

audition

equipment review

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Subsonic XS1 MkII Subwoofer

If there is anything my time in audio retailing taught me, it was that competition in the \$1,000 subwoofer market is tough. It's just a price-point that fits within the budget for many people doing the complete home theatre fit out. Along with the cost of the electronics and the other speakers, a \$1,000 subwoofer is a nice fit with say, a \$5,000 system (TV excluded). It was for this reason that we here at *Audio & Video Lifestyle Magazine* conducted a sub-\$1,000 (sorry!) subwoofer shootout a while back. Our very own in-house low frequency expert Gavin Womersley assembled a good collection of

subwoofers from both local and overseas companies in order to battle it out.

And the winner? None other than the then just released Subsonic XS1 subwoofer from local loudspeaker design and manufacturing company Lochsonic Pty Ltd. Well constructed and able to go deep, the Subsonic handled music and movies with finesse.

Buoyed by favourable reviews both in these pages and elsewhere, the XS1 went on to sell well for Subsonic, along with the rest of the range of loudspeakers and subwoofers. But the competition of course has not remained still and time has come for an update of the XS1 design. Behold XS1 MkII.

In improving its original design, Subsonic listened to some popular subwoofers currently on the market. This experience led to the conclusion that its new subwoofer should have a driver with sufficient throw to deliver big bass, but just as importantly, a magnet large enough to control the woofer though its entire excursion. Having a long throw woofer is all good and well argues Subsonic, but only if you can get it to behave predictably at all times. To this end, the new XS1 MkII makes use of two magnets with a combined thickness of 31mm. This creates a magnetic field 20 per cent greater than the MkI.

There is also a new woofer, custom designed by Subsonic. It is described

Q. What do you do with an award-winning subwoofer?
A. Improve its performance

By Michael O'Connor

Vital Statistics

Dimensions:

515 x 430 x 420mm

Weight:

34kg

Price:

\$999

Distributor:

Lochsonic Pty Ltd

PO Box 52

Coniston, NSW 2500

Telephone:

(02) 4296 3366

Facsimile:

(02) 4296 3388

Website:

www.subsonic.com.au



most part and is rated at 250 watts. Running out of drive shouldn't be an issue.

Lifting the XS1 MkII out of its crate and into position in my home theatre room, it looked solidly made and well finished off. My example came in black, as yours will too if you opt for the standard finish. Subsonic advertise that upon special request, they'll finish your XS1 in most any colour you want to match the rest of your décor. Just why you'd want to make a design feature of your subwoofer though is beyond me. I don't know; call me old fashioned, but I like my beer cold, my women beautifully sexy and my subwoofers black.

I let the XS1 warm up for a week before turning the loudness dial in a clockwise direction. Initial impressions with 2-channel music were of a very well mannered and even cultured sound. The Berlin Philharmoniker playing Beethoven's *1st Symphony* on a Decca recording was well filled out with good drama and different shadings and colourings. The bass was warm and earthy and with a bit of adjustment of the volume and positioning in my room (I ended up pulling it out from the corner a little), the bass became well integrated into my small Naim/Legend system. The bass didn't seem overly fussy or as if it

as being a semi-long throw woofer that has good excursion, but only enough to get the job done properly. Subwoofers with very long throw drivers, but no means of controlling them says Subsonic, have a tendency to become loose and erratic when cranked up.

Cabinet construction has also been revised for the MkII. Few subwoofers under a grand will give you a cabinet of anything greater than 18mm of thickness. The XS1 now has sidewalls of 25mm, with the front baffle now a bank vault door like 32mm thick. The new baffle is 43 per cent thicker than was the case with the old Mk1. The purpose of creating such a ridged cabinet is to brace the woofer as it fires, improving bass definition and reducing distortion. Five of the six walls are now damped with quality acoustic grade foam. This has significantly reduced colouration compared to the performance of the Mk1. If any evidence was needed of the seriousness of the new cabinet, just trying to pick the subwoofer up

will tell most of the story. It weighs a lower back shredding 34Kg, so get help when trying to move the thing around.

I think probably the biggest improvement in subwoofer design in recent years has been the widespread availability for the first time of compact, decent sounding and inexpensive amplifiers. Even budget models are now likely to have something half way serviceable in the form of a budget IE type transformer. For their revision of the XS1 however, Subsonic decided to go one better and use a toroidal transformer in the amplifier. This really is the preserve of models costing well outside the \$1,000 mark. I pulled the amp module out and I can tell you it's a thing to behold. The toroidal transformer is rated at 420VA. To keep all that juice on the straight and narrow, there are a couple of fat caps lying along side. Between the two of them there is no less than 8000 μ f of storage. The amplifier runs in A/B mode for the

Technotalk

Product Type:

Active subwoofer

Driver Complement:

1 x 12-inch (31cm semi-long throw woofer)

Amplifier Power:

250 watts class A/B

Frequency Response:

22Hz-150Hz \pm 3dB

Crossover Frequency:

40-150Hz

Enclosure:

Bass reflex, dual front ported

Cabinet:

25mm MDF

32mm MDF front baffle

Finish:

Black, although other colours are available on request

Technotalk specifications and recommended retail prices are supplied by the manufacturer

was drawing attention to itself. Rather it was quite musical, exhibiting good control and neutrality.

Buoyed by this early success, I went on to a number of DVDs to test the XS1's movie credentials. With the fast paced action of *Spider-man II*, I found that the subwoofer was kicking me in the guts in all the right places. All of the drama and impact was there, as I would expect from a 12-inch (31cm) subwoofer. There were several characteristics I noticed, but most importantly I suppose was the fact that the sub was getting down nice and low. It appeared to me to be capable of producing real bottom notes which is pretty good going in and of itself really for any subwoofer under \$1,000.

With *Once We Were Kings*, the subwoofer continued to perform admirably. The definition and poise of the bass appeared smooth right throughout the frequency range; and this was the case even when I turned the volume up... right up. The sound of George Foreman's 747 landing at Kinshasa Airport to fight the fabled Rumble in the Jungle stopped me dead. It was deafening as most of the 250 watts squeezed itself out into my room. I tried to find the point at which the sub's thermal overload protection cut in, but to no avail. Although the door of my theatre room had near been blown off, I clearly wasn't riding close enough to the edge to warrant such intervention. Same story with the take off scene from *Apollo 13*. Turning the volume right up (probably beyond the point of what's advisable) didn't cause the sub to step out in any dramatic way. It was well in control of itself throughout.

Things such as the rumbling Harleys in *Kill Bill Vol. 1*, filled my room with petrol-fuelled mayhem as they panned across the screen. Rather than shrinking from this bass loaded soundtrack, the Subsonic kicked it up into another gear and seemed to relish the opportunity to demonstrate its abilities. It was real fun; and all this from a subwoofer it must be remembered, which would still be regarded as being in the budget range. It's an encouraging thing actually that such fine bass performance can be had at such a realistic, everyday price. For those of you who are really into your movies, you just don't want to skimp out on the subwoofer. It adds so much drama to what you are seeing.

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Get a sub with a driver too small for the room you are using it in, or one which is underpowered and that final element of impact will be missing. I've always felt that a good starting point for subwoofer performance is one with a 12-inch driver. Of course it only gets better from there.

I'm sure a significant factor to the XS1 MkII's control is the sheer heft of its cabinet. A 32mm thick baffle is big in most anyone's book. It anchors the driver into itself and holds it perfectly ridged as the drama unfolds. Either side of the woofer, facing out into the room are two reflex loaded ports.

In a marketplace choking with sub-\$1,000 subwoofers, I think probably the best way I can describe the effect of this new Subsonic is that it has the sound of a sub that costs far more than its \$999 retail asking price. **AVL**

Ancillary Equipment: Sony KLV-MR32 LCD TV, Naim Nait5 amplifier, Denon AVR 1803 AV receiver, Denon DV 800 DVD player, Legend Joey II SE loudspeakers

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

“It appeared to me to be capable of producing real bottom notes which is pretty good going in and of itself for any subwoofer under \$1,000.”

Performance

★★★★★

Build Quality

★★★★★

Compatibility

★★★★★

Value For Money

★★★★★