

CRACKING A FAT

FAT IS GOOD, RECKONS
GARY PEARCE

“Gazza, I have an interesting review for you”, squawked the editor down the phone. “You’re off to Parmenter Sound in Muriwai to review his Fat Boys!” Now you’d be excused for thinking I was off to interview a couple of chubby, pie-eating kids, but this was to prove a far more interesting and rewarding afternoon.

Jason Parmenter is the head honcho of Parmenter Sound, a boutique hi-fi dealership specialising in some of the world’s most exotic brands. He also manufactures his own distinctive audio products. Parmenter Sound is located at Muriwai on the wild west coast just north of Auckland, and the spellbinding view from his property was not the only experience to be savoured. Lurking menacingly in the downstairs demo room were the Fat Boys – and we’re talking real porkers here, folks. Weighing in at over 200kg each(!), these Kiwi-made heavyweights are built to withstand your average category five tornado – and they offer more than the typical in-ye-face horn sound quality.

Chances are if you’ve been to a live gig you’ll have heard horn loudspeakers. Horn loading makes for exceedingly high sensitivity, meaning the speakers need only a few watts per channel to reach high sound pressure levels. The bass drivers in this type of enclosure tend to be extremely short throw; they don’t exhibit the

massive cone excursions of other designs, but this in turn places demands on the size of the cabinet. Think massive and you’re partly there – giant enclosures and equally large bass drivers are required to move enough air to generate useable bass extension. In the case of the Fat Boys this entails a cabinet the size of an overturned fridge freezer, with an enormous 15-inch JBL pro driver. There’s a small



chance the bass from these boys may just cut the mustard, I thought to myself. Rounding out the driver complement is an amazing TAD rear compression tweeter loaded in a beautiful real timber front horn. This bespoke horn tweeter enclosure took countless hours of laborious work to produce – the cabinets alone were a two-and-a-half week job for Jason and his expert cabinetmaker.

But back to the tweeter. It has the biggest magnet assembly I have ever seen on an HF driver, and the whole device weighs in at an amazing 12.5kg. With a frequency response from 600hz to 20kHz, this bomb-proof driver uses lightweight Beryllium domes to produce an astounding 110dB/w at one metre. Here’s where things become even more interesting. Marchand active crossovers are used, and these can be modified to meet the requirements of your room – just replace the main board with a new one to suit your new listening room. An expensive solution to be sure, but one that offers total flexibility to the prospective owner.

For the demonstration Jason had the Fat Boys bi-amped, with his own 10wpc tube monoblocks driving the high frequencies and a monster Pass Labs X350.5 delivering a whopping 350wpc to each JBL bass driver. It’s not the mismatch it looks – at 98dB/w at one metre the JBL driver is 12dB less efficient than the TAD tweeter, so a lower-powered amp to drive the high frequencies made absolute sense.

And so to the listening session. Jason had the talents of EMM Labs’ wonderful upsampling CDSA CD/SACD player and the S7 turntable from Simon Yorke on hand to feed the system its diet of music.

I was expecting a slightly brash, raw sound with obvious



colouration. This assumption was quickly dispelled as Jason began playing the many discs that fine afternoon. Rebecca Pidgeon sounded positively gorgeous on *Retrospective*; her vocals were reproduced with a sweetness that belied the brutal form of the Fat Boys, while the guitar sounded like a guitar should. You could practically feel the guitarist pluck the strings (palpability – Google it!), while the dynamics on this beautifully recorded album gave the music a life-like quality achieved by only the best equipment. Imaging was also a high point; sounds would emanate from extreme left and right of the enclosures, which gave a heightened sense of realism and added to the enjoyment of the music.

It was time for some low down dirty blues, so Jason whipped out his Buddy Guy collection. *Sweet Tea* actually had Buddy in the room with us, and his huge voice really boomed out of the Fat Boys with awesome clarity and realism. It was stunning, and I could feel the vibrations through the couch every time Buddy reached down to the lower vocal register.

Classical music is difficult to reproduce well on lesser systems, but Copland’s ‘Fanfare For The Common Man’ (JVC 24-bit XRCD) was reproduced with excellent weight and authority – trumpets blasted out with brassy realism and the room literally shook with the impact of the bass drum and timpanies during the many crescendos in the recording.

It was time for a vinyl end to the proceedings, so Jason placed Chris Isaak’s *Wicked Game* onto the stunning Simon Yorke S7 TT. Here was another excellent performance; the combination of amplification,

It was time for some low-down dirty blues, so Jason whipped out his Buddy Guy collection. *Sweet Tea* actually had Buddy in the room with us, and his huge voice really boomed out of the Fat Boys with awesome clarity

turntable and the Fat Boys seemed to strike a real synergy. Isaak’s breathy vocals were reproduced with a sublime delicacy that made me want to listen to every note. In a word: fabulous.

I listened to more CDs and vinyl that afternoon, and each occasion I heard excellently reproduced and tuneful music. And that’s the key; at no point did I catch myself listening to the equipment, it just did its job and conveyed the emotion and actions of the performers to me, the lucky listener. And that’s just what it should be about – the music.

The Fat Boys are not inexpensive, but given the labour of love that went into producing them and the profound quality of components used in their manufacture, they would seem a rare and justifiable bargain to the right buyer. They certainly wouldn’t be out of their depth in some extreme high-end systems, either in terms of aesthetics or sound quality. ■

Parmenter Sound Fat Boy Loudspeakers \$40,000

