

A Class Apart

An in-ear monitor from new firm IMR Acoustics offers something truly different, says Jon Myles.

No end of in-ear monitor (IEM) headphones pass through Hi-Fi World every year. Most are similar - delineated by price and a small design difference sufficient to give them individual appeal. Occasionally, a product comes along that makes us sit up and take notice, offering something very different from the norm.

So it was with the RIs from IMR Acoustics. My first reaction was that I'd never heard of the company before - so who were they? A phone call to owner Bob James revealed all. Bob recently worked with Trinity Audio helping design their well-regarded IEMs and has a background in studio engineering. He's also an avowed vinyl lover who places musicality as the prime consideration when voicing any earphone.

Hence the emergence of IMR Acoustics and its first product the RIs - that are decidedly different. At their heart is a 13mm custom-made hybrid driver consisting of two materials - ceramic and beryllium. Bob says this combination was tried in smaller sizes (9mm and 10mm) but only the 13mm proved truly effective.

Unpack them and you are presented with a rather large headshell which is constructed from an all-aluminium body. It looks heavy but, in use, is remarkably light. Also included in the box are five custom filters which alter bass, mid-range and treble detail (more of which later).

There's one other detail - a knurled wheel on the back allows the

RIs to be used as closed or open-backed. It's a novel feature that I haven't seen on other in-ear monitors but makes quite a lot of sense.

SOUND QUALITY

The first task with the RIs was for me working out which filter to use. The five are listed as Black for maximum attack with powerful impactful bass and a rich midband, Pink for a slightly decreased bass, Copper for fuller low-end but a recessed high-frequency response, Orange which brings a more balanced bass and midband and rolled off treble, and finally Blue which is the most balanced of the lot.

I tried them all and overall preferred the Blue filter - it had a natural and airy presentation with no undue emphasis on any part of the musical spectrum. However I can see others - especially those whose tastes veer towards dance or bass-heavy rock, opting for Black as it brings a little more punch and dynamic attack.

Whichever filter you choose, though, there's something wonderfully natural and organic about the sound of these in-ears. What they do especially well is present a big, expansive soundstage. There's more of a loudspeaker-type feeling than some other 'phones that seem to be punching the sound directly into your eardrums.

So on The Verve's 'Bittersweet Symphony' I could hear the full range of the instrumentation via an iPhone 7. Things became even better with high-resolution tracks via a FiiO X5.

The electronic beats and lush synths on Kraftwerk's 'Minimum-Maximum' (24bit/96kHz) had superb atmosphere, the music ricocheting around my head. Tracking individual instruments was easy but the way the IMRs blended everything together into a whole meant they never sounded clinical.

They are not quite as detailed as my reference Noble K10 in-ears but compensate with a rather richer, free-flowing sound.

Switching between the open and closed back settings on Mussorgsky's 'The Great Gate of Kiev' brought out a slightly larger soundstage with the former but, in truth, it is not a night and day difference. Having the option though is a nice touch.

Even nicer is the way the R-I's just get on with the business of playing the music without drawing too much attention to themselves - which is exactly what a good in-ear monitor should do.

CONCLUSION

At £500 these are not the cheapest in-ears you can find but their build quality, range of filter options and sheer all-round musicality make them excellent value for money.



IMR ACOUSTICS R1 £500



OUTSTANDING - amongst the best

VALUE - keenly priced

VERDICT

Excellent-sounding in-ears that offer a range of tuning options allied to a big soundstage.

FOR

- wide soundstage
- tuning options
- natural, free-flowing sound
- build quality

AGAINST

- nothing

IMR Acoustics
www.imracoustics.com