

**THE CLOSED BOX
HARBETH HL-P3ES-2**

Once common, closed box 'speakers are now a rarity. The bass reflex (ported) cabinet goes lower, but their bass can sound a little slow and soggy compared to a well designed closed box. Closed box (or infinite baffle) 'speakers are also power hungry and need a sturdy amplifier.

The HL-P3 (available in professional form as the Monitor 30) has been around for many years, this being the latest version of what is regarded as a classic. Designed by Alan Shaw, this little wonder is a direct descendant of the wonder box that was the Harbeth BBC LS3/5a - the first 'bookshelf model whose sound belied it's miniature dimensions. The task of the HL-P3 was basically to get as much sound, including bass from a small sealed cabinet. Sound quality was a priority.

Build quality is superlative - even the metal framed grills could knock out a woolly mammoth. The cabinet is constructed from solid eucalyptus hardwood, a rarity these days (Italian company Opera excepted) and it weighs a hefty 6kilos - no mean feat for its relatively small size (305x188x198mm, HWD).

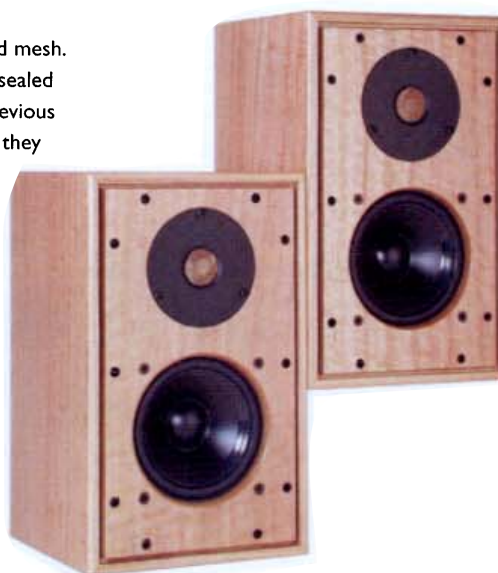
Although the smallest Harbeth 'speaker, it nonetheless uses their SuperTunedStructure and SuperGrille technology, seen in the larger models. It uses a custom made low frequency drive unit measuring 110m which is made from polymer and the accompanying tweeter is a 19mm

ferrocooled aluminium dome concealed beneath a fine, fixed mesh.

Those familiar with both sealed construction 'speakers and previous HL-P3 models will know that they take some driving. Having fairly low impedance and very low sensitivity means that these 'speaker are only truly happy with a minimum of, say 80W per channel, something like 100W being more realistic. We fed them with a Cyrus 7 (70W) a heavyweight Meridian 557 power amp delivering 250W per side. With both amps, the P3s showed what they were made of but the Meridian pushed the quality even further.

The P3 offers a true high fidelity sound. It images perfectly and precisely and has a fine, deep soundstage to boot. Bass was simply amazing when the size is considered. Massive Attack's Mezzanine has some seriously impressive trouser flapping moments and the P3s made pretty good work of them, delivering a very powerful and fast, if dry bass quality.

Their midrange was also very strong, being open and clean, with vocals well positioned. Detail was superb, with percussive intricacies easily discernable. The only gripes came with classical music, where the strings and piano of the Fauré trio had a certain amount of edge to them, but this was made up for by



the the sense of reality and 'being there' that they create.

The P3s are real gems in the true British audio mould. Although a box 'speaker they sort of remind me of an electrostatic (only with slightly more bass kick and more treble edge!) in their quality treatment of recordings, as they create a great window into the sound. That aluminium dome can create a tad more push at the high end than I'd wish for but overall this is a highly impressive 'speaker. It can't be stressed enough that the Harbeths need power, as without it they won't deliver their full potential.

Harbeth HL-P3ES-2

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MEASURED PERFORMANCE

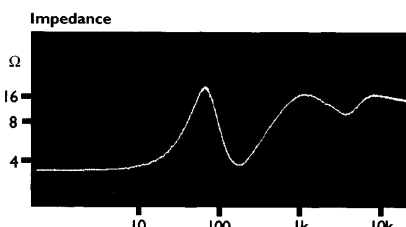
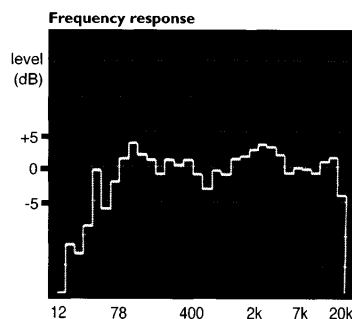
The HL P3 has been around for quite some time. It is a quality miniature. Our frequency response analysis shows it works from a low 40Hz right up to 20kHz. There are some ups and downs in response but it basically remains pretty horizontal from one end of the frequency spectrum to the other. Looking at details, like a lift up at 2.5kHz I would expect the HL P3 ES-2 to sound bright and detailed, but not harsh.

Although an infinite baffle (sealed box) design the bass unit gets down low enough. It will be well damped and will likely give good quality bass

that seems both fast and controlled.

Sensitivity was very low at just 81dB SPL from one nominal watt of input (2.8V). The volume control will need to be cranked around hard for this one. Harbeth use a 4ohm bass unit that drops to 3.5ohms though, so in spite of low sensitivity the unit still draws current. Not easy to drive.

The HL P3 ES-2 will need a powerful amplifier to get it going, but it measures well in most important areas and should sound good in practice. NK



World Verdict



Need lots of power to drive them but when properly fed are hugely impressive with bags of weight and insight galore.