



SVS

MTS home theater speaker system

SVS is a small but growing direct-to-Web speaker manufacturer in the unlikely location of Youngstown, Ohio. (I say “unlikely” because I’m an Eastern Snob, and we expect speaker makers to take root in places like Boston or Baltimore.) The company first earned its colors with highly affordable subwoofers that outperformed most anything in their class. But SVS has been energetically poking up into the remaining eight octaves of sound for several years now with high-value bookshelf-speaker designs.

SVS is accelerating this trend with its newest (and highest-priced) lineup to date, which consists of the MTS-01 towers, MCS-01 center, and MBS-01 surrounds. While the MBS-01s are two-way designs, the tower and center models are both “two-and-a-half ways,” in which one woofer rolls off above the bottom few octaves while the other woofer’s range extends all the way up to the tweeter.

Speaking of tweeters, SVS makes a pretty big deal about the one that’s used in all three models. It’s a new soft-dome unit from Denmark’s Scanspeak, and its leading-edge features include the use of an array of six small magnets in place of the single large one found in most tweeters.

This opens up the air movement, which is said to reduce unwanted reflections.

The MTS line’s cabinet design is strictly conventional. This is the kind of construction that was standard 30 or 40 years ago, with solid, well-braced enclosures made from heavy wood-composite panels. Though biggish and boxy, these speakers are nonetheless handsome, nicely finished in real wood veneers and constructed with obvious care. The speakers also have some contemporary touches, like a cunning grille arrangement held in place by invisible magnets.

SVS rounded out the system by sending its flagship subwoofer, the PB-13 Ultra — and I still haven’t forgiven them. Uncrating and moving this 150-pound behemoth — literally the size of a small four-burner range — was no light undertaking. But the results were worth the effort.

SETUP

I unpacked the boxes, muscled the speakers into place, and connected them. All three MTS models feature dual-linked multiway terminals and come with both soft- and hard-cone feet.

Each speaker has a tweeter-level switch with 0 and –3-dB settings, which I left at –3 for a subtle but noticeable reduction in

treble energy. Each one also comes with a cylindrical soft-foam “bung” for plugging each cabinet port so you can convert the speaker design from bass-reflex (vented) to more-or-less sealed. Since the MTS-01 and the MCS-01 both have dual ports, you can re-tune them by leaving one port plugged and one open.

I spent quite a bit of time experimenting with the various bunging combinations, and found that each one yielded a meaningful difference. (SVS obligingly graphs several examples in the owner’s manuals.) To cut a long story short: My room has a modest but well-established 50-Hz rise, so when the tower speakers were running full-range, they sounded tighter and more transparent when fully bunged. Meanwhile, the center speaker best matched its mates when single-bunged. Bunging really didn’t matter with the MBS-01 surrounds since the signal to those speakers was crossed over to limit bass reproduction.

MUSIC & MOVIE PERFORMANCE

I keep two different two-way speaker pairs on hand as sonic reference points. One pair sounds bright, while the other is subtly warmer. Auditioned full-range in stereo, the SVS MTS-01 towers split the difference between those two sounds with wonderful precision, being almost perfectly neutral on the warm-to-cool

The Short Form

Snapshot

These speakers might be big and slightly old-school-looking, but given their powerful, superbly neutral full-range sound, who cares?

Plus

- ⋮ Neutral, near-full-range towers
- ⋮ Awesome subwoofer
- ⋮ Solid center-speaker performance

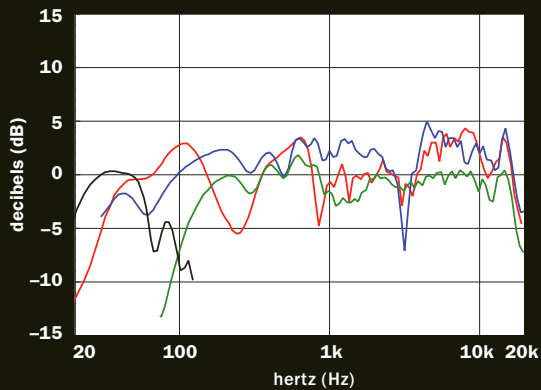
Minus

- ⋮ Big (especially the sub!)
- ⋮ A bit old-fashioned-looking

Price \$4,400

Test Bench

Full lab results at soundandvisionmag.com/SVSMTS



L/R 34 Hz to 17.1 kHz ± 5.1 dB Surround 129 Hz to 16.7 kHz ± 2.4 dB
Center 33 Hz to 18.2 kHz ± 6.1 dB Subwoofer 21 Hz to 59 Hz ± 1.8 dB

All measurements were taken with the tweeter-level switch in the 0-dB position. The MTS-01 has a 5-dB floor-bounce swallow centered at 244 Hz with fairly significant roughness above that point and a 3- to 5-

dB elevation between 5 and 9 kHz. The MCS-01 displayed a deep, narrow notch just above 3 kHz at every listening angle. But this notch doesn't become severe until $\pm 45^\circ$ off-axis — beyond the range of a typical seating position for viewing movies. The MSB-01 surround channel has a wide radiation pattern and the smoothest response of this set. Each speaker's treble-control switch reduced high frequencies above around 3 kHz by approximately 2 dB. The PB13-Ultra is a true subwoofer in that it will produce significant sound pressure below 25 Hz. It also has fantastic bandwidth uniformity, producing a 103-dB average SPL over 10 to 62 Hz.

— Tom Nounsaine

scale and virtually without character in the ever-sensitive vocal regions. (Lack of character is a *good* thing for a speaker; not so much for a speaker reviewer.)

When combined with the MTS-01's superb bass, which sounded pretty much unfettered to nearly 30 Hz, this made for an outstanding listening experience. Great recordings, such as guitarist Ralph Towner's classic *Solstice*, were reproduced with an evenness of timbre and an image depth rarely found in so affordable a speaker. SVS's spiffy tweeter really did shine on the 12-string-guitar-and-drums duet "Piscian Dance," where drummer Jon Christensen's stuttering snare and hi-hat and floating ride cymbals shone with a notably unstressed, no-limit airiness.

While SVS had suggested that I cross the towers over at 80 Hz to let the massive subwoofer do its thing, I found that running them full-range and crossing over the system's center and surrounds at 60 Hz delivered the best, most cohesive sound, particularly on multichannel music. And pretty glorious sound it was, too, on a Telarc SACD of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra playing Stravinsky's *Firebird Suite*. The system's presentation of massed strings and hall sound was simply first-rate, while brass attacks and inner details like sidewall echoes from

the glockenspiel sounded consistently clear and lifelike. Under it all, the PB13-Ultra sub contributed seemingly limitless, but controlled and unexaggerated, bottom end. I've never heard the Cincinnati's big bass drum sound bigger, nor have I heard its climaxes in unison with the tympani during the "Infernal Dance" scene delivered with deeper impact.

Hidalgo isn't a very good movie, but it does offer well-photographed vistas on Blu-ray Disc, a sweeping James Newton Howard musical score, and plenty of action — once you get past the notion of Aragorn as a cowboy. The SVS system delivered wholly cinematic soundscapes, with solid spatiality and effortless dynamics; indeed, this system sounds better the louder it plays. Dialogue was uniformly clear and stable (though maybe not as tightly locked to the screen as it would be with the very best speaker systems), while the L/C/R trio maintained a solid front during the film's countless pans of galloping hooves.

The MBS-01s — located in my usual surround speaker position on high shelves flanking my listening position and angled in somewhat toward the rear wall — performed surprisingly well. I never once felt my attention pulled away from the screen, though my everyday dipoles clearly

sounded bigger and more amorphous, which I feel is a virtue with most movie soundtracks.

The PB13-Ultra was quite possibly the best subwoofer I've ever had in my system. It went lower and louder than any single-piece sub I've tried here, and it did so without producing a hint of excessive sound on the middle-bass octaves from 60 Hz on up. Even without exploiting any of its EQ features, the PB13-Ultra easily awoke rattles in my room that only one other sub (the JL Audio f112) has found. And scenes such as the sliding tomb door in the opening moments of the *Stargate* DVD caused it to deliver truly structural rumbles at cinematic levels.

As with the MTS speakers, the PB13-Ultra has foam bungs for its three cabinet ports. And it produces enough bass that I found employing all three bungs to be an ideal option in my room. Doing so barely tightened the already well-controlled sound, and even with its peak 3-Hz level thus curtailed (a sealed enclosure returns deeper extension but slightly less peak loudness higher up the frequency range), the SVS sub still could play substantially louder than I could ever demand.

BOTTOM LINE

SVS's MTS system, complemented by the PB13-Ultra sub, is as impressive a music system as it is a home theater one. Any value-conscious audio seekers who care more for performance than pedigree, and for great sound more than mere style, should look and listen no further. **S&V**

Key Features

MTS-01 (\$1,499 a pair)

:: 1-in soft-dome tweeter, two 6½-in cone woofers; 41 x 13 x 10 in; 60 lb

MCS-01 (\$599)

:: 1-in soft-dome tweeter, two 6½-in cone woofers; 10 x 24 x 13 in; 39 lb

MBS-01 (\$999 a pair)

:: 1-inch soft-dome tweeter, 6½-in cone woofer; 16 x 13 x 10 in; 27 lb

PB13-Ultra (\$1,599)

:: 13-in proprietary cone woofer; 750-watt amplifier; 22 x 20½ x 28 in; 155 lb

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