

REVIEW – MALAYSIAN ‘STAR’ JANUARY 2010

Tired of the slam-bang, fast-food approach to home theatre? Perhaps we could interest you in the alternative menu?

EPOS ACOUSTICS AVS 5.1

WHAT IT IS: A 5.1 AV speaker package

LUST FACTOR: Speakers for the ‘audiophile’ AV enthusiast. Impressive all-round presentation. Tight and snappy bass.

REALITY CHECK: Extension is limited by sub’s size.

SPEAKER packages for home theatre use have proliferated the market for more than a decade. There are as many gems as there are duds – sometimes, cost-cutting can have nasty side effects not obvious at the beginning.



My first question to anyone asking me to recommend the “cheapest” speaker system is this: do you still want to be enjoying your home theatre experience a year down the road?

If you do, well, here’s something that should keep you entertained for a long time: the AVS 5.1 from Epos Acoustics, the British speaker manufacturer that has done little wrong in the past couple of decades.

The AVS 5.1 comprises four satellites, a centre-channel unit and an active subwoofer, all magnetically shielded and finished in piano-gloss black, painted over solid MDF cabinets.

The satellite units sport the DNA of two new drivers from the company: a 25mm aluminium-magnesium alloy dome tweeter and a long-throw 115mm paper cone mid-bass driver. They are front-ported, bass reflex designs, hence, close-to-the-wall placement is not an issue.

These units can either be affixed to optional metal stands or mounted on the wall.

The centre-channel unit sports similar drivers, with an additional mid-bass transducer. Again, the design is bass reflex, with forward-firing ports.

The active subwoofer has a 200mm paper cone woofer and is powered by a 100-watt analogue amp. You can adjust volume, frequency and phase at the rear of the cube-shaped cabinet. The woofer here fires forward and is covered with a cloth grille – there is also a port underneath the cabinet, and the provided 50mm feet allow it to breathe. Features on the sub include low-level (un-filtered) LFE, line level stereo in/out, high level in/out, volume, variable low-pass filter (40-160Hz) and continuously variable phase control.

A remote unit is provided for volume and power on/off.

The satellites are each rated at 100 watts, four-ohms and 86dB, and go down to 70Hz. The centre and sub units are both rated at 84dB. The centre speaker's lower range is 65Hz, while the sub takes it further down to 38Hz.

The finish and presentation are impeccable, although the gloss is a headache to keep in pristine cosmetic condition. Still, the AVS 5.1 will score high with the other half, as it stays out of the way.

Hi-fi cred.....

The front satellites were mounted on dedicated stands, flanking my Panasonic plasma TV, with the centre unit going on a shelf of the rack. The system was, at different times, driven by Yamaha and Pioneer AV amps, with a Pioneer DVD player, HD storage media and Astro as sources.

The very first week I had the AVS 5.1, I had friends over who had listened to my previous speaker system – as I played a CD in the direct mode of the amp, they smiled and said, "Well, these are 'hi-fi' speakers!"

This impression remained throughout – the AVS placed focus on clarity of detail, tonal balance and musicality. Fed audiophile test discs, the main satellites stood proud, despite their lack of bass extension. They were honest and faithfully reproduced vocal and instrumental nuances usually heard in costlier speakers.

But how did the AVS 5.1 deliver in home theatre mode, with high-resolution movie tracks?

Impressively I would say, when certain conditions were met.

One, your room shouldn't be too big; two, the amp and source have to be of good quality. Working in such an environment, the AVS 5.1 had great rhythmic impact with the volume raised, and yet, delivered detail at lower levels. The system sounded tight and in control, even during transient peaks and soaring crescendos.

The bass from the subwoofer was tight and punchy, although not as extended as I would have liked; then again, a bigger drive unit might have messed up the balance.

Dialogue was pristine, and yet, there was a tinge of warmth in musical tracks that reflected the company's hi-fi credentials.

Those who want a more subliminal approach than offered by cheaper, all-fizz-little-substance systems will appreciate the subtler sonic nuances of the AVS 5.1, which won't get in your face or sound messy when pushed, and yet, with the right content, will sound magnificently expansive and expressive.

A seductive take

There's bang for buck and then, there's sheer class. If you're prepared to elevate your home theatre experience and take it beyond mere visceral thrills, the Epos AVS 5.1 should be on your shopping list.

Those as fussy about musical quality as they are about sonic impact will appreciate this – the AVS 5.1 may not move the seat beneath your butt, but will certainly immerse you in a seductive embrace.

These are getting permanent residence in my home!