

When Are Monitors So Bad They're Good? Check Out Page 72

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# 18

## Monitoring Products On Review!

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# REVIEW

BY PAUL VNUK JR.

## PSI Audio A14-M Broadcast and A14-M Studio Monitors Swiss precision in a remarkable portable monitor



PSI Audio is a Swiss manufacturer of high end studio monitors. The origins of the company date back to 1977's Roux Electroacoustique, who designed and built speakers under the PSI name, which then became Relec SA in 1988. In addition to its own products, Relec SA was a major OEM company whose most fruitful partnership was with fellow Swiss firm Studer. Relec developed and produced a popular series of nearfield studio monitors—the Studer A1, A3, and A5 models—between 1992 until 2003.

When Studer was acquired by Harman in 2003, Relec began selling the formerly Studer-branded monitors under the revamped PSI audio name. Since then PSI has expanded its line to include full size mastering speakers in addition to updated versions of the older Studer models. All of the models are hand-built, and PSI Audio can still repair any monitor it's ever sold!

### A14-M and A14-S

The A14-M is in fact an updated version of the older Studer A1. It is billed as a broadcast model and is built with options for both portability or permanent installation. As of the 2015 AES show in New York there is also an A14-M Studio version; other than physical features, there are zero sonic differences between the two. I was sent a pair of A14-M Broadcast speakers; I will simply say "A14-M" from here on out.

The A14-M is the baby of the PSI line. It measures 9<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub>" tall, 6<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>" wide, 6<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub>" deep

and weighs in at just over 12 pounds. Its cabinet is made of MDF and finished in a dark crimson textured coating which is the signature look of the PSI Audio line.

The A14-M is a ported design with a thin, low-profile reflex bass port on the bottom of the cabinet. It has a 5.8" bass driver and 1" tweeter. Also on the front is a volume attenuation control and a 2-stage green/red power-clip LED light. Around the back there is a balanced female XLR input, a low-end rolloff control, and a 3-prong IEC connection.

The A14-M is biamped with 70 watts for the bass driver and 30 watts to the tweeter. The crossover point is set at 3.5 kHz, its frequency response is 56 Hz to 22 kHz (-6 dB), and it has max SPL of 112 dB (per pair).

### Under the hood

The A14-M makes use of four innovative technologies unique to PSI Audio. To understand some of what goes into the monitor to create its sound, let's tackle these new technologies (and their alphabet soup) one by one.

**AOI**—Adaptive Output Impedance: adjusts the impedance of the amplifier to make sure the speed and movement of the speaker membrane and the amp are in perfect sync. According to PSI, this makes for better accuracy and truer sonic translation, especially in the low frequencies.

**CPR**—Compensated Phase Response: an analog system of all-pass filters that controls group delays, phase distortions, and irregularity for better clarity and imaging.

**ALG**—Acoustic Load Guide: PSI Audio's waveguide which helps with the speaker's directivity, SPL levels, and bandwidth extension.

**PSC**—Phantom Standby Control: allows for remote-controlled standby of PSI monitors through the signal cable. It requires a simple voltage control via the company's R&B Signal Router.

### Broadcast vs. Studio

As mentioned before, the A14-M Broadcast offers a few unique features not found on the Studio version. Since it is made with portability in mind, the bass

driver is protected by a robust metal grille. It also sports a thick metal bracket which swivels from top to bottom. This bracket can be used as a handle, to attach the speaker to a mic stand, or even as a wallmount in a permanent install or surround setup.

The front panel volume control is unique to the broadcast model. On the A14-M Studio and most other PSI Audio models, the volume is on the back and there is no grille over the woofer or handle/mounting bracket. (For the historically minded, the original Studer A1 looked identical to the A14-M but was finished in gray. It had the bracket, but not the grille cover.)

### In use

I started using the A14-M in my home editing suite. After a few days of low-level burn-in, I set to work using them for podcast creation, pre-mixing and editing, dialogue work, and general music listening.

The words that describe these speakers best are "focused, full, and accurate." They are not a pretty-sounding monitor and not made to sweeten a mix. They will expose flaws in a mix, and delight in



doing so! They are great for finding and fixing issues in a track, not so much for kick-back casual listening.

Interestingly, while critical in nature, they are not “studio monitor bright” or clinical in nature. One of my favorite qualities of smaller desktop-style studio monitors is a tight punchy low end. The A14-M thumps fully with the best of them, yet it does not sound pushed or hyped, or like it’s trying to sound too sub-like.

While made for smaller rooms and portability, the A14-M can still crank quite nicely. Just for testing, I pushed them up to a downright painful sustained 106 dB before any hint of distortion crept in. Beyond that the clip protection kicked in and worked perfectly. At moderate levels of 62 dB up to 82 dB, I was impressed at how even and consistent they sounded. Even at quiet levels, the A14-M still gives you the full sonic picture.

### Ask the mastering engineer

Next I moved them to my main mix room, Moss Garden Music, and for a second opinion I called my friend Justin Perkins to come over and give them a listen. Justin owns Mystery Room Mastering in Milwaukee, WI, and he uses a pair of PSI Audio A215-M reference monitors in his room. Justin is intimately familiar with the PSI Audio sound; if you check out the website for ZenPro Audio, the US distributor of the

PSI Audio line, Justin’s opinions on the A215-M are quoted on its product page. I have also heard the A215-M speakers in his room, and they are seriously impressive!

I knew in advance that the small A14-M would be a little bit swallowed up in my mix room, especially alongside my Amphion One18 and Focal Trio6 Be monitors. In practice, the studio environment really helped add context to the PSI Audio sound. We spent a morning listening to dozens of tracks from the prerequisite Steely Dan to the Beatles, Buffalo Springfield, and early Rolling Stones, to modern well-mixed albums like Beck’s *Sea Change* and more.

Justin immediately noticed that despite their size, the A14-M had the same qualities he valued in their big brothers. According to him, the strength of PSI monitors is that they are an honest representation of the source. In Justin’s words, “They do not flatter a mix and will highlight faults instantly.”

Compared to the other large monitors in my studio, they had a completely different sound, and as such could make a great complementary tool even when larger monitors are present. While the larger Focals offered extended highs and a sub-thumping low end, and the Amphions were more open with a nice solid midrange, the A14-M was perhaps the most neutral.

As an example, when listening to a classic blues song from Muddy Waters’ 1963

*Folk Singer*, the snare really popped out clean and bright on both the Focals and the Amphions. It sounded great, but Justin’s guess was that it probably did not stand out quite so much when originally recorded and mixed. On the PSI Audio monitors the snare was in fact a touch duller and more natural. As Justin put it, “It sounded more like the band was in the room with you.”

### Conclusions

I would like to leave you with two final considerations. First, this speaker is a high-end workhorse and made for serious business. If you are in a small bedroom studio, editing suite, or broadcast booth, and are used to the similar-sized competition—many of which try hard to “sound” impressive—the A14-M will take some aural readjustment, thanks to its honest and unflattering nature. Many of you will simply not have heard microscopic accuracy like this before.

Second, PSI Audio quality comes at a significant cost, and one thing these amazing speakers are not, is “budget”! That being said, if you need unsurpassed professional quality that you can mix on comfortably for hours at a time, with superb real-world translation, then these speakers are well worth the investment. ➤

**Price:** \$1050 each

**More from:** PSI Audio, [www.psiaudio.com](http://www.psiaudio.com)