

# audition

equipment review

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## Subsonic XM1 Mk.II Floorstanding Loudspeakers

**T**here are many loudspeakers in the market at \$2,000 per pair. In fact, this spot in the speaker market is just about as competitive as the \$1,000 price point below it. There is a healthy mix of imported and locally built products that compete here.

The model for review this issue falls into the locally built category. By locally built I mean really local - the cabinetry is made here - not outsourced to a factory in Asia as is becoming very common. Subsonic has been around for a dozen years now with the XM1 as its top X Series model. It knows how to make a

loudspeaker - I recall its \$999 subwoofer winning a six-sub face off I conducted a few years ago. The win was against some pretty good competition, but what we have here is no subwoofer. The floorstanding XM1 Mk.II replaces the long-running Mk.I (surprise, surprise) and is officially released at the time of writing this review. Following this in July, will be a matching pair of rear speakers and a centre speaker. So, is the XM1 Mk.II \$2,000 well spent?

Let's start with the appearance of the Mk.IIs. At the risk of generalising, many imported speakers at the \$2k price point will have a vinyl finish. Meanwhile, local speakers, free of importers' margins and with lower freight costs, can afford to have a real wood veneer. This is the case here with the new Subsonics coming in a real wood Jarrah, Oak or Black finish. There is also the option, for a couple of hundred extra dollars, of a huge range of custom finishes if the speakers need to match other furniture or colour schemes.

The review pair, in the Jarrah, appear well finished and a rap on the cabinets indicates sturdy construction. Subsonic states it has heavily braced the cabinet and also used considerable amounts of dampening to minimise box colouration of the sound. The speakers come with carpet spikes supplied.

The XM1 Mk.II is a type of 2½-way design with four active drivers in total. By 2½-way it means that of the three woofers, the top one also handles

**Subsonic releases its XM1 Mk.II this month, but is it any better than its superb forebear?**

By Gavin Womersley

### Vital Statistics

**Dimensions:**  
965 x 230 x 395mm

**Weight:**  
56kg (pair)

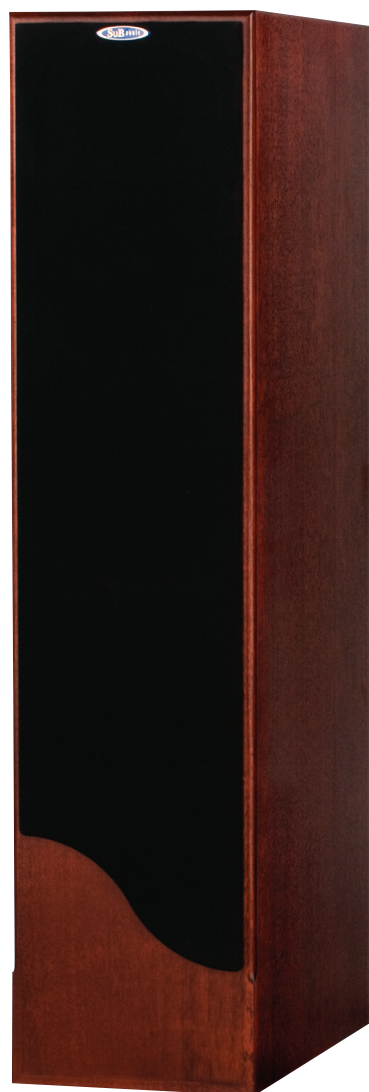
**Price:**  
\$1,999 (pair)

**Distributor:**  
Subsonic Audio  
PO Box 52  
Coniston, NSW 2500

**Telephone:**  
(02) 4296 3366

**Email:**  
avsales@subsonic.com.au

**Website:**  
www.subsonic.com.au/audio



midrange duties before crossing over to the tweeter at a little over 3,000Hz. The bottom two woofers operate up to 450Hz, states Subsonic's design engineer, Duncan Best. All woofers sport oversized magnets for plenty of power handling and control. Subsonic has devised an elaborate crossover design to give a very flat response up to 15,000Hz, with overall response rising to around 30,000Hz, thanks to high quality Danish Peerless tweeters. The speaker is ported which should increase bass in the frequency range targeted by the manufacturer. Given the size of the cabinet, the ported design and the rated sensitivity of 92dB, I was expecting a loudspeaker that would do well with the bigger action movies as well as normal music.

I set the speakers out a few feet from the wall and toed them in a little. Using a *Video Essentials* DVD I found that they were of slightly higher



sensitivity than my own Celestion speakers (4 ohm models, rated at 90dB) and thus backing up the quoted specs. But whether its 91dB or 92dB these speakers are pretty sensitive so you should get plenty of output from them with even modest amplifiers. Of course better amplifiers will always give you better results - such as smoother sound and more control etc., so still always get the best amplifier that you can afford.

To start things off I ran some tests on the Subsonic pair and found that the speakers, in my room, had useable output down to around 27Hz. The Mk.IIs are rated to 32Hz ( $\pm 3$ dB) in free space. This is actually quite deep for speakers of their size and price. From my experience most of the opposition start to drop away in the mid to high 30s. When exposed to loud tone sweeps and low frequency test tones the new Subsonics were rattle-free and there was hardly any port chuffing.

These were promising signs and I had not got into any music yet!

I started with a focus on stereo imaging and rather than my usual *BluesMasters* disc I listened to an album featuring the best of '70s group Supertramp. Vocals on songs like *Give A Little Bit* came through superbly, as if my centre speaker was still hooked up. Similar results with other albums indicated that the drivers are well matched for each other and had negligible differences in their key performance parameters.

Top-end performance seemed a little more pronounced, not that this was unpleasant but just that high hats and drum brushwork seemed a little more forward. The treble was certainly clean and sweet though. The triangle struck repeatedly in the main theme to *Jerry McGuire* on the *Beautiful Hollywood* CD, on the Telarc label, sounded wonderful and smooth.

The loudspeakers' midrange sounded slightly chesty and coloured. My Telarc recording of Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* still sounded great though and very impressive for a \$2,000 speaker. It was easy to warm to the sound and the strings were alive and transients had plenty of bite. The Eagles' *Hotel California* also had plenty of snap to

## Technotalk

**Product Type:**  
Floorstanding loudspeaker  
**Driver Complement:**  
3 x 150mm woofers  
1 x 25 mm soft dome tweeter  
(full magnetic shielding)  
**Cabinet Configuration:**  
2½-way, four driver, bass reflex  
**Frequency Response:**  
32-25kHz ( $\pm 3$ dB)  
**Low Frequency Response:**  
27Hz (measured in room)  
**Amplifier Compatibility:**  
20-200 watts (RMS)  
**Nominal Impedance:**  
4 ohms  
**Sensitivity:**  
92dB  
**Warranty:**  
10 years  
**Finishes:**  
Black, Jarrah and Oak

Technotalk specifications and recommended retail prices are supplied by the manufacturer

**“The Mk.IIs performed brilliantly here. When playing *Boxenkiller* loudly I had to check my 18-inch (45cm) subwoofer was off, such was the strength of the low frequencies produced from the kick drum. Dynamically, these speakers hit hard like few others I have heard at this price. Music from Swiss pop group Yello sounded awesome through these new Subsonics.”**

transients and did a good job with the vocals at a variety of volume levels.

Drum test tracks such as the track *Boxenkiller*, found on a Focal-JM Lab test CD, is not music you’d tend to listen to for pleasure, but they are great for putting speakers and amplifiers through their paces. The Sheffield Lab label also has some great test discs that help you explore the outer edge of a speaker’s dynamic ability. The Mk.IIs performed brilliantly here. When playing *Boxenkiller* loudly I had to check my 18-inch (45cm) subwoofer was off, such was the strength of the low frequencies produced from the kick drum.

Dynamically, these speakers hit hard like few others I have heard at this price. Music from Swiss pop group Yello sounded awesome through these new Subsonics. The album *Pocket Universe* contains some brilliantly recorded tracks packed with energy and huge dynamics. Orchestral bass drums had similar impact to their rock counterparts. So, bass performance overall was excellent. Only the lowest of organ pedals on recordings such as *The Great Organ Of St. Eustace* (Dorian label), or the very deepest rumbles from synthesizers such as in *There Will Be No Armageddon*, sounded like they could have benefited from the reinforcement that a subwoofer provides. As you would expect this excellent dynamic and low frequency performance translated well to the movie arena.

The XM1 Mk.IIs are very capable of handling modern movie soundtracks. Running in my 700m<sup>3</sup> room, I had the main speakers set to ‘large’ so they handled their full allotment of deep bass. They easily achieved reference level with the most demanding of movies, including *U-571*, *The War Of The Worlds*, *End Of Days*, *The Chronicles Of Riddick* and *Pitch Black*. When a car is thrown high into the air and crashes to the ground in the chapter where the Tripods emerge in *The War Of The Worlds*, the loudspeakers don’t hold back on the violence, giving viewers a real fright.

I wish I had a couple of other loudspeakers of a similar price to hand for comparison during the reviewing process, but without that luxury I have to gauge the Subsonics’ performance against some speakers I have heard and reviewed over recent months. Despite that passage of time I strongly feel that these Subsonic loudspeakers are very

competitive. They are especially impressive in the area of dynamics. Certainly the three good quality woofers help in this, as does the efficiency and the solid construction of the cabinets.

But do not mistake this as simply another loud ‘banger’ style speaker, suitable only for action movies and parties. It does have some subtlety and will reward almost any type of music.

Being backed by a 10-year warranty doesn’t hurt at all either. If the centre and rears are of a similar character Subsonic will have a great AV speaker combination. In this competitive segment of the market this model is one to put at the top of your audition list. **AVL**

**Ancillary Equipment:** Celestion A Series loudspeakers, Yamaha DVD-S1500 DVD player, Velodyne DD-18 active subwoofer, DigitalView DVR-800 HD set top box, Rotel RSP-1068 AV processor, Parasound HCA-2205 multichannel power amp, Audioquest interconnect cables

## O p i n i o n

The ‘Opinion’ expressed here is that of the reviewer, summarised in the form of a 5-star rating system, and should be considered as an integral part of the full contents of this Audition Equipment Review. As such, each category should be judged on its own merits and not necessarily used as a comparison with other equipment reviews in this, or other editions of Audio & Video Lifestyle magazine.

- ★ Shocker
- ★★ Average
- ★★★ Good
- ★★★★ Excellent
- ★★★★★ Perfection

**“The model for review this issue falls into the locally built category. By locally built I mean really local - the cabinetry is made here ...”**

- Performance**  
★★★★½
- Build Quality**  
★★★★½
- Compatibility**  
★★★★
- Value For Money**  
★★★★½