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### A-20 Pro Audio Review (Award Of Excellence)

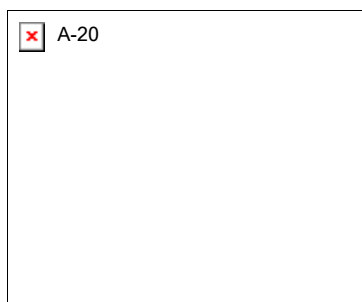


#### A-20 Studio Reference Monitor System

By Bruce Bartlett, [Pro Audio Review](#)

Finally, something new in monitoring! The NHTPro A-20 system (\$2,000) is a pair of small speakers and a separate 250W control amplifier. The amp lets you modify the speakers' response in a controlled way: adjust the highs for nearfield, midfield or farfield use; adjust the lows to compensate for the number of nearby surfaces.

Since the amp is separate from the speakers, the speakers weigh less and have more internal volume than speakers with built-in amps. The A-20 gives the benefit of powered speakers (custom response tailoring) but without the drawbacks. And you can adjust the settings from the listening position.



Beyond that, the NHTPro A-20 system sounds just excellent: wonderful clarity, accuracy and volume. When I opened the shipping carton and took a look at the speakers, I thought my vision had gone wacky.

The front baffle of each speaker is angled inward toward the listening position, giving the box a distorted, but intriguing, shape. And the finish is dazzling! It looks like brushed black satin.

#### Features

Each acoustically suspended box contains a 6.5" treated-paper woofer and 1" aluminum dome tweeter. A foam pad near the tweeter smooths its response. On the back is an XLR connector that takes a speaker-level signal from the control amplifier. Magnetic shielding is included.

#### Product Points

**Applications:** Studio recording

**Key Features:** 6.5" treated-paper woofer; 1" aluminum dome tweeter; frequency response 48Hz - 20kHz, +/-2 dB with 1/3-octave swept noise.

**Price:** \$2,000

**Contact:** NHTPro at 877-464-8776; <http://www.nhtpro.com>

#### Plus

- Neutral, accurate sound
- Good bass for size
- Tight bass and transients
- Powerful dynamics
- Really sharp imaging
- Transparent, high resolution
- Low fatigue
- Adjustable response
- SPL display

#### Minus

NHTPro specs the frequency response as 48 Hz - 20 kHz +/-2 dB with 1/3-octave swept noise, down 6 dB at 40 Hz in a room. Peak output is said to be 117 dB SPL. The box is made of 3/4" MDF with HP laminate inside and out. Dimensions are 12" x 7.5" x 11.9" (HWD), and each monitor weighs 17 lbs.

• None

**The Score:** "Produces loud, clean sound that is accurate."

The control amplifier is designed to be used only with the A-20 monitors, and vice versa. This amp puts out a hefty 250 W continuous per channel (400 W during a 100 ms peak). Its output is on two XLR-type connectors, feeding the included matched-impedance cables. Input connectors are balanced phone jacks and XLR-types. A headphone jack completes the package.

On the front are three controls: sensitivity, listen and boundary. The sensitivity knob adjusts the input sensitivity in five steps (-10, -3, +4, +11 and mute). Listen has three settings (in five steps) that affect the high-frequency response: nearfield, midfield and farfield. The boundary knob adjusts the bass in five steps to compensate for the number of boundaries or surfaces near the speakers: 0, 1 or 2. It is rare to see this degree of control in a monitor system, and it makes the system quite flexible.

A unique display on the front panel indicates power, overload, SPL output, line voltage, and output device temperature. I found the SPL display especially useful in setting consistent levels during mixes. Weighing 42 lb., the control unit measures 3.5" x 19" x 10.8" (HWD). The user manual was clear and helpful.

### In Use

Time for a listening test. I placed the Model A-20s where they sounded best, about 1.5' from an absorbent wall behind them, with the front baffles angled in just ahead of the listening position. When I first turned on the speakers, they were loud and this made them sound too bright.

That's the Robinson-Dadsun equal-loudness contours taking effect: we hear more upper midrange at high volume than at low volume. So I turned down the listening level and all was well. Here's how the A-20 reproduces some instruments:

- Bass guitar: Deep, full, nonboomy, very tight, uniform loudness of notes. Better-controlled than many other speakers.
- Kick drum: Strong impact. Good bottom considering the small speaker size. A deep bass drum roll has some weight.
- Cymbals: Clean and crisp. Realistic — sounds like brass, not like white noise.
- Vocals: Not boomy or chesty. Natural, uncolored. Not overly sibilant.
- Drums: Lots of snap, strong impact. Great transients.
- Percussion: Sweet, crisp and detailed. Slightly bright.
- Sax: Good sense of "edge," slightly less warm than some other speakers, but very good.
- Acoustic guitar: Clearly delineated, not too tizzy.
- Electric guitar: Lots of bite, neither puffy or thin.
- Piano: Natural, slightly hard upper mids.
- Strings: More breathy or airy high frequencies than you hear in the concert hall. But very clear, detailed and transparent.

My previous mixes translated well to the A-20. The speakers were so clear, they helped me choose between two different mixes of the same tune. The A-20s can play very loud. They can separate each instrument in a complex mix. You'll hear pinpoint images, clear placement of reverb, and fine rendition of hall acoustics.

I used the NHTPro A-20s on five recording sessions for tracking and mixdown. I never had a sense of fighting the monitors to correct for their response. They were a pleasure to work with and resulted in excellent mixes.

### Summary

The NHTPro A-20 system is something special. It produces a lot of loud, clean, accurate sound from

a small box. Imaging, resolution and detail are first rate. The system can be adapted to any listening environment. Finally, like a trusted friend, it tells the truth.

*Bruce Bartlett is a design engineer, technical writer and regular contributor to Pro Audio Review.*

O P I N I O N S

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