



Category Winner: Home Theatre Speakers under \$2,000
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SUBSONIC AUDIOSTYLE



Prior to us receiving this system for review, we knew for quite some time that there was a new loudspeaker range coming from Subsonic. It's been a while since the Australian brand released any new products, but if its new loudspeakers are anything like the Polymorphic and X Series that preceded them, then the wait will have been worth it.

Subsonic first hit the Aussie audio scene around seven years ago and it's since made a name for itself as a home-grown loudspeaker brand that offers a great product at the right price. Its X Series products include a full complement of hi-fi and AV speakers, plus subwoofers and Subsonic even goes so far as to state its XM 1 floorstander was created to be

'the ultimate value for money loudspeaker sold in Australia.'

The X Series certainly has done the business for Subsonic, but over the past couple of years it's been looking at what the loudspeaker marketplace needs. The result of this is the new Audiostyle speakers, which the tag line says are 'part Audiophile - more than Lifestyle.' By 'lifestyle' Subsonic is referring to the proliferation of so-called home-theatre-in-a-box systems that often accompany flat panel televisions. These systems are often practically given away with these screens and although you'll be watching a nice picture, the sound quality just won't be up to scratch. It needn't be this way though and if you're prepared to spend a bit of



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your budget on decent electronics and speakers, then the whole home theatre experience will be a far more enjoyable one.

So, taking a look at what sort of sub/sat systems that are commonly available, Subsonic decided there were plenty of plastic and aluminium ones of mediocre quality available, but these systems left several areas with room for improvement, which is what Subsonic set out to address with this new range of compact ‘lifestyle’-orientated loudspeakers.

The subwoofer/satellite system has long been dismissed by audio purists as a compromise when it comes to sound quality - both with stereo and multichannel use. Bose has long enjoyed success with this formula and up until quite recently, its ‘lifestyle’ and Acoustimass speaker systems were considered almost the sole option for discretely-delivered home theatre audio and video. Other manufacturers have since joined the ranks of heard-but-not-seen hi-fi and AV systems, but if the truth be told, the smaller the speaker cabinet, the greater the limitations on what it can do.

This is especially true with subwoofers and apart from a couple of notable exceptions from the likes of Sunfire and Velodyne, genuine bass needs a big cone and enclosure. The same applies, albeit to a lesser extent when partnered with a subwoofer, to the satellites, but it is possible to achieve a lot of sound out of very small sats these days.

The last sub/sat system that really caught my attention was the excellent Mission M-cubes, which used tiny NXT-based sats and a conventional active subwoofer. The Whatmough-Whise Synergy2 system is another high quality compact sub/satter that’s got what it takes. And then there are the KEF KHTs which have long been a popular solution. All these systems retail for around the \$3,000 or above, so what’s available if your budget won’t quite stretch this far?

Well, the new Audiostyle system in 5.1 channel configuration has a recommended price of \$1,996. That gets

you two pairs of AS-M monitors (\$399 per pair), a single AS-LCR monitor (\$399) and XS2 (\$799) active subwoofer. The four sats are quite small, while the centre channel is about twice the size and they are all accompanied by the XS2 subwoofer from Subsonic’s X Series, but you could use any of its subs. The XS2 is the perfect partner though being the smallest of all of Subsonic’s three active subwoofers. The AS-Ms can be stand mounted, or supplied with their own plinth and the AS-LCR is shaped so that it’ll fit nicely on a shelf beneath the TV screen. It can also be used as main fronts as opposed to the AS-Ms and both models can be wall-mounted with supplied keyhole brackets. The XS2 subwoofer isn’t particularly big by active subwoofer standards; it’s about average for a 10-inch (250mm) driver design. Amplification is rated at 150 watts and twin forward-firing bass reflex ports make it a bit more placement-friendly than a sealed enclosure.

Other speaker specifications are an AV receiver-friendly 6 ohm impedance and 87/89dB sensitivity. Power handling is quite generous across the board with the Audiostyles rated at 100 watts RMS for the AS-Ms and 125 watts for the AS-LCR. This is a particular aspect of the speakers’ design that Subsonic says it got heavily involved in as the feedback it received from dealers was the lack of power handling in sub/sat systems. Build quality is something else the Audiostyles have in their favour and constructed from MDF, the cabinets are solid and well fitted. They can also be painted to whatever colour you desire to match the room décor.

The drivers are Subsonic’s own - not off the shelf units from another manufacturer. In fact, the Audiostyles use the same tweeter found in the flagship Polymorphic range and the 4-inch (100mm) bass/mid driver has an oversized 25mm voice coil which helps it handle more power. The AS-Ms are 2-way, sealed cabinets while the AS-LCR uses twin bass/mid drivers and tweeters in forward-firing bass reflex port cabinet.





Hooked up to my AV system, I gave the Subsonics a few days of running in as they were all brand new. Sitting down to then take stock of this compact system, my initial impression was that it definitely delivers what Subsonic intended it to achieve. There's none of the 'small box' sound that you'd normally expect from compact speakers such as these and helped by the very capable XS 2 subwoofer, the Audiostyles simply build on what is a very solid and musical foundation. The system works as a whole with tremendous cohesion and boasts unexpected presence that would embarrass many more expensive sub/sat speaker systems. Integration between the subwoofer and satellites is seamless and there's a real sense of substance, power and control, especially from the XS2. It's an articulate and very musical-sounding design (as is the entire system) and it blends in nicely with the Audiostyles with the combination of forthright satellites and deep, pulsating subwoofer soon becoming addictive.

With music, both in stereo and multichannel, the Audiostyles prove their worth. Most designers of sub/sat systems would be happy enough if it performed okay with movie sound, but this Subsonic system successfully crosses the divide between music and movie use and is adept at both. These speakers have a strikingly clear sound, especially given their size and they impress with the way they separate the various parts of orchestral pieces such as Beethoven's 9th Symphony, making it easy to hear exactly what's going on. Dynamically the results are good too - there's little sense of the speaker holding back crescendos even at high listening levels. This is something the Subsonics don't mind doing either; playing loud. I'm aware that there are the normal physical restrictions from using small drivers and cabinets, but if you close your eyes, you'd swear blind that you could be listening to a much bigger speaker system. It's not just the sublime depths that the XS2 subwoofer plumbs either; the Audiostyle satellites

compliment this deep and powerful bass extension with impressive soundstaging and excellent stereo depth.

This scale and dynamic ability translates to surround sound 100 per cent. In movie mode, the Audiostyles are no less impressive. With the DTS-ES sound of *Die Another Day* the action is laid on thick and fast by the Subsonics, which keep up the audio pace nicely. There's all sorts happening in this ES audio mix and for sheer surround excitement, it's hard to beat. The Audiostyles deliver all the sonic spills and thrills intact with tremendous verve and vigour delivering the big action moments (and I mean big) with genuine scale and authority. The opening hovercraft chase sequence is full of enveloping surround action from multiple explosions to rapid gunfire and the Audiostyle system translates the lot into a whirlwind of well-placed effects and fast-shifting transients. It does so seamlessly so you're aware of the spacious soundfield that's generated, but never does any one channel dominate proceedings, including the subwoofer.

Less frantically paced films such as the wonderful *Walk The Line* demonstrate the Subsonic's ability to relay detail and atmosphere plus the system's rhythmic ability, which is spot-on. The live concert scenes sound incredibly realistic while speech and dialogue is clear as crystal, despite the occasional thick accent.

Despite the wait, this new system from Subsonic is a very welcome addition to its product range. As this year's AVL Best Buy Awards winner, the Subsonic Audiostyle system does all things right and demands your consideration if you are looking to buy a compact AV speaker system with \$2,000 to spend.

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Ancillary Equipment: Okyo DV-SP502 DVD player, Onkyo TX-SR702 AV receiver, Toshiba HD-S25 digital TV decoder, Neotech Component Video cables, QED Silver Anniversary Biwire loudspeaker cables, Concorde equipment support, SAP Relaxa 1 isolation platform, Black Box mains conditioner

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Specifications:

Product Type

AV home theatre speaker system

Recommended Amplifier Power

25-100 watts

Driver Complement

AS-M: 1 x 100mm bass/mid, 1 x 25mm tweeter

AS-LCR: 2 x 100mm bass/mid, 2 x 25mm tweeters

XS-2: 1 x 250mm long-throw woofer

Frequency Response

AS-M: 90Hz-20kHz

AS-LCM: 80Hz-22kHz

XS-2: 25-150Hz

Sensitivity

91dB at 2.83V, 1m

Impedance

6 ohms (AS-M and AS-LCR)

Dimensions

AS-M: 210 x 140 x 175mm

Weight

XS-2: 26kg

Price

\$1,996 complete

"The system works as a whole with tremendous cohesion and boasts unexpected presence that would embarrass many more expensive sub/sat speaker systems... It simply does all things right..."

Reviewer:

Nic Tatham

All specifications and recommended retail prices were supplied by the distributor at the time of original review, and may now be subject to change

