

Fluid Audio Image 2 Monitors

*Advanced 3-way monitors with
Sonarworks integration*

REVIEW BY ALEX HAWLEY

Founded in 2011, Fluid Audio is led by speaker designer Kevin Zuccaro, who spent many years with companies like JBL, Cerwin-Vega!, and M-Audio. Perhaps best known for coaxial speaker designs with models like the FX80 (reviewed January 2020), Fluid has also added microphones, interfaces and headphones to its lineup in recent years. On review today are the Image 2 monitors, a brand new 3-way design from Fluid Audio.

Overview

The Image 2 monitors mark a few 'firsts' for Fluid. For one, it's not a coaxial design—and while it isn't a *first* for the relatively young company, they haven't made a traditional powered monitor like this one. Image 2 represents the first 3-way design from Fluid and the first monitor anywhere near its price tag at \$1,899 each, or ~\$3,800/pair. Image 2 is also Fluid's first monitor since partnering with Sonarworks, giving the ability to store calibration profiles directly onto the DSP—more on that later.

Designed for near or mid-field configurations, Image 2 consists of *four* drivers in a sealed cabinet with an extended frequency response reaching from 28 Hz to 27 kHz. The folded ribbon Fluid AMT (Air Motion Transformer) tweeter, which first appeared in the unique FPX7 coaxial monitor (reviewed March 2017), is recessed in a waveguide to ensure phase coherence with the 5" aluminum midrange driver. These can be flipped within the cabinet to accommodate both vertical or horizontal speaker orientation. The dual 8" side-firing woofers live inside their own enclosure within the cabinet with a proprietary woofer stabilizing system that Fluid Audio refers to as Vi-bracer technology.

Brace for Bass

Vi-bracer technology is designed to eliminate cabinet vibrations—typically a significant source of distortion in studio monitors. According to Fluid Audio, the Vi-bracer design eliminates vibrations before they begin: "The low-frequency drivers are mounted on opposing sides of the cabinet, and their motors are tied together with outward pressure. As the cones are driven in and out in opposite directions, the forces exerted on the motors cancel one another...and because the wavelengths generated by the woofers are much larger than the speaker cabinet dimensions, the drivers radiate as if they were a single point source."



Amps & Connections

Image 2 is powered by four Class-D amplifiers: 75W treble, 150W midrange, and two 225W amps for the opposing woofers. Altogether, Image 2 is capable of a maximum SPL rating of 116dB. The footprint is significant, largely thanks to the dual long-throw woofers, measuring at 13.81" T x 9.5" W x 14.3" D and weighing nearly 28 pounds each. Something to keep in mind for smaller home studio setups—you'll want dedicated speaker stands.

The back plate hosts an assortment of subtle tone shaping and connection options. Mid and high-frequency adjustments are available at +/- 1dB, while the low-frequency setting allows up to a +/- 2dB adjustment. The input signal can be received via analog XLR and TRS, or digitally via AES/EBU or S/PDIF in/thru. There is also a USB-B type connector for interfacing with your computer and a 1/4" foot switch input for toggling between the default voicing and Mixcube mode.

Image 2 also offers an automatic standby/power saver mode.

Voicing Options + Sonarworks

The default Flat voicing reproduces the full range of the spectrum (which *nearly* reaches 40 Hz at 0dB before it tapers off). When using the included foot switch to enable Mixcube mode, Image 2 can replicate the classic frequency response, phase and transient characteristics of single-driver Mixcube-style speakers.

The SoundID software by Sonarworks is designed to account for shortcomings in your acoustic environment. Traditionally, software such as SoundID manifests as a plugin that sits on the master output channel within your DAW. With the new partnership between Fluid Audio and Sonarworks, you can permanently store the calibration profile directly onto the DSP on the Image 2 monitors.

Not only does this free up computer processing power, but the room correction response is applied across all audio, not just through your DAW.

The setup/calibration process took about 20 minutes. Once completed, you can store up to four calibration profiles directly onto the monitors, which can be toggled using the companion app, Fluid Audio DCT (as long as both monitors are connected to your computer via USB).

Image 2 Image

To kick things off, I set up the Image 2 monitors in the A room at Coupe Studios in Boulder, CO, with all flat settings. One of the first aspects that stood out was the incredibly fast transient response and imaging, especially in the top-end. The phantom center is exceptionally anchored—providing hyper-realistic placement of instruments across the sound stage.

The lows are far-reaching and impactful, perhaps with the most well-articulated and cleanest extension of any monitor I have reviewed in recent memory. It holds up at lower volumes as well,

maintaining its impressive level of low-end detail even at bedroom listening levels. The midrange feels slightly pulled back in the 1.5–2.5 kHz range, but the top-end is ultra-detailed with a smooth sheen that rests on the top of the snare and hi-hat response. [Fluid Audio let us know that thanks to feedback from users, the mid-range voicing has already been tweaked in the current shipping models to be less pulled back and much more “present” sounding.]

Sound(ID) Check!

Next, I brought the monitors to my home studio to understand better what SoundID can do in a less-than-ideal mixing environment. After the calibration and upload process, the resulting sound was a subtle shift from the Flat voicing; however a marked improvement. The low-end became slightly attenuated (I wouldn't say more clear, as it was tight and clean to start), and the top end was also attenuated by a subtle amount. While it didn't yield a drastically different character, the small changes amounted to a more accurate response for the given space.

The various voice settings quickly became quite valuable to my workflow. I especially found Mixcube mode useful to check and balance mixes. It more than accomplishes the task of evoking the classic bandlimited sound for which it's designed, and the footswitch makes it very convenient to use. I almost wish I could toggle between the Flat and SoundID profiles with the footswitch as well, but it's easy enough to access those through the Fluid Audio DCT app.

Final Thoughts

The Image 2 monitors by Fluid Audio are remarkable. The fast transient response and rich lows are addictive for both mixing and general listening. They sound consistent at all listening levels and have no problem getting loud enough to fill larger rooms, like the A room at Coupe Studios. I have always been a fan of 3-way designs, and Fluid Audio nailed it with the Image 2 monitors. ➤

Price: \$1,899 (each)

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