

STEREO SPEAKERS / MP3 ACCESORIES

BEST STEREO SPEAKERS £150-£350

Monitor Audio Bronze BR2 £200

**THERE'S A NEW** kid in town, and it's after an Award. We loved the BR2's predecessors, and we're pleased to inform you that things are even better now.

Monitor Audio has broken a basic rule: the BR2s weren't broke, but they fixed 'em anyway. But during the 'fix' process, they left the solid construction, quality finish and neat cosmetics.

**"Adding the BR2s to more capable kit won't see them out of their depth"**

*Simon Lucas, First Tests Editor*

The improvements are not only skin deep, though. The new and improved tweeter has a wider bandwidth, giving an airy, but not artificial, top-end. The bandwidth improvements also mean that the tweeter can venture lower in the frequency range, making sonic integration that bit easier.

Solid build, sonic performance and decent aesthetics make the BR2s a 'must audition'

**VERDICT**

For unashamedly good budget speakers, there's no point in looking any further



However, it's the overall results that impress more than individual upgrades. Although they come in at £200, these are refined speakers, so they won't make a meal out of aggressive systems, or harsh, raw recordings. The detail resolution, too, is superb for the money, so adding

them to more capable kit won't see them out of their depth, unlike many rivals. We put them on a pair of Soundstyle Z2 stands, biwired them, and the sonic improvement was immense.

**Polite partners need not apply**

The only minor disappointment is the slight smooth edge, which renders some aggressive music – like *Be Your Own Pet* – a bit on the polite side, for our tastes. That aside, if you're into your music, but can't justify thousands of pounds on high-end speakers, these won't disappoint.



**CD PLAYER**  
CAMBRIDGE AUDIO AZUR 640CV2  
£250

For all-round performance at a price that won't have your bank manager in fits, try this

**STEREO AMPLIFIER**  
ROTEL RA-05  
£350

The addition of this amplifier will give this Award-winning system finesse as well as brawn

AWARDS 2006

STEREO SPEAKERS  
BEST STEREO SPEAKERS £150 - £350  
MONITOR AUDIO BRONZE BR2



STEREO SPEAKERS

Monitor Audio Silver RS1



£350

**IT HASN'T BEEN** long since the *First Test* of these speakers (last October), but ever since, we've been anxious to get them into a *Group Test* like this. Our initial impressions were overwhelmingly positive, but only against a worthwhile collection of peers can a loudspeaker's reputation be made (or flattened). The RS1s have the showroom appeal, but they're up against some great-sounding and established favourites here.

**The silvers are pure gold**

Like all standmounters, the Silver RS1s do their best work when isolated on top of some substantial speaker stands, but the Monitor Audios don't lay claim to the amount of free space that some rivals demand. Toe them in toward your listening position just a fraction, enjoy the fact that they didn't need as much playing-in time as their rivals, and let them do their vivid, articulate thing.

A song like Devendra Banhart's *Heard Somebody Say* suits the RS1s down to the ground: they're fast, tight, time well and – despite a default setting that presumably reads 'mature and grown-

**FOR**

Articulate, accurate and rapid sound; excellent standard of fit and finish

**AGAINST**

Lacking the last smidgin of low-frequency conviction

**VERDICT**

Thoroughly likeable and enjoyable, the RS1s will find favour with anyone who listens to more than just the bass

up' – are prepared to get gritty and raucous as and when required. The soundstage they create is plausible, and dynamic shifts are handled with something approaching contempt. Integration, both through the frequency range and between instruments and voices, is first-rate.

Switching to The Shins's *Saint Simon* reveals the only, tiny, chink in the Monitor Audio's armour: while there's no shortage of low-frequency presence, and it's all well-timed and controlled, the Silver RS1s don't launch into the leading edges of bass notes with quite the attack that, say, the KEF iQ5s can muster.

Only the most strident of bass fans

**"We're struggling quite badly to find fault with these very**

will count this minimal vagueness as a downside, but we're struggling quite badly to find fault with the MAs: this little hesitancy will have to suffice.

All of which should illustrate just how highly we regard the RS1s. They're well made and look good, they're laidback about room position, and they sound just as good as the amplifier that drives them. Unless you're a strict hip-hop/dub/R'n'B listener, you need to audition these.



These Monitor Audio speakers stand comparison with even the best loudspeakers in our *Group Test*

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MP3 ACCESSORY PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

MONITOR AUDIO I-DECK £200

Pick up last year's Awards edition, and you'll find the i-deck occupies our MP3 Product of the Year slot. As you can see, one year on, it's the same story. Does this demonstrate a lack of imagination on our part? No, it doesn't: we've tested a barrow-load of MP3 speaker systems over the last twelve months. However, it does illustrate just what can happen when a manufacturer gets things spot-on. Helped by a fifty quid price cut, the i-deck still offers the most effective way to dock your 'Pod and unleash your air-guitar. This system is one of the few MP3 speaker set-ups to offer 'hi-fi-esque' sound, plus deliver enough muscle to fill a decent-size room. Love that new black finish, too.



AWARDS 2006

PRODUCT OF THE YEAR  
MP3 ACCESSORIES  
MONITOR AUDIO I-DECK

PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Monitor Audio RS6 AV

£1900

**YOU CAN'T JUDGE** a piece of hi-fi equipment on looks alone, but there's no denying that showroom appeal counts for a lot. If Monitor Audio's riveting RS6 AV speaker package looked rough as an old boot, we'd still enthuse about its sound, but retailers would have their work cut out selling it to the public.

Fortunately, the RS6 AV looks very nearly as good as it sounds. The wood finishes are smooth, lustrous and expensive-looking, while the mixture of materials that make up the drivers (ceramic-coated magnesium/aluminium alloy with gold dome tweeters) add to the package's appeal.

**This is a special-sounding system**

So, provided that you have the space, this Monitor Audio package will look discreetly indulgent in your home cinema room. Driven by an appropriate multichannel amp, it also sounds indulgent – but far from discreet. The presentation is confident, engaging and superbly detailed. The clean and uncluttered top-end communicates impressively, while dialogue comes

**VERDICT**

This combination of graceful looks and compelling sound with movies and music doesn't come along too often – not at this price, anyway



**YAMAHA DVD-S2500 DVD PLAYER**  
£700

Great picture, hefty sound and full spec, and this DVD player looks the part, too

**YAMAHA RX-V4600 AV RECEIVER**  
£1000

The drive and huge soundstage will suit MA's loudspeakers down to the ground



AWARDS 2005

PRODUCT OF THE YEAR  
SPEAKER PACKAGES  
MONITOR AUDIO RS6 AV

across in a crisp and natural manner. Low frequencies are tight, deep and authoritative, while the entire frequency range knits together seamlessly. Buying the RS6 AV is a decision you won't regret in the cold light of day.

**"The wood finishes are smooth, lustrous and expensive-looking, adding to the package's appeal"**