

## Fluid Audio F5 Studio Monitors

By Adam Gallant

Long before I had a home-based studio, we would lug our modest Pro Tools set-up to rehearsal spaces, churches, live venues, barns, and bars to record drums and bed tracks. I always carried a copy of Tom Petty's *Full Moon Fever* with me for reference in the ever-changing spaces. Being so familiar with this album, I made it my first listen on the Fluid Audio F5s. The verdict: for such a small package, these speakers sound big with lots of headroom.

I A/Bed the Fluid F5s against my Yamaha HS5s in our studio B room. These two sets of monitors have very different sonic profiles but similar tech specs – 70 W of total power, 5-in. woofers, 1-in. tweeters, and they both weigh in at around 11 lbs. The most prevalent sonic difference is in the low mids. The Fluids have a wide Q hump around 150 Hz, which is enjoyable and certainly something to know about their character when approaching a mix on them. Another big difference is that these speakers are front-ported. The Fluids range from 49 Hz to 22 kHz, with the HS5s at 54 Hz to 33 kHz. Outside of the lows, the F5s do have a nice airy quality above 9 kHz that my Yamahas seem to lack. The F5s are a treat to listen on; however, I feel I would risk making less informed decisions about information from 800 Hz to 6 kHz, as compared to my Yamahas. This is a critical area for me and the type of work I do, namely dialogue editing for video and vocals in music.

The 'F' in F5 stands for "fader," and there are four iterations of this design under the line. All models provide a fader on the front of the speaker case for volume control. The monitor world is packed with options for features; subsequently, companies are very competitive and tedious about where resources go.

The fader as a prominent feature is risky, in my opinion. In my workflow, the faders offer flexibility in an area where I

desire rigidity. One of my principles for mixing is to avoid touching the volume until I have a full first pass completed. Only then do I start checking at low and high volumes for tonal balance. I realize this is not very conventional, but this approach provides me with one less variable in the endless scope of options when mixing. With so many other ways to change my playback volume (via my interface or monitor controller), the fader feature feels redundant. Also, the fader is touchy, leaving me questioning the stereo balance and repeatedly tweaking the faders. They are notched at -6dB, which is a great help, and newer models feature three notches as opposed to just one. All that said, this is particular to my workflow, and this feature could be an attractive one depending on yours.

One thing I love about these monitors is that the LED light indicating on or standby is inconspicuous. As someone who wears glasses, this prevents glare from the speakers' lights when the room lights are low. This may seem trivial, but it is a real-world annoyance I've always thought about and have covered the LEDs on monitors in the past. Also, the LEDs appear brightest when the speakers are pointed directly towards the listener, meaning you can feel confident that you are on the correct listen axis by matching the intensity on both speakers' LEDs.

These monitors also sport a standby function – a great feature for any set



of monitors as it conserves energy and extends the life of the product; however, I did find they initiated standby mode a bit early for my tastes.

At the price point of \$400 CDN for the pair, these monitors pack more wattage and low frequency range as compared other 5-in. models I've heard and researched. There's lots of power for the price and I suspect with the great external heatsink on the back, these speakers will live a long life at loud volumes. They also come with a couple of little pluses including monitor isolation pads as well as foam feet. You've also got good connectivity options with XLR, 1/4-in. TRS, and unbalanced RCA inputs.

Overall, Fluid Audio's F5s are a great option for a producer with a small room set-up or as a second pair of monitors for anyone looking for rich low mids with a small footprint.

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