Finding the right pair of studio monitors can be a bit of minefield. Long gone are the days of NS10 dominance, and although plenty of manufacturers have produced fine sounding speakers, there is no real ‘industry standard’ as such. In fact there’s less of a need for a standard. With so much work getting done in private or project studios, the key is finding a pair of monitors that suit your own needs (and fundamentally are comfortable to listen to for long stretches).

This can be very dependent on the type of music you work on. Something with a harsh mid-range (such as an NS10 for example) will prove very tiring if you work on a lot of guitar or rock music, but may be fine if you’re doing pop or dance. Furthermore, actually getting to test a range of monitors can be a bit of struggle, and there’s no guarantee that they’ll sound the same when you get them home.

On a more positive note though, the proliferation of active monitoring means that one variable (namely the amplification) is removed from the equation. And among the more respected active monitor manufacturers, Genelec has carved out a niche that extends from the compact 1029A to the larger-than-life 1039A and beyond. The fact that this company installs loudspeakers in some of the biggest and best studios in the world certainly carries with it a certain cachet, and although only a select few will ever get to work on their more impressive systems, there’s a consistency that extends right across the range. That’s not to say that they all sound the same (because they don’t!) but there are certain characteristics that are easy to spot. So although we have their latest bottom-of-the-range monitor up for review here, it’s in no way a budget model and shouldn’t be viewed as such.

Straight eight...

Inevitably, Genelec’s large studio monitoring systems get them attention, but in practice it’s their compact 1029A, 1030A and 1031A models that have
brought them to a wider audience. And hardly surprisingly, it’s the smallest and cheapest (1029A) that has sold like the proverbial hot cake. So presented with the opportunity to redesign and upgrade, it was these models that got prioritised. So we now have a new range consisting of the 8030A, 8040A, and 8050A, all of which have been re-designed from the ground up (including the drivers). These mark a complete overhaul, not merely a cosmetic facelift. And needless to say, initial mattersingARTICLE SOFar in the industry and at trade shows have been very positive.

So what’s different? Well, I’ll resist the temptation to say everything, but there are a couple of significant changes that mark out the 8030A from the 1029A.

Firstly, the cabinet is completely new (made from die-cast aluminium) and combines rounded edges to reduce edge diffraction with an improved version of what they call a DCW (Directivity Control Waveguide). This is the smooth-contoured surround for the tweeter that improves not only the on-axis frequency response, but also the driver efficiency and the stereo imaging. The other main consideration was that the 8030A incorporates a rear-port bass reflex system. This not only extends the bass response a further 12Hz downwards to 58Hz, but one could also argue that it genuinely removes the need to run these with a sub-bass unit.

**Design issues**

In designing these monitors, Genelec have clearly gone back to the drawing board, especially with the driver design, but they still remain extremely familiar in their operation. You still have front-positioned power and volume controls, and the 4-way diposwitch matrix for tweaking the response (see the box on the left for set-up instructions). And the XLR inputs, through port and mains, remain nicely tucked away below the amp.

**But back to the new stuff!**

In addition to the Minimum Diffraction Enclosure, Genelec’s design team have gone back to the drawing board with the drivers. Rather than build using off-the-shelf units, their new low distortion drivers mark a considerable improvement in response and offer a better transition at the crossover point. The new bass reflex also contributes considerably. Its curved tube runs from the bottom of the enclosure, appearing at the top back of the monitor with a flared output. The result is, quite frankly, far better low frequency extension than one would expect from a speaker of this size.

Mounting and positioning monitors can be a bit of a struggle in any studio, and the best bet is obviously freestanding speaker stands (even though these do tend to cost a small fortune). The 8030s, however, incorporate a number of useful options.

Firstly, they are ready-drilled for wall brackets and also have a single M10 thread in the bottom. But it’s the new Iso-Pod that will affect most people. Essentially this is a moulded rubber cradle with four feet that isolate the monitor from the surface it sits on. And you can also slide the monitor back and forth on the cradle to adjust its tilt angle, thus making the process of positioning the speakers much easier. Incidentally, because they have a curved bottom surface you can’t actually use the 8030s without the Iso-Pod, but hey.

Okay, a quick look at how the specs of the 8030s and 8029s measure up. Overall the 8030s are slightly bigger than the 1029s. This is partly because of the Iso-Pod (including this they’re a couple of inches higher than the 1029s, but they’re also over an inch wider, although slightly less deep. The amp power remains the same (40W for both drivers), but the peak SPL at 1 metre is down slightly (108dB rather than 109dB). The overall frequency response is considerably better, however (58Hz to 15kHz, which can be extremely useful if you’re used to less sparkly sounding speakers. Combine this with the suggested settings for your particular set-up and you should be up and running in no time at all.

**SET-UP**

Setting up monitors can be as much of a task as choosing them in the first place. The lengths that big studios will go to in order to reduce room null points and flatten the response of their main monitors can be extensive. Thankfully, though, for smaller monitors operating at a reasonable level, it’s usually more a case of positioning them wisely. With the 8030As, most of the tweaking options relate to setting up the low-end response. With three bass tilt options at 100Hz (-2dB, -4dB and -6dB) there’s plenty of scope to tame the low-end extension. Plus, of course if you’re using a sub-bass unit there’s a -6dB roll-off option at 85Hz. Treble tweaking is limited to a simple -2dB tilt at 15kHz, which can be extremely useful if you’re using to less sparkly sounding speakers. Combine this with the suggested settings for your particular set-up and you should be up and running in no time at all.

**INFO (cont.)**

| Tone controls: Bass tilt @ 100Hz, -2dB to -6dB @ 2dB steps. Bass roll-off @ 85Hz, -6dB (for use with sub-bass) Treble tilt @ 15kHz, -2dB |
| Dimensions: 285 x 189 x 178mm (299mm high with Iso-Pod) |
| Weight: 5.6kg |
| Tel: 020 8428 0778 |
| www.scvlondon.com |
| www.genelec.com |
| www.scwlondon.com |

**REVIEWS**

In keeping with their single unit pricing (each speaker costs £370)
Inevitably, Genelec’s large studio monitoring systems get them attention but in practice it's their compact 1029A, 1030A and 1031A models that have brought them to a larger audience.

ALTERNATIVELY

Mackie HR624 (£199, 9/10, FM(1/4)
Mackie’s platinum award winning monitors offer good value for money, but may lack the sweet top end of the 8030As.
www.mackie.com

Dynaudio BM6A (£199, 9/10, FM(1/2)
Popular for some considerable time now, the BM6As are a quality package but bigger louders and more expensive than the 8030s.
www.dynaudio-coustics.com

Mackie HR624 (£149)
Nearer the BM6As in price and power, Mackie’s flagship model is a highly rated performer.
www.mackie.com

Event 20/20bas v2 (£699)
Biggest setting monitor in the US, we hear, and a bargain to boot.
www.event.com

FutureMusic

inc VAT), the 8030s arrive packaged singly. Installation stretches to fitting the iso-pod to the base, which is simple enough, and aside from tracking down the appropriate cabling (XLR inputs only on the back, I’m afraid) and plugging up the mains, that’s about it.

Despite that, they do include a useful quick set-up guide. This covers do’s and don’ts for speaker placement and orientation, including advice on positioning for surround monitoring (all very useful). But in practice, the most important aspect of setting these speakers up is adjusting the dip switches on the back to match your speaker placement. With them positioned about a foot and half from a wall and the switches flat there’s far too much low end. In fact, this setting is designed for when they’re free standing in a damped room. For typical nearfield use on a meter bridge, for example, the suggested setting is -4dB, while for use close to a wall -6dB (which is the maximum attenuation).

Having tried all of the settings I found that with them a foot and a half from the wall, the -4dB setting is the best for my set-up. It provides plenty of low-end, even at moderate listening levels. Obviously the only way to be sure of these settings is to check your mixes in a number of places and gauge how true you feel they sound. But if there’s one thing that’s hardest to get right in any monitoring set-up, large or small, it’s the low-end accuracy. With monitors this size, you may feel the need to include a sub-bass unit, but to be honest for most regular music applications that may be an unnecessary expense.

Most Genelec monitors I’ve used (both big and little) have a tendency to sound quite bright and the 8030s are no exception. This isn’t a bad brightness, and it’s quite high frequency. If anything they sound enhanced in the way that a hi-fi speaker might. A quick look at the frequency response chart shows a rise between about 14kHz and 18kHz. Obviously if you feel this is too much you can switch in the -2dB treble tilt that operates above 15kHz and certainly smooths off the top end quite a bit. If you were shifting over to a pair of these from the N510s for example, then it might be a good starting point. Other models in the range. This means that even if you can’t stretch financially to the larger models, you know the technology you’re getting is consistent across the range.

At £740 (inc VAT, list price), the Genelec 8030A is also extremely good value for money, especially when you consider what a pair of decent passive monitors plus amplifier will set you back. Plus of course they definitely punch beyond their weight in terms of scale. In reality, these monitors should really be tested up against larger boxes from other manufacturers.

It’s also good to see a manufacturer confident enough to go back to the drawing board, both in terms of technology and in terms of cosmetics. With the 8030s they’ve managed to incorporate a number of cool design features but in a very practical way. I very much like the iso-Pod and especially the fact that you can easily tilt the speakers in the vertical plane. But the completely redesigned drivers and bass reflex are changes that won’t be obvious to the casual observer, and believe me, they make a considerable difference! Plus there are plenty of options on the dip switches to allow these monitors to succeed in a whole host of environments. And if portability is your thing or space a consideration they are both compact and surprisingly light.

Clearly this size monitor isn’t going to suit everyone: for bigger rooms it’s really unlikely to cut the mustard. My only task now is to get to try the other two models in the range – can’t wait. As always with monitors you never really know for sure until you have a listen, and opinions can be personal. I can only recommend that you get down to your nearest Genelec stockist and have a listen for yourself. FM

< “Inevitably, Genelec’s large studio monitoring systems get them attention but in practice it’s their compact 1029A, 1030A and 1031A models that have brought them to a larger audience” >

Conclusion

I think top marks has to go to Genelec for these monitors. Not only has it redesigned its most successful model, but it also standardised the first three

REST OF RANGE

The 8030A is the baby of a completely new three-model range essentially designed to supersede the 1029s, 1030s and 1031s. All units are two-way and feature the new minimum diffraction enclosure. In fact they look so similar that it’s simply the size that distinguishes the different models.

The 8050s come in at almost 18 inches in height whilst the 8040s are just over 14 inches high. In power terms the 8050s pack a serious punch with 150W bass amplification and 120W treble offering a 120dB SPL maximum. Whereas the 8040s have twin 90W amps and a 115dB SPL max. The other major consideration is bass extension, with the 8040s going down to 40Hz and 8050s 38Hz (both +/-2dB). However, both these systems are considerably more expensive than the 8030s, with the 8040s coming in at £1,245 a pair and the 8050s at a whopping £2,186 a pair.

VERDICT GENELEC 8030A

Build quality
Value for money
Ease of use
Versatility
Sound/results

A very successful redesign for Genelec’s smallest monitor, producing a sound beyond its size.