

Fostex RM-2

You want sound but the space is tight so you'd like it as small as possible. How does as stereo rackmount in a 1U grab you?

ZENON SCHOEPE listens with confidence.



MONITORING CAN BE divided into a number of different classes depending on your outlook and how precious you want to be about the subject. In there among the talk of definitive references and domestic reference lies the unglamorous but important business of monitoring just to hear that something is there. Rackmounting such a monitoring device makes it the preserve of the machine room, truck or anywhere else where space is tight or valuable. The problem with the RM-2 is that it's not rackmountable when you get it; you have to screw the ears on yourself. That's the sort of thing I used to enjoy when I was younger but it's an irritation now and I can't imagine why anyone would want to use it as a standalone; if you need a standalone then use some speakers.

The RM-2 (£399 + VAT) is a tidy little 1U that provides two speakers for full and glorious stereophonic reproduction together with some metering and analogue or digital input source selection. Rackmounting monitors tend to fall into two rough categories: those that serve as a listening post for a variety of sources that can be connected to the back and those that simply play out leaving the multitude of source selection to some other piece of gear. The RM-2 very firmly falls into the second type. You get a pair of balanced inputs on Combi connector and an XLR AES-EBU running 44.1-96kHz. You switch between these two sources on a dedicated front panel switch with LED indicators.

Once you have the stereo signal you want you can decide how you'd like to be listening to it. A second

switch circles through the options of delivering from the two speakers LR stereo, mono or the isolated Left or right channels individually in mono. Thankfully there is LED indication of what you are listening to although it's not the most obvious of presentations. The Channel Select switch also acts as a Mute when pressed and held.

There's then a dual concentric Level pot and a fine sounding headphones circuit that disables the speakers when a plug is inserted. Finally we encounter the metering which is multi-LED and switched in ballistic from 3S peak hold for digital sources to just peak hold for analogue sources. Needless to say, slap a modern hot CD up the analogue and the room lights up and stays lit. The Peak hold on this is unfortunate and would have been far more useful if it followed the digital input's 3S pattern. I also have a problem with the intensity of the LEDs because they are so very bright that in low to medium lighting conditions I found they blinded me from being able to see the panel legending around them.

Still, the RM-2 doesn't sound that bad for the intended application. There's very little in the way of rattles and buzzes, which is important. The sound is peaky and mizzly without a lot of top end fizz — perfect therefore for cutting through in noisy environments. There's also more than enough level available if it should come to a shouting match, although the RM-2 becomes very strident in its delivery when wound up. The 110mm x 40mm cone, magnetically shielded drivers are driven by a 10W amp, which doesn't sound as dangerous as it is, if you get my drift.

It's not a bad little package marred by the metering issue but the fact remains that it is rare to find a rackmount monitor for this sort of money. ■

Fostex 6301D Representing one of the enduring designs from the brand, there seem to have been small black boxes with volume controls and orange Fostex logos on the front for as long as the company has existed. Of course, the models have changed but the 6301B, on which the 6301D is based, has been around for long enough to attract widespread acceptance. You'll see them in studios, machine rooms, bound together with an adaptor and rackmounted, and they've long been an exhibition demo favourite on account of being small and innocuous. It's the definitive convenience monitor.

The 6301D (£199 +VAT each) adds an AES-EBU input and Thru to its back panel alongside the analogue jack input. The front panel retains the power switch and LED and Volume pot, which never really needs to go past 2 in a small civilised room situation.

Part of the charm is the aluminium box and metal grill that makes it feel indestructible and 6301s can certainly take some knocks (note to SCVLondon to check the review models upon return). A 10W amp drives a single 10cm driver with no ports and no fancy stuff. Like the RM-2 above, 6301s are about hearing something rather than listening and in this role they excel. There's a mizzly quality again that aids clarity and you're not going to forget about it while it's playing along in the background. However, what I really like about them is how you can pick them up and plug them into anything you want to get sound out of in a hurry. Still convenient, now with a digital input.



PROS Compact; loud enough and abrasive enough to keep you informed.

CONS Metering too bright in low light conditions; peak hold is too much.

Contact

FOSTEX, JAPAN:
Website: www.fostexinternational.com
UK, SCVLondon: +44 208 418 1470