

Running in the family

Speaker manufacturers tend to leave electronics to others, but **Ed Selley** wonders if they might have some bright ideas of their own

It should not come as any great surprise to find that the audio industry thrives on specialisation. Within the church of hi-fi there are, of course, manufacturers that only produce components in a single category and do very well out of it. There are also those that take pride in being able to make a complete system, keeping the entire process inhouse. Between the two exist infinite variations on the theme, but the setup here is sufficiently unusual to be worthy of comment.

Mention PMC to anybody with at least a passing understanding of the hi-fi sphere and they'll talk about speakers. The company has a superlative track record in the construction of both domestic and professional audio monitors, all tied together by the use of transmission lines to augment and shape their

bass response. In some ways, the twenty5.24i is almost the standard of what many of us expect a PMC speaker to be. It's a slim, two-way floorstander that combines a soft dome tweeter with a woven driver that exits via a transmission line that is nearly 10 feet in length.

Even though the basic formula hasn't changed, PMC has been hard at work on the details. This latest iteration features all the evolutionary developments the company has been working on. This means the transmission line exits in the specially developed 'laminair' port and that those smart outriggers you see at the bottom of the cabinet have been exactly engineered to improve the way that the speaker couples to the floor. Without looking like it has changed much of anything, PMC has in fact, changed just about everything. ▶



COMPONENTS

BRYSTON BDP-3 £3,900

The BDP-3 is a network streaming transport designed to work in a wide range of implementations with fit-and-forget reliability. It offers a selection of digital outputs that allow the decoding of your choice to be connected.

BRYSTON BDA-3 £3,600

An exceptionally flexible DAC that has a complete range of connections you might reasonably expect, but then proceeds to add a whole set of HDMI options to act as a 4k video switcher while decoding the audio.

PMC COR £6,000

The Cor is an integrated amplifier that builds on the experiences of PMC's active speakers and places a 95W Class AB amplifier that adheres to the company's design principles in a striking-looking piece of industrial design.

PMC TWENTY5.24I £5,500

The largest two-way speaker in the newly revised twenty5i lineup combines a 170mm woven mid/bass driver with a 19mm soft dome tweeter in a cabinet that benefits from laser measurement and includes a 3m transmission line.

Picture credit: Shutterstock.com (background)

BEAUTIFUL SYSTEM
PMC/BRYSTON



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PMC/BRYSTON

If the twenty5.24i is PMC doing business as usual, the Cor is anything but. The company wanted to make an amplifier, so it did. It isn't the start of a planned range or a piece of brand building, in fact more than anything, the Cor is a physical manifestation of the company scratching an itch. It is an amplifier built as PMC feels that amplifiers should be. This means you get 95W into 8ohm, a useful spread of analogue inputs and tone controls that are actually designed to be used in such a way to facilitate that.

Cor blimey

The front end comes from Bryston, a company with an entirely symbiotic relationship with PMC that shares a similar attitude toward fripperies. The BDP-3 is a network streaming front end designed to function in environments that would leave rivals flummoxed and sulking and features a degree of customisation that simply isn't present elsewhere. Outputting to a BDA-3 DAC, the duo oozes a 'built to survive the end of the world' feel that I'm hugely fond of. There's

something charming about the way that, by eschewing any conscious aesthetic, Bryston wound up with one of the most distinctive design languages in the industry.

The trio of units feel special in an entirely pragmatic way. The 24i is a compact and elegant speaker, but there's a heft to the way it is built that

It's no surprise to find that the relationship between PMC and Bryston is symbiotic

never lets you forget it's related to speakers designed to withstand anything the professional world can throw at them. The Cor is infused with the same feeling of purpose. That giant volume knob isn't a design flourish. It gears the pot so you can set exactly the right volume rather than an approximation of it. The Bryston might have swathes of setup menus, but once it is set the way you want it it stays set that way – seemingly

Above left: Slender cabinets give little hint of the extension that's on offer

Above: The Cor and Bryston duo exude a purposeful air

impervious to what your network might be doing in the meantime. This is heavy-duty hardware that manages not to dominate the space it is in.

Hanging out

It will fill it, though. Keen to hold off talking about sledgehammer bass for at least part of this review, I begin with *Exile*, the recently released duet between Taylor Swift (yep, really) and Bon Iver. This stunning, goosebump-inducing work is not about low end, but it lives or dies on the perception of scale and this system delivers it perfectly. Both Swift and Justin Vernon are convincingly sized and the supporting music hangs behind them in a way that extends far beyond the position of the speakers themselves. The piano that anchors the track sounds big and convincing and when the gentle application of low end happens towards the end of the track, it's beautifully understated. The 24i can hit like a hammer when you need it to but, crucially, when you don't need that blunt force, it's exceptionally dextrous too.

Above these technical aspects, there is an emotional content to the performance that belies the exceptional accuracy with which it goes about reproducing music. It may sound contradictory, but the reality is that the lack of embellishment these products apply to music means the emotional content shines through perfectly. The opening *Ponta de Lança Africano* from Jorge Ben's *África Brasil* is reproduced with its warm and analogue quality intact and it absolutely fizzles with the infectious energy that earns this album a place of the list of 'Music I am no longer allowed to drive to.'

Control freak

There is also an agility here that is a demonstration of the combined qualities of the components that forms it. The Cor exerts a level of control over the 24i that means it powers through the insanely catchy *Tell The DJ* by Le Peuple De L'Herbe in a head-nodding, foot-tapping whirlwind of energy and punch. The deep electronic note at the start is effortlessly



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bryston.com

subsonic; a pressure wave felt as much as heard. PMC's feelings on amplifier design naturally feed off its speakers and it should be no surprise to find the relationship between the two is symbiotic. Even allowing for this, it's hard to work out where the talents of the amp end and the speaker's begin.

This is heavy-duty hardware that does not dominate the space it is placed in

Against this, the charms of the Bryston are more subtle, but make themselves felt the longer you listen. I close off my session with *Impossible Object*; the haunting closer from Hayden Thorpe's *Diviner*. This is an exceptionally simple track with only Thorpe's vocals, his piano and the gentlest application of electronica. There's nowhere for any mistakes to hide and it is here that the Bryston duo shows how good it is. Thorpe's

striking vocal is flawless and aided by the tiny details of the movements of his hands on the keys, controlled breathing and tiny inflexions are all there. They aren't overblown or obvious, simply stitched into the music itself. It's unshowy and, because of that, utterly wonderful.

Class of its own

The more you listen, the more it becomes clear this is a class act. PMC's single mindedness and vast experience with speakers makes itself felt with every driver excursion of the twenty5.24i and what is so impressive is that the Cor, despite being one of one in the PMC electronics range, feels exactly the same in the way it works with your music. Mated with a digital source as capable as the Bryston, you get all the positives of the single mindedness wrapped up in a system with an exceptionally broad range of talents. It is undoubtedly a good thing for companies to specialise, but this setup shows that the same passions applied elsewhere can make that main offering better still ●