

audition

equipment review

Subsonic X Series Home Theatre Speaker System

One of the things that makes Subsonic's speaker a bit different from the rest is its Polymorphic range. We first looked a pair back in AVL-106, an impressive pair of floorstanders made system and room-friendly, thanks to three switches. The company's Polymorphic technology allows the user to tailor and fine tune performance with switchable impedance and different room size and acoustic settings. Well, as well as the PM series, Subsonic produces another range of speaker designs, it's more conventional

and affordable X Series, a few of which we have gathered here to put to the test.

The X Series is Subsonic's answer to the increasing number of affordable loudspeaker packages out there designed for both music and movies. Subsonic believes they represent the best quality and value for money loudspeakers available in Australia today - a bold claim, but natural enough when you're enthusiastic about your products, as Subsonic obviously is.

There's a few models in the range, and putting a suitable system together, Subsonic sent us a pair of XM3 floorstanders, XC2 centre and a pair of XR2 rear surrounds. There are three active X Series subwoofers, although one wasn't supplied for the purpose of this review. Starting at the front, the XM3s are the smallest and most affordable of three floorstanders in the range and were designed to have a tight and musical feel, according to the manufacturer. The XM3s incorporate two 130mm bass/mid drivers and they're the same units as used in the company's flagship PM1 model. Situated above these is a single a 25mm soft dome tweeter equipped with an aluminium voice coil.

Subsonic's literature makes several references to the construction quality of its X Series and there's been a lot of thought and effort in this regard. The XM2s cabinets are made from 18mm MDF and 360° interlock bracing is used that runs right around the inside of the cabinet. The front baffle is painted to a

**Five speakers;
one purpose.
To offer the
best quality
and value in
Australia**

By Nic Tatham

Vital Statistics

Dimensions:

795 x 195 x 295mm (XM3)

Weight:

16kg each (XM3)

Price:

\$1,897 (complete system)

Distributor:

Lochsonic Pty Ltd

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very high standard and the finish on the black or Mahogany veneers is also very impressive. The cabinet is a bass reflex design, with a rear-firing port and internally Subsonic has fitted the speakers with extensive acoustic damping. The XMs are biwireable and the gold-plated terminals are connected to a high quality crossover with substantial internal cabling. The

crossover also features decent quality components, such as air-cored inductors and polypropylene capacitors. All of these X Series speakers are fully magnetically shielded and share the same 130mm woofer and 25mm tweeter, to provide that all important tonal balance.

The XC2 is the smaller of two centre speakers but is still a substantial box. It's equipped with not only two woofers, but two HF units as well, to eliminate any higher frequency 'sweet-spot' from the centre channel. It too features high quality internal crossover and wiring and is also fully acoustically damped. Subsonic also points out that over 70 per cent of information in a home theatre comes from the centre channel, so it's important to get this one right. This led to the XC centre's multi point source design, using multiple tweeters to create a larger perceived 'sound window'. As Subsonic quite rightly states, 'you want the centre sound to be as big as your picture.' The X Series centres all use what it calls 'Complex Field Dispersion' (CFD), a technique designed to create horizontal and vertical sound dispersion, regardless of the listening position. This means you don't have to be sitting dead centre on the sofa in order to hear dialogue and other centrally placed effects clearly.

Bringing up the rear, the XR2 surrounds have also received their own fair share of design attention. Subsonic actually recommended listening to the rears with a subwoofer, as sat/sub combo to hear just how musical they can

sound. I duly hooked them up as such, before mounting them on the wall behind the sofa, and sure enough, they make a terrific pair of stereo satellites in their own right. The rears maintain the tonal balance with the rest of the system, using identical drivers as the centre and mains and they too have their fair share of quality componentry, including the crossover, internal wiring and cabinet construction. The XR2s are designed to be hung on the wall and there's a screw mounting bracket on the speakers' rear. The tweeter's located below the bass/mid driver and if you're going to wall mount them, it's a good idea to get them up fairly high.

For a new set of speakers straight out of the box, the collection didn't need a great deal of running in. Straight from the off the X Series settled nicely into their AV role. Bass sounded lean and well rounded, midrange open and expressive and there's no hint of any higher frequency harshness. Without one of its own subs, I tried the X Series with and without a Richter Thor subwoofer, mainly for use with Dolby Digital and DTS movie material. The XM3s are capable of a tight and very tuneful bass, but to get the extension needed for action movies' dynamic moments, a decent active sub is a necessary addition.

Connected to an Onkyo TX-DS797 receiver (reviewed p.19-21), the Subsonics sound superb. They present a relatively easy amplifier load, the front three have a nominal 6 ohm load, the rears are rated at 8. Sensitivity's not stated, but judging by the ease in which the 100-watt Onkyo drove the system, it's pretty high.

There's one word that best describes the sound of this X Series collection - cinematic. In a movie role, the five speakers combine to sound totally cohesive. The uniformity of the drivers and the smoothness of their response serves to create a lush, powerful presentation, in which movie sounds have a real sense of space in which to breathe. The XM2s and XC2 combine to provide excellent front-speaker drive.

Chucking on an oldie, but fantastic sounding DVD, the Dolby Digital rumblings of *Event Horizon* have the potential to upset woofers. The panning spacecraft shots above a stormy planet are full of weight and presence and on-screen movements from left to right and front to back are excellent too. You get a genuine sense of bulky, meaningful

Technotalk

Product Type:

Home theatre AV speaker system

Driver Types:

130mm bass/mid (all models)

25mm soft dome tweeter (all)

Frequency Response:

42Hz - 22kHz ± 2 dB (XM3)

47Hz - 22kHz ± 2 dB (XC2)

85Hz - 22kHz ± 2 dB (XR2)

Power Handling:

25 - 100 Watts RMS (XM3 & XC2)

15 - 65 Watts RMS (XR2)

Impedance:

See text

Sensitivity:

Not stated

Finishes:

Black & Mahogany (XM3), Black (XC2 & XR2). Additional finishes available on request

Magnetic Shielding:

All models

Technotalk specifications and recommended retail prices are supplied by the manufacturer

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presence as the camera first pans across the huge spacecraft. The X Series’ soundstage is deep and impressively solid, especially for loudspeakers of their price, and for a slim pair of floorstanders, there’s an impressive amount of bass weight generated by the XM3s.

With the active sub turned down to a low output, the XM3s generate decent low-level response, especially when used with straight music.

In a real cinema you tend to hear a wall of sound from the front because the front speakers are identical and emerge from behind a uniform cinema screen. The same sort of effect is true to some degree with the Subsonics, because of the driver uniformity and the dispersion of the XC centre, the middle ground is so well covered, the mains and centre present a particularly united sonic front.

As for the rears, the XR2s contribute well from the back. I actually mounted them on the sidewalls, behind the listening position and as a result they filled in the ‘side’ gaps in the soundfield well to give greater credibility to front-to-back effects pans.

Revisiting the excellent DVD of *Ronin* always makes for a fantastic AV speaker system test. The accents and dialogue-heavy script provide the centre speaker with a challenge and to give all (including the sub) a good going over, you can’t beat the BMW v. Peugeot car chase through the streets of Paris. As the two cars battle it out, there’s a ton of surround information coming from all directions, and it hits hard. The X Series proved adept at picking up and maintain the frantic pace, delivering the transient effects with lightening speed and agility.

When the lights come up again and you fancy a bit of music, the XM3s are happy to oblige. They sound precise, separating layers of music into crisp component strands. Jazz, pop, classical, it all sounds big and spacious with plenty of energy and slam.



With the best car chase since *The Italian Job*, *Ronin* gives all AV speakers a run for their money.

Overall, this Subsonic set-up is a fabulous proposition for the home theatre buyer who wants an affordable system with an eye on hi-fi performance too. Whether they’re the best quality and value loudspeakers in Australia, I’ll leave Subsonic to lay claim to that one. AVL

Opinion

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

“For a new set of speakers, the collection didn’t need a great deal of running in. Straight from the off the SuBsonics settled nicely into their AV role.”

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