

Scansonic MB6 B

Bucking the trend – Scansonic goes for the slender, multi-driver approach for its flagship design, to impressive effect
 Review: **Andrew Everard** Lab: **Paul Miller**

The MB series is the high-end range from Scansonic, and the MB6 B the flagship of the latest iteration of this lineup. Yet in an arena where bulky, room-dominating speakers prevail, this design takes a different approach. Yes, it's tall, at just over 1.4m, but the company has kept it slender – at under 18cm, the front baffle is narrower than that of many a much smaller design. For example, even the little B&W 606 standmount speaker is a centimetre wider than this floorstanding tower.

It's all made possible by the drivers chosen for the MB 6B, which sells for £8999 in a simple choice of white or black silk finishes. Rather than adopting the 'big drivers shift more air' principle to deliver the bass, the designers at Danish company Dantax – parent of both Raidho and Scansonic – have gone for multiple smaller units. This is not a unique approach – such an arrangement is found elsewhere, and even in some innovative speaker cabinets designed for use by bass guitarists – but it has definite advantages.

Not only does it allow the slimline design we see here, but smaller drivers are notionally much easier to start, stop and generally control than the bigger and heavier cones more conventionally associated with powerful bass. Big drivers with 300mm cones may look impressive but, to put it bluntly, they do tend to flap about a bit if not tightly controlled. Various strategies have been employed to gain this kind of control, an extreme example being the complex and expensive electromagnet system used in Focal's massive Grande Utopia EM Evo speaker [HFN Dec '18], with its huge 40cm bass unit.

STRAIGHT SIX

The drivers in the MB6 B speakers are little over a quarter the size of those Focal units, at just under 11.5cm, but the Scansonic engineers have used six of them, complete with carbon-fibre cones, in what they call a 'power sharing line array', claiming time alignment of all drivers at the listening position. This is a classic d'Appolito

arrangement, with the treble driver – in this case the now-familiar Raidho/Scansonic ribbon-esque/planar tweeter – at its centre, and the midrange and bass drivers arranged above and below it. The way the drivers 'radiate' outward is an effort to enhance the 'point source' effect by starting with the most directional drivers at the centre, moving out to the less directional units.

Thus, in the MB6 B, two of the 11.5cm drivers are used, one above and one below the tweeter, to cover the midrange, between the 250Hz and 2.6kHz crossover points, while above and below this arrangement are further pairs of the drivers configured as bass units.

MASS MOVEMENT

Scansonic says its arrangement has a larger radiating area than that of a conventional 30cm bass unit, while retaining both the speed and agility of the smaller drivers, which combine a woven carbon cone with ridges for stiffness, no dustcap for greater integrity and an overhung motor designed for long excursion.

The low mass tweeter, meanwhile, uses a Kapton/aluminium sandwich diaphragm just 20µm thick – we're talking human hair here – that weighs only 0.03g. In treble drivers, where lightness is paramount for the high frequency movement required, that's an advantage – Scansonic describes the mass as being '50 times less than any conventional textile, ceramic, beryllium or diamond dome', which comfortably covers most of the competition's technologies!

All the speakers in the revised MB-B range, which made its debut at the beginning of 2019, share these drivers in various combinations. The lineup kicks off with the £1899 MB1 B standmounts, then moves up through three more conventional-looking slimline floorstanders ranging from the £2899

RIGHT: The 115mm carbon-fibre mid units and two pairs of 115mm bass drivers look identical to those in the MB6 but now feature new suspension systems. The rear ports [see p59], ribbon/planar tweeter and stabilising alloy outriggers are retained



A BETTER B

New for the 'B' iteration of the Scansonic MB6 is a redesigned crossover, while the internal construction of the curved, heavily braced cabinet has been reworked with minimal damping. A 'looser', low-loss spider has been adopted for the rear suspension of the mid/bass diaphragms, Scansonic reporting improved dynamics and LF response after a much-reduced 'break-in period' of some 100 hours' use.

Three sculpted ports to the rear tune the bass, and the 36.5kg speaker sits on substantial, easily-adjustable feet. A single pair of input terminals is provided, so no need to faff around wondering about bi-wiring or bi-amplification, and the minimum power requirement is relatively modest at 50W. However, as PM points out in his Lab Report [p59], these are speakers benefiting from the use of fairly substantial amps, not least in tackling the relatively low impedance, especially in the bass, but also in overcoming a 'real-world' sensitivity that's lower than the manufacturer suggests. Similarly, while Scansonic says the switch to a more conventional ported cabinet design for the 'B' series gives 'a more coherent, dynamic and detailed low-end reproduction, while at the same time making in-room placement of the speaker much easier and more versatile', some boundary reinforcement was advantageous.

MB2.5 B to the £6249 MB5 B before arriving at this range-topper. The MB2.5 B uses a conventional 'tweeter above mid above bass' arrangement, while the MB3.5 B and the MB5 B [HFN Jun '20] both use a d'Appolito treble/mid layout, with bass drivers below.

SLIMLINE TONIC

Having reviewed the MB5 B speakers relatively recently, I was expecting this flagship model to be 'more of the same, but more so', especially as the redesigned bass drivers and cabinets claim to make the most of the bass here. And with the proviso in PM's Lab Report [see p59] regarding the positioning of the cabinets – that's just what the MB6 B delivered, at least when some boundary reinforcement was provided.

Underpinning the junior model's combination of detail, focus and imaging is notably greater bass extension, yet without sacrificing any of the low-down speed and control that has so far been a hallmark of the latest versions of the MB speaker range.

With these loudspeakers on the end of high-quality amplification – I tried the Bricasti M20/M25 combination [HFN Nov '20] and, at a more affordable level, the Michi P5 preamplifier [HFN May '20] and M8 monoblocks [HFN Oct '20] – it was clear that the increased low-end punch available here didn't stop the MB6 B from delivering a thrilling sense of air and space in the sound.

If you're a sucker for that brief glimpse of recorded ambience in the moment before the music starts, or the way the sound decays away into a well-captured acoustic, you'll find much to like here. That was certainly the case with Elton John's 'Border Song', from his self-titled 1969 album [Mercury Japan UIGY-9612]. The sense of performance and of the lone performer at his piano in a credible acoustic was striking,

before the backing vocals soar up with a rush of exuberance, and the drums punch through the mix with real impact.

Similarly with Christophe Beck and Frode Fjellheim's 'Vuelie' (the theme from *Frozen*), by Norwegian choir Cantus on Spes [2L 2L-110-SABD], the MB6 B speakers deliver a precise, ultra-clear view of a typically wide-open recording. Every voice in the choir ranged before the listener is readily apparent, as is the acoustic space, and again the drums have both weight and fine attack.

That speed, allied to the explicit yet sweet treble from the ribbon tweeter, is heard to good effect with Angelo Verploegen and Jasper van Hulten's *The Duke Book* [Just Listen Records JL019], a wonderfully simple tribute to Duke Ellington played on no more than flugelhorn and drums. The recording, made live with no edits or overdubs, displays fabulous speed and drive. The drum kit sounds particularly snappy and punchy, and there's a glorious sense of the two musicians occupying the same acoustic space, their playing bouncing off each other.

HALL EFFECT

On a different scale, Britten's *Serenade For Tenor, Horn And Strings*, recorded in the composer's own concert hall at Snape Maltings [Linn CKD 478D] shows the speakers fully able to let the notes hang in, and decay into, the hall's ambience. The strings and the two soloists are delivered with entirely realistic proportions, with the diction of tenor Allan Clayton made explicit by the apparently seamless integration between the speaker's drivers – and again, that sense of experiencing a performance, not just listening to a recording, is a strength here.

More obviously live sets also benefit from the broad, deep focus and airy top end of the MB6 B speakers, with the 2019 Vienna

LOUDSPEAKER



LEFT: The narrow, tapered cabinet profile dictates the use of multiple reflex ports while the reworked crossover still only offers one pair of 4mm cable terminals and no bi-amping/wiring

Philharmonic New Year's Concert, conducted by Christian Thielemann [Sony Classical 19075902822] having a lovely rich, warm sense of the well-heeled audience gathered in the big room of the Muzikverein.

One can't help but be reminded of John Lennon's line, 'Would the people in the cheaper seats clap your hands? And the rest of you, if you'll just rattle your jewellery', but it's hard to argue with the feeling of occasion, and of the audience playing as big a part in the event as the orchestra. The band's on form, the audience is having a (very polite) ball, and the weight and balance of the loudspeakers convey all the atmosphere of the concert.

SHEER DRIVE

So yes, you certainly need to take a bit of care when it comes to positioning these loudspeakers to get the best of that bass, but do that and the MB6 Bs aren't afraid to rock out, whether with the pomp of 'Thunder Child' from that famous *War Of The Worlds* recording [Columbia DPCD960000] or the sheer drive and slam of The Who's 'You Better You Bet' [Face Dances; Geffen 96kHz/24-bit download].

The clarity here is a major factor, but the speakers never stray into 'too much information' territory. Instead, they deliver a sound that's both satisfying in hi-fi terms and musically compelling, too. 🎧

HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

You'll need to shove them closer into the corners than common sense would suggest, and make sure your amplification is up to snuff, but these tall, slender speakers don't just look fabulous: they also deliver the music – any music – with real vitality and impact. They're detailed, refined and classy, but hit them with something rougher and harder and they'll rise to the occasion in admirable style.

Sound Quality: 86%

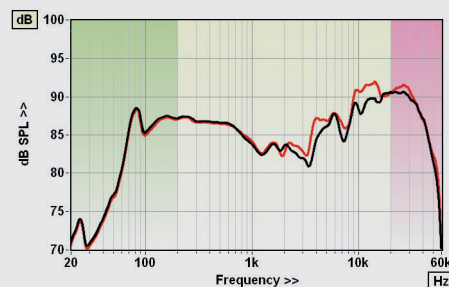


LAB REPORT

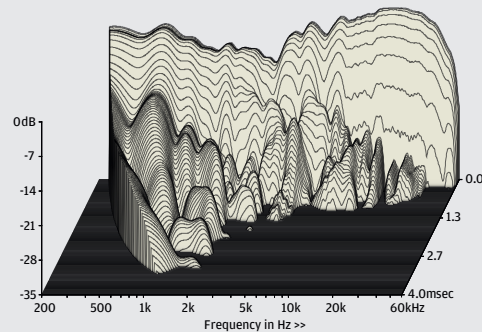
SCANSONIC MB6 B

Scansonic continues to specify a high sensitivity for its reworked 'B' series but the depressed midband and shelved-up presence/treble of the MB6 B suggests a standard 1kHz figure of just 84.1dB (re. 2.83V/1m) improving to 84.9dB (500Hz-8kHz) and 86.3dB (200Hz-20kHz). As we saw with the MB5 B, narrowband variations in the output of the planar-treble driver above the 2.6kHz crossover contribute to response errors of ±4.9dB with a hefty pair-matching error of 3.6dB. On the other hand, HF distortion is lower in this model at 0.6%/10kHz/90dB SPL and break-up behaviour better controlled [see Graph 2, below].

Working with a 'line array' of small woofers brings both benefits and challenges – the low frequency alignment here is decidedly 'peaky' with all four reflex-loaded 115mm bass units tuned to 79Hz and a steep roll-off thereafter [green shaded area, Graph 1]. While the diffraction-corrected bass extension of 54Hz (-6dB re. 200Hz) may seem slightly parsimonious, in practice we found the MB6 B certainly benefited from some near rear-wall reinforcement, these slim floorstanders delivering their smoothest, deepest subjective bass in this location. So the MB6 Bs are certainly room-friendly, but the amplifier loading – particularly below 150Hz – is a little tougher than Scansonic's '>4ohm' specification might suggest. Even though swings in phase angle are limited to +47°/-29° through this region, the impedance minima of 3.1ohm/89Hz and 2.98ohm/25Hz are best handled by heavyweight solid-state amps, particularly when the reduced sensitivity is also taken into account. Then again, a £9000 flagship is unlikely to be partnered with anything less! PM



ABOVE: Response inc. nearfield summed driver/port [green], freefield corrected to 1m at 2.83V [yellow], ultrasonic [pink]. Left speaker, black; right, red



ABOVE: Low-level modes visible from the four bass units at 500-1.5kHz but planar treble is well damped

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Sensitivity (SPL/1m/2.83V - 1kHz/Mean/IEC)	84.1dB / 84.9dB / 86.3dB
Impedance modulus: minimum & maximum (20Hz-20kHz)	3.0ohm @ 25Hz 13ohm @ 69Hz
Impedance phase: minimum & maximum (20Hz-20kHz)	-29° @ 78Hz and 2.9kHz +47° @ 56Hz
Pair matching/Resp. error (200Hz-20kHz)	3.6dB/ ±4.9dB/±4.9dB
LF/HF extension (-6dB ref 200Hz/10kHz)	55Hz / 47.7kHz/44.7kHz
THD 100Hz/1kHz/10kHz (for 90dB SPL/1m)	0.35% / 0.28% / 0.56%
Dimensions (HWD) / Weight (each)	1410x178x410mm / 37kg