

One MicroWedge, Two MicroWedges, Three MicroWedges...

By Larry Hall & Bill Evans

For a long time the Radian MicroWedge (popularly referred to as the "Rat wedge" due to Dave Rat's involvement with its development) was one of the "go-to" stage monitors for the live audio biz—especially for those of us who specialize in concert-type events. We could almost always be sure that the MicroWedge would be one of the rider-acceptable choices. The compact boxes put out plenty of clear SPL, and while everyone has their own personal favorites, few acts would turn down the MicroWedge when advancing the gig.

Now unless you have been sleeping in class, you know that there have been some major changes in the past year-plus in MicroWedge World. Dave Rat and Radian ended their longstanding relationship and Radian announced the APEX as a successor to the MicroWedge while Dave hooked up with EAW to develop a new version of the box. Which basically leaves us with three versions of the MicroWedge: the original, the new EAW MicroWedge and the Radian APEX.

Which leads us to this: Yes, we are doing a shootout. FOH never does shootouts because the editor is a wuss who says that "the only one who gets shot in a shootout is me." But this is a unique situation and it screamed for a direct comparison.

The Gear

All three boxes have the same basic structure: they are full range or bi-ampable boxes with a coaxial device that includes an LF driver and a high-frequency horn, and are available with 12-inch or 15-inch LF drivers. (For the shootout we used 12-inch versions of all boxes). Both new boxes use a HF driver with a 3-inch voice coil, but the Radian claims a 2-inch exit to the EAW's 1.4-inch exit. Both new boxes contain a passive crossover and both sound good, but the crossover in the EAW is substantially bigger and beefier. The chances that anyone buying wedges at this level is using them passive is not great, so we are not gonna spend a huge amount of time on it, but the old Radian took a lot of power to get cranking when in passive mode and that has not changed much here.

The most immediately noticeable difference is in the shape of the boxes. The new MicroWedge is a bit smaller and lighter—7 lbs—and where APEX has gone to a whole new profile, EAW has retained the shape of the original MicroWedge. The cabling connects on the front of all of the boxes, providing an elegant look, and no cable ends to trip over and break because they "live" inside the box.

The EAW also incorporates a fly-track on the bottom that allows you—in addition to other obvious options—to use a kind of kickstand attachment to change the angle, which is kind of cool. Last physical difference—we did the tests with the grills off, but the New MicroWedge has some foam incorporated into the edge of the grill that makes them a bit more stable at higher volume. In other words, more gain before feedback,

which is always a good thing.

Mics used were a Shure SM 58, an Audix OM5 and then just to see how they handle something very hot and very wide, an Audix VX-10. We set up one of the older Radian MicroWedges as a baseline reference. Crest 8200s provided all power. We used a dbx 480 to set up crossover points for the APEX. For the EAW, we used the recommended UX8800 processor.

The Gig

OK, it was a shootout in the warehouse, not an actual gig, but you get the picture.

We did the deed over two days. First we got all official and scientific and did actual measurements from three feet—actual measured three feet, not "yeah that looks like about three feet." The first thing that was obvious was that both the APEX and the EAW were substantially louder than the old Radian—a good 6 dB louder. We barked into mics until our voices gave out then went to program material and test tones and ran them until there was substantial heat coming off the voice coils and all three held up nicely.

The next day was about the more subjective "how do they sound?" part of the equation. Same setup, same gear, but we brought a singer in to be our test subject. Again we started with the old Radian as a baseline playing pre-recorded tracks then moved on with the same tracks and the same setup as the day before to the new boxes. Then had both the singer and an engineer used to doing lots of monitor work hit the mic both with and without tracks running and then sat down to talk it out.

Our initial impression came down to two good boxes that were just different flavors. I like vanilla bean ice cream and you may prefer French vanilla. They're both vanilla but they taste different. Using the "flat" setting on the UX8800 processor, the EAW came across as being smoother across the tonal spectrum while the Radian was very "present" in the vocal range, and the vocals cut better than the EAW. Our singer said that on a loud stage where he really needed to hear his vocal he would opt for the APEX but on a softer gig where he wanted to hear a fuller mix he would prefer the EAW. The engineer, on the other hand, just preferred the EAW. Using their processor and presets, the EAW was a few dB louder than the APEX with the same input.

We bypassed the dbx480 and took the EAW processor out of the chain and ran them passive and noted less of a difference in sound character and about a 2 dB advantage in output for the EAW. At this point we had planned on being done until someone suggested using the EAW with the dbx480 and without the UX8800, at which point it got very interesting.

In this setup, the first thing we noticed was that the EAW advantage in SPL disappeared, as did much of the "hi-fi"



We tested the monitors with a number of different mics, including a Shure SM 58, an Audix OM5 and an Audix VX-10.

feel of the sound. The boxes sounded a lot more similar. So we took it one more step and ran the same process with both boxes using the EAW controller. And...

The APEX got louder and smoother. So we tweaked the 480 settings for a little while and got the Radian to the same output and a sound character that was remarkably similar—in fact, damn near identical.

So, Who Wins?

This is one where you will have to make your own call. But here are some things to think about. If you are all about the processor, then you want to think twice about the APEX. We used the same settings on the 480s that we have used on the old MicroWedges forever. Since the shootout, presets have been written in house for both the dbx 4800 and the Crown iTech. Those were given to Radian, and we offered to write more, but have not received a response.

Ultimately, much of this comes down to the processor. The EAW definitely sounds better and is louder when matched with the UX8800 but we were able to get the same—or very close to the same—results with a non-EAW controller. And both the old and new Radians sounded substantially better and were louder using the UX8800 presets.

Bottom line on both sound and output is that the new MicroWedge mojo appears to be in the controller.

Taking the controller out of the picture the Radian is more attractive on a price level, with a \$700-plus difference in dealer cost per box. So the differences come down to shape, beefiness of the internal crossover, the integrated flytrack with optional kickstand, a couple of dB more output and a substantially higher price tag on the EAW versus the more basic but still loud and nice-sounding APEX, which is easier on the wallet. Neither has been on the market long enough to make a rider-friendliness call, although with the MicroWedge name, we have to assume that EAW will have the upper hand there.

Our recommendation is this: If you're on any type of budget and need a wedge like the original Micro that is simply a loud, clear and durable wedge with minimal to zero DSP, give Radian a call. If you're not on a budget so much, and are already looking at the Clair 12AMs or the Firehouse wedges, or the newer Showco wedges, take a look at this new MicroWedge. Its got killer but pricey DSP and the wedge/DSP combo is pretty insane, and quite a bit cheaper than the 12AM/Clair DSP combo. **FOH**