which was how I used them for the bulk of the listening.

Similarly, a Class A Sugden FBA-800 power amplifier – while clean and clear as always – sounded a little short of the requisite drive to really get the M2s to sing. Instead I opted for the 100-plus Watts of the excellent Creek Evolution 100A integrated which really brought things alive.

Now I could hear what the XTZs are capable of – which is an exceptionally smooth, sophisticated sound which majors on detail and insight as opposed to artificially extended highs or lows.

On Messiaen's 'Quartet For The End Of Time' the piano, clarinet, cello and violin are placed with pinpoint accuracy in the soundstage. There's air and extension to the tweeter although not in the sense of sounding bright or forced. Instead instruments have a sense of life and timbre.

The open nature of the M2s also mean they reveal details in tracks that some other loudspeakers gloss over. Listening to Saint Etienne's shimmering 'Milk Bottle Symphony' the sound of tinkling glass and footsteps could have been there in the room with me.

That same quality means the M2s handle more up-tempo performances with aplomb, having a subjectively

'fast' sound with no sense of bloat or unnecessary bass drag. The Killers' 'Human' was driven along at great pace, the bass firm and taut but never overdone.

All these qualities, however, mean the M2s don't flatter poor recordings. Playing over-compressed pop or rock I soon knew about it – but that's a trade-off to the overall accuracy of the design.

What the XTZ M2s will do, however, is shine a clear light onto your recordings and even the quality of components used with them bears comparison with loudspeakers costing many hundreds of pounds more.

CONCLUSION

If you want an accurate, revealing loudspeaker that will tell you exactly what your system is capable of, the XTZ Master Series M2s could be exactly what you are looking for. Partner them with the right amplifier and take time with positioning and tuning and they really do belie their price tag.



The rear of the Master Series M2 includes a pair of 'speaker terminals, plus a tuneable reflex port with XTZ supplying a full and semi-open bung to tailor bass response to the room.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Frequency response of the XTZ M2 shown in our analysis runs smoothly and evenly across the audio band. The drive units are well integrated, with no trough at crossover and this result was held at a range of measuring-microphone positions vertically and laterally, helped by the small horn in front of the tweeter. So the M2 can be pointed at listeners or straight down the room with little difference in its sound balance. And it is fundamentally accurate in this balance, so will sound

smooth and a tad less bright than many.

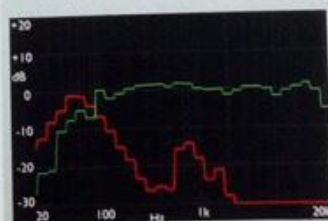
Sensitivity measured 84.5dB from 1 Watt input (2.84) and overall impedance measured 8.8 Ohms, quite a high value, explaining the low-ish voltage sensitivity figure. The bass unit has a high d.c.f. of 7 Ohms, where 4 Ohms is common nowadays, expelling the low sensitivity; the speaker draws less current than most, but needs amplifiers with some power, 60 Watts or more being suitable.

Our impedance trace shows the open port as green, the annular bung as yellow and full bung as brown. When measuring frequency response with the annular bung, a peak at 40Hz appeared in the response trace and clearly this bung offers a good compromise with a little more bass heft. However, with no bung the speaker was bit more even in response, whilst the full bung did, as is common, negate port action, turning the cabinet into an Infinite Baffle the brown trace shows. This gave a damped frequency response where bass rolled off steadily, suiting near-wall placement. Port output was high so it contributes substantially to bass.

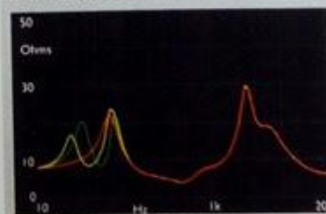
The M2 measured well. It is tonally accurate and will sound smooth, yet detailed. It does need to be used with a reasonably powerful amplifier however. The two different bungs supplied offer useful fine tuning options. **NK**

FREQUENCY RESPONSE

Green - driver output
Red - port output



IMPEDANCE



XTZ MASTER SERIES M2 £1400



OUTSTANDING - amongst the best.

VALUE - keenly priced

VERDICT

A revealing, accurate loudspeaker that majors on detail and insight but is never less than enjoyable.

FOR

- accurate
- insightful
- bass tuning possibilities
- build

AGAINST

- doesn't flatter poor recordings

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