

# PRO PILLS

**It's the next prize in our £13,000 HK Audio giveaway! But what do we think of the HK Audio Premium PR:O?**

Words: Simon Croft

**Have you** ever been to a gig where the sound is so loud, you can't really hear the music? In case you don't know what I'm talking about, here's an example. I was in a fairly small club a while back – the sort of venue where more than 250 people come through the door and the fire officer will want to know about it. The band was doing a fair

guitars sounded like that guitar-solo-with-no-notes you can hear in your head when you're in bed after a gig that was too loud. (God's way of warning you that permanent damage will follow if you keep it up.) And the vocals? Well it's very hard to swallow a microphone and produce recognisable syllables at the same time, so it had been a

**"SOMEONE'S GOING TO WIN THIS AND A WHOLE NEW LEAGUE OF GIGS WILL OPEN ITS DOORS."**

impression of Motörhead Performs The Hits of Chuck Berry.

At least, I think that's what they were doing. It was hard to tell because the bass end of the rig was shifting so much air, it all turned into one great pressure wave. You could sort of tell there was a bass guitar and a bass drum in there but I'd defy you identify to identify one note the bassist was playing.

As you can imagine, the guitars and vocals weren't having much luck cutting through the thud. The

waste of time the singer learning the words... Or the tune for that matter.

The effect was about as musical as a Sherman tank driving over corrugated iron.

The point to this little story is not to let you know that I had a crap night out – although I did, to be honest. No, the point I am trying to make is that any div can put together a sound system that is loud. Designing one that is going to be loud, intelligible and musical is

much, much harder.

All of which brings me neatly to this month's featured HK Audio rig, the Premium PR:O. Not only does it all meet three of my objectives handsomely, it's really good value. In fact, for one lucky reader out there, it's going to be the best value of all time because a four-box Premium PR:O rig is our next HK prize in our massive HK Audio £13,000 giveaway.

Someone's going to walk away with this system... Well, drive away, as there's rather a lot of it. To wit, HK Audio distributor JHS is including a VX24000 amplifier, the mounting poles and the cables – that's £3,120-worth of rig that you could own in just a few weeks time.

So read on and learn about the sound system that could soon be yours. Then use your loaf and enter the competition. ▶



## HK AUDIO PREMIUM PR:O

### WHAT IS IT?

A sound reinforcement system you can put the entire band through with confidence. Oh, and the grand prize for the second quarter of our HUGE £13,000 HK Audio giveaway.

### WHY SHOULD I WANT ONE?

A good sound reinforcement system is a bit like one of those road-laying machines – if you had one, you could go anywhere really. Warehouse party, turn the Dog and Duck into a major rock venue, host your own local festival at the town hall – it's all suddenly within your grasp. And this one sounds fantastic.

SRP (INCL VAT)  
PR:012: £329  
PR:015: £349  
PR:018: £469  
VX2400: £1399  
01132 865 381  
WWW.HKAUDIO.COM

## ROADTEST!

We RoadTested the HK Audio Premium PR:O in the demo area of John Hornby Skewes & Co – HK Audio's UK distributor. It's a fair sized room and the walls have cloth draped in front of them, so the acoustic is closer to a traditional

the speakers were on a stage. It's one of those useful ideas that seems blindingly obvious but only after someone else has done it.

I am told that more care has gone into the design and build of the crossover than you'd normally

## "THE PREMIUM PR:O IS A STRONG PERFORMER

carpeted pub than an empty church hall. That said, if we had invited 200 people in, the place would have been rammed and the room acoustic would have been more like sticking your head under a duvet! It was a fair test of the Premium PR:O system, although it will easily fill much bigger venues, typically with a capacity of around 400.

The system proved easy to put together, partly because the PR:O12 or PR:O15 cabinets sit on poles that mount in the top of the PR:O18 subs. But beyond this, there are little touches that make your life easier. For instance, the integral handles on the top boxes are comfortable and well positioned – a detail that starts to matter a lot as the box gets to head height.

Secondly, the Speakon connectors on the top boxes are on an angled plate. When the cabinet is on the floor, this doesn't make much odds but when you are stretching up to connect the cable, you're grateful for the socket pointing towards you.

Another nice touch is the DuoTilt system fitted to the bottom of the top cabinets. These have more than one hole, allowing you to position the speakers straight ahead – which is what you want if the subs were on the floor – or tilted downwards 15° or 7.5° – which would give you better coverage of the audience if

expect for the asking price of the system. I heard this from two places: the first was from product specialist Neville Raine and the second was from the system itself – which I rate as sounding exceptionally good. (See *The Technical Bit* for more about the crossover arrangement.)

The Premium PR:O system is a strong performer across the whole sound spectrum, from clean and clear cymbals to solid, thumping bass. It also does something in the vocal range that I really like but is hard to explain. It gives vocals an immediacy that somehow seems to make them sound bigger, in front of the rest of the mix.

By now, the more informed reader is probably muttering, "You mean it's got a whacking great mid-range peak." But it hasn't – it's more subtle and far more pleasing to the ear than that. Let's just put it down to good design and engineering.

For the record, we listened to the system with PR:O12s (12" woofers) and PR:O15s (15" woofers). To be honest, there's not a lot in it, either financially or sound-wise with the subs in place. If you were thinking of using the PR:O12s, or PR:O15s on their own, you might be tempted by the slightly fuller low-end of the 15" but I'd confidently use either. **PM**

## ACROSS THE WHOLE SOUND SPECTRUM, FROM CLEAN AND CLEAR CYMBALS TO THUMPING BASS."

▶ Someone's going to win it and when they do, a whole new league of gigs will open its doors.

### Nicely made

The PR:O12 and PR:O15 cabinets are nicely made and attractive. The foam grilles have an air of hi-fi about them but they're covering kick-proof steel mesh, so I wouldn't worry about their durability.

Both these cabinets are a little narrower at the front than the back,

which would make them easier to combine into arrays, if you want to build your system up with multiple cabinets over time. Alternatively, you could start your system off with just a pair of speakers and add the subwoofers next as you start to play bigger venues.

For even more flexibility, there is a variant on the larger cabinet, known as a PR:O15X. The woodwork on this is slightly more complicated because you can use it for Front of House or as wedge monitors on stage, so it can be tipped back at a variety of angles. Like the PR:O18 Sub, these cabinets have outs as well as ins, so it's easy to chain cabinets together, powering a number of them from one amp.

Talking of the sub, it too has integral handles, formed by routing out the wood then reinforcing the bar that remains. The holes this creates are sealed from the inside by a smooth cover that means the cabinet remains airtight. ▶

# WIN THIS SYSTEM!

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The full Premium PR:O rig is a three-way system with high-quality, passive crossovers, which means that one amp – in this case an HK Audio VX2400 – will power the lot.

This arrangement is okay but it means that the mid/high unit is still receiving a full-range signal, leaving the mid-range drive struggling with low frequencies that are already being handled by

**“ALTHOUGH THE POWER RATING OF THE PRO CABS AND 18” SUBWOOFER IS 400W, HK AUDIO RECOMMENDS AMPLIFIERS THAT DELIVER 1,200W.”**

From the left/right outputs of the amp, the power goes to the two subwoofers, then onto the mid/high cabinets. This is because the crossovers in the subs ensure that the really low frequencies are not sent to the mid/high cabinets.

The alternative arrangement you sometimes come across send a separate, full-range feed to the subs, where the crossover simply sends only the lowest frequencies to the sub's speaker.

the sub.

Inside the PR:O12 or PR:O15, the remainder of the frequency spectrum is divided by a further crossover, which feeds the high frequency horn and midrange cone driver. Although the power rating of the PRO cabs is 400W and the 18" subwoofer is also 400W, HK Audio recommends amplifiers that deliver 1,200W a channel into 4 ohms for maximum headroom, like the HK VX2400. **PM**

**“IF HK AUDIO HAS A PROBLEM, IT'S THAT THIS RIG IS ALMOST TOO GOOD FOR THE MONEY...”**

▶ If you're two-ing the sub, it's a fairly easy lift but if you're a one-man band or the poor bastard that got conned into carrying all the gear by being told he was “the fifth member of the band”, you'll be relieved to know that the holes for castors are pre-drilled.

I can understand why HK Audio doesn't include them on a product of this price. A lot of these systems probably get put into clubs and stay there for years, so who wants to pay for a set of castors they are going to use precisely twice? It's a mark of serious quality.

#### Poles apart

Some systems use nothing more sophisticated than a plain metal pole to keep the satellite speakers in the air but HK is a little more refined, with the poles screwing into the bass units for a really solid mounting. (Stop sniggering!)

This is needed because HK's patented DuoTilt system allows you to put the top speakers at an angle. That said, the designers have been canny enough to keep the centre of gravity stable – see *RoadTest* for more details.

The other factor controlling where the sound goes is the dispersion characteristic of the horn. It's the virtually industry standard 60°x40° pattern but I

must say, it sounds exceptionally good – dynamic but clean and with a strong stereo image over a wide area.

As I've discussed in *RoadTest*, the high frequency driver brings a very desirable quality to the vocal range, in a similar way to an expensive condenser mic. In fact, the sound is so pleasing to your ear, you don't really notice how much sound level you're kicking out until you notice that the snare drum hits are making you blink! To me, that's a sign of a speaker system that is reacting fast, reproducing the big ‘transient’ peaks you get when a stick first hits a drum or a pick strikes a string.

Guess what – I like the HK Audio Premium PR:O system. In fact I'll go a step further: if HK Audio has a problem, it's that this rig is almost too good for the money, to the point that the sound rivals some of its own more expensive systems.

If I went further up the HK range for a system, it would probably be because I was gigging every night and wanted birch ply construction, or because I wanted a bigger rig from day one.

But comparing like-for-like, my personal opinion is that you'd probably have to spend a lot more money before you found a system that out-performed the Premium PR:O. **PM**

