

Flying Mole DAD-M100

They're small but they're not furry, shortsighted, a plague to gardeners or bewinged.

We must be talking about a power amp then. **ROB 'as seen on TV' JAMES** wrestles with the concept and listens to the results.



A FLYING MOLE IS a contradiction in terms. The Japanese apparently believe that although the mole lives underground, he would really like to take to the sky and fly. To find a less likely mammalian candidate for aerobatics you'd probably need to be looking at a rhino.

This is rather the point. The Flying Mole offer is almost equally implausible; tiny form factor, impossibly low weight, low power consumption of 32W max, 100W into 8ohms and, of course, top class

sound (UK £290.59 + VAT). The Flying Mole Corp, motto, 'flying high after digging deep', has largely succeeded in delivering exactly this (*It's lost me though. Ed*).

Until recently digital amplifiers have been regarded as technical curiosities, fit only for low-end, all-in-one home cinema systems. Flying Mole products seek to succeed in the middle ground of high-end hi-fi and professional monitoring, below the esoterica, but well above high street, so-called hi-fi.

The M100 series is available in a variety of versions with connections to suit different applications. All have a front panel power switch and level control. DC powered versions are also available, a little larger and 300g heavier and of considerable interest for PA applications in a wide range of circumstances.

The technology employed combines the power supply (switch-mode) with the amplification. The descriptions of the exact techniques employed are pretty impenetrable and the explanations well above my head. The available literature doesn't really help and does neither Flying Mole nor me any favours.

As is so often the case, the figures they have chosen to quote present the product in a good light but actually don't tell you much. I have not yet decided if this is all smoke and mirrors or whether Flying Mole is really on to something. I suspect that, as with other digital devices, at this stage in development, we don't yet know the correct questions to ask: just as with CDs and DATs, conventional analogue measurement criteria are inadequate to predict real-world performance. So it comes back down to listening, maybe no bad thing.

I partnered the Flying Moles with a pair of Leema Xens, my most clinical monitors and not the easiest of loads. For critical listening tests I fall back on a very limited repertoire of material, Suzanne Vega's Tom's Diner, Goldfrapp's Lovely Head, some Air tracks and a variety of spoken word. The Vega is, probably, the most revealing, certainly of digital problems. The reverb tails show up any low-level horrors and this recording is very sensitive to any crunchiness in the midrange because Vega's voice becomes sibilant at the least provocation. The Goldfrapp and Air tracks have a number of challenges and recording deficiencies, which are very much easier to identify with a decently transparent system, and one of the Air tracks is particularly difficult at the bottom end. Spoken word is always the best way to judge the overall performance of loudspeakers. If speech doesn't convince, nothing else will in the longer term.

Results from the listening tests confirmed that the Moles are in a different league compared with domestic digital amps. A muscular low-end is a particular strength although the high-end seemed a trifle muted. A quick glance at the specifications reveals the reasons for both observations.

The frequency response of these amplifiers is sensitive to load impedance. With an 8ohm load the