

# The VMPS RM/X 'Elixir'



RM/X (shown in piano black)  
2003. finalist for "Best of CES" Award in Hi-End audio category

Other finalists were Trinaural Processor from Spread Spectrum Technologies (\$1500), and Swan Diva 2.2 loudspeakers (\$68.000). Trinaural Processor won the "Best of CES 2003", playing within a system with RM/X.

## **This is what the RM/X does that our other speakers can't:**

**1.** Permit user adjustment of treble angle of incidence in the vertical plane, so that any listening position in a given room is covered ideally. The RM/X utilizes a tweeter pod with a 45 degree downward arc any part of which can be set by the listener for the desired coverage. While the cabinet shape was the long-festering brainchild of industry veteran James Bongiorno, it could not have been built without the specialized equipment and 3 dimensional custom design software of Dorn Dibble in El Sobrante.

**2.** Eliminate the horizontal diffraction path for mids and trebles. The poor vertical dispersion of long ribbon panels takes care of the interference and lobing in the vertical plane. This feature is the enormous credit of Jim Bongiorno's concept, which took heroic effort to turn into reality.

**3.** Solve the problem of common room modes. There are sidefiring, bottom firing and front firing woofers on the RM/X which means 3 different bass path lengths into the room, confounding the resonances typically found in rectangular rooms. Even if you listen in a cube you'll be helped.

**4.** Offer solidity and rigidity like no other enclosure. In order to eliminate horizontal diffraction the front baffle starts out as a 14cm thick billet of MDF, which is cut away by the CNC ball mill on either side to a depth of 10cm, leaving nothing but air on either side of the ribbon array. The tweeter pod is not only directable but uniquely shaped to prevent diffraction. It is elevated completely free of the main cabinet.

The Ribbon Monitor Extreme (fanciful name "Elixir") has a "standard model" price of \$9800 per pair plus shipping. They weigh in at about 170kg each, dimensions are 198Hx32Wx51D cm. The base is wider than the box to prevent tippiness. The 'standard model' is an automotive quality deep gloss black lacquer finish, courtesy of Dorn Dibble's shop. It takes three days to apply two coats of primer, two of lacquer, and one of clear overgloss with hand sanding inbetween. There is no better finish at any price. All wood finishes are optional, all finishes including the piano black are modeled on the "under glass" look of the best Italian furniture.

The RM/X utilizes a new highly advanced tweeter, a 1cm wide x 5cm long free-swinging true ribbon with 96dB sensitivity. Moving mass of the tweeter is 13 milligrams, response is -3dB at 40 kHz, and the sound is the sweetest we've heard.

One free-swinging ribbon = 96dB/1m/100W RMS

Due to its outstanding low frequency response the new tweeter will cross over in the 7 kHz range. Mated to the RM/X's 94 dB midrange section you should get by on 15W of tube for the mid/treble, plus solid state amplifier for bass. This new tweeter is available in all our ribbon speakers for \$400 per pair additional. Auricaps add \$550, TRT's \$1200 as usual.

While on some other loudspeaker designs an hourglass shape for the cabinet does reduce the diffraction path length in the horizontal plane, it wouldn't help the problem of poor vertical dispersion typical of ribbons. The RM/X takes an entirely different approach, eliminating horizontal diffraction entirely while providing ideal vertical dispersion for tweeters and mids. The FS tweeter is only 1cm wide, which means horizontal dispersion is excellent up to 25kHz. Sweet spot city for any listener, standing, sitting, or laying down! (Unless you're over 195cm tall and walk around constantly, of course).

## **Specifications**

Bass: 30cm sidefiring WCF Megawoofer bass, 25cm front WCF midbass, 30cm PR  
Mid: six 20cm Neo ribbons, 166Hz (-3dB)  
Treble: FS ribbon tweeter, 7kHz - 40kHz  
Frequency response: 20Hz-25kHz +0/-3dB  
Dimensions & Weight: 198Hx32Wx51Dcm, 168kg  
Finishes: automotive 7 layers piano black standard; all wooden finishes optional (with black front)

## **Elixir Story**

After last year's Best of CES award ceremony, **Jim Bongiorno** offers to take us to the best restaurant in LV (as it turned out, Dutch Treat).

Being trapped at a table with James B. is a memorable, frightening experience. Jim really knows how to make friends. "Brian", he yells, "I hate speakers. But yours aren't too bad. So I'm gonna do you a favor. No charge." And he proceeds to sketch on a cocktail napkin three views of a fascinating cabinet design which, of course, is unbuildable. However, in one brilliant stroke the design solves most of the acoustic problems cabinets present. James has had this in his head since he designed the Rectilinear III back in the sixties, his only commercial speaker work.

Trouble is the only way to make the box (if you can call it that) is with hammer and chisel.

Enter Dorn Dibble, a local cabinetmaker and audio enthusiast. I show my sketches of the cocktail napkin and he tells me his new \$300,000 CNC lathe can cut the many swoops and curves out of six inch thick material in four passes. Provided I buy a \$2000 router bit.

So here we have three guys, one with crazed visions of perfect speakers with no idea how to realize them, me, and Dorn, a 205cm 135kg local audio nut who spends all his time making boxes and buying woodworking gear. Probably the strangest combination since Manny, Moe and Jack.

And I wonder why it takes such a mismatched (not to say deranged) trio to outthink and outbuild the biggest speakermakers on the planet.

## **CES 2003 Story**

The tweeter top swivels 45 degrees down from the floor parallel and the setting is critical to 3mm precision, as we found out. Typical room modes can be defeated by a placing the woofers on the outside and turning the cabinet.

By the 4th day of the floor the sound quality was so good no other speaker I heard at any price came close.

Of the three finalists two came from our booth and were the speakers and electronics of our demo. The 3rd finalist received no votes from the judges. A judge told me that they were placed in considerable difficulty about the trophy, but since our speaker had won last year the award went to Jim's processor, which I demoed many times 2 vs 3 channel for the judges who came to the booth. In any case we were competing against ourselves, not the rest of the exhibitors, and the award represents the sound of the booth, an inextricable combination of processor driving speaker, and speaker playing the output of the processor.

The speakers had very little playing time (3 hrs) before being unpacked in the booth, thus the relatively poor sound on setup day. Sound improved daily until Sunday which visitors who heard will never forget, so stunning was the presentation.

I set up a bypass by using a second very good source (Krell transport, Pass Labs DAC, Bolder IC's, total about \$16,000) to drive the unbalanced inputs of the four

Ampzillas, which had switchable balanced or unbalanced inputs. The second source was the Philips CD1000 player which I got at Good Guys for \$599, connected to the line level inputs of the rebuilt 27year old Thaedra (GAS Thaedra solid state preamplifier), which drove the Trinaural processor, whose left and center and right outputs were connected via XLR cables to the balanced inputs of five Ampzilla 2000's.

As you can see the two channel setup had every advantage but could not approach the magical sound quality of the processor (which alters the L and R signals and derives the center algebraically in the analog domain).

*Brian Cheney*

**Lightning strikes twice** - sort of. Last year, Brian Cheney (of VMPS) won this award for his magnificent RM-40 ribbon loudspeaker. Hopefully in some small part being powered by the mighty Ampzilla2000 amplifiers. Again this year we shared the exhibit space. We had the full Trinaural system up and running. Actually, virtually the entire system was my concept (except the CD players). I had a souped up Thaedra (with new cards-shades of the new upcoming Thaedra2000) driving the Trinaural Processor which in turn drove six Ampzilla2000 amps. This combination drove the new VMPS Elixir loudspeaker which was also my concept design. More on that in a moment. Needless to say, the sound was beyond belief. Never in my career have I ever used "snake oil phrases" but I must say that even I, the ultimate skeptic, was truly blown away. And obviously so were all the judges. The object of audio reproduction is to make the system "disappear" and have just the close to true holographic presentation. In my entire career, I can only remember three occasions where I experienced something close to this. But this was the whole enchilada. I can surely tell you that once you experience the trinaural processor, you will NEVER go back to stereo again.

In my judgment however, the real hero of this endeavor is Brian Cheney. Last year at CES, at one of our dinners, I sketched out a complete set of drawings (on my favorite napkins of course) for this new speaker. I told Brian that THIS is what he should develop for the following year. Not only did he break the bank with this effort, his brilliance has created without any shadow of a doubt, the finest loudspeaker that has ever been created. Brian surely deserves the credit for being the absolute most brilliant loudspeaker designer on the planet. I can just see all the crocodile tears from all the others. BOO HOO. You may have to get in a long line as his entire first production run was sold out AT \$9,800.00 per pair. If you want Nirvana folks, three of these ELIXIR loudspeakers in my Trinaural setup will surely send you there.

*James Bongiorno*

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