

Product Review: Whatmough PAV-2 Home Theatre Speaker System



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Product Type: Home Theatre Speaker System

Price: \$11,496

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No-one could fail to be impressed by the P33s that are used as front left and right speakers in the PAV-2 system. Partly because they're finished in a superb Bubinga real wood veneer (a metallic duco is also available), but mostly because they stand 1.2 metres tall on a 260×430mm footprint and are shaped like pieces of modern sculpture.

The P-8 centre is equally impressively large, at 665mm wide, 290mm high and 360mm deep — and remember it's a centre channel! Even the surround speakers are relatively large. The P12s stand 460mm high, 215mm wide and 325mm deep. But it's the subwoofer that will require the staunchest heart. Whatmough's Impact subwoofer has dimensions of 410×425×610mm (hwd). However, because all the bass comes from a single fairly small slotted port, you can hide this sub away almost anywhere. So long as the port is free to 'fire' into the room you'll hear all the bass the Impact can deliver... and that's a lot!

Equipment

The P33 is a three-way design (available separately for \$4999 per pair) that uses a pair of 180mm dual-layer fibreglass/Nomex cones to deliver the bass. These operate in tandem, to increase piston area, before crossing to a single 125mm midrange driver.

Handling the high frequencies is a 35mm dual-concentric tweeter with a waveguide centre plug. This type of tweeter is a new design, sometimes known as a 'ring radiator' to distinguish it from the ordinary 'dome' tweeter design. Ring-radiator tweeters have far smoother frequency responses than ordinary dome tweeters, and extend high-frequency response over 30kHz. This would not be so unusual except that ring-radiator tweeters can also handle far more power than conventional domes, so high frequencies don't get attenuated after prolonged playing. Unlike the similar-looking tweeters on some other speakers, the P33 uses a genuine Vifa XT25 — though modified to Whatmough's own spec.

Colin Whatmough specifically recommends using his P12s as rear channels with the P33s, so these are the speakers we used for this review. But he says that if wall-mounted surrounds are essential, his PFX3 speakers are not only a good compromise but also less costly at just \$899 the pair, rather than the \$1499 per pair commanded by the P12s.

The P12s use the famous 'D'Appolito' speaker array, with an XT25 mounted centrally between two bass/midrange drivers. These two drivers are also made for Whatmough by Vifa. They're 148mm in diameter and have plastic cones and ABS baskets. The large drive magnet is fully magnetically shielded,

and vented to eliminate air compression effects. As with all Australian-made Whatmough designs, the internal wires (which are solid five nines copper) are silver-soldered to the driver terminals as well as to the crossover network, rather than spade/lug connected, which can deteriorate over time. The network is all hard-wired using audiophile-grade components.

The P8 centre-channel is unusual in that the midrange and high-frequency drivers are arrayed vertically, like a conventional two-way, so you get a typical dispersion pattern rather than having to suffer the interference effects you get when a midrange and tweeter are side-by-side. The four drivers used in the P8 are exactly the same as those used in the P33. And when we say 'exactly' we mean it: they're not magnetically shielded, so the P8 should not be used anywhere near a TV with an ordinary cathode ray picture tube. (LCD and Plasma screens are fine.)

The subwoofer in this PAV-2 system is the famous Impact (also available separately for \$2999), now with linear 200W watt amplifier.

Performance

Whatmough's PAV-2 home theatre system is one of the very few we'd happily recommend as true state-of-the-art two-channel ready. Those P33s at the front are that good. What's more, the performance of the Impact is such that it's one of the few subs you can use to augment the low frequencies when playing back stereo rather than reserving it for home theatre playback; it remains one of our favourite subwoofers. We've also experienced the P12s before — their performance is so superior that using them as surround speakers is probably overkill unless you regularly listen to multichannel DVD-A or SACD discs. (Though they'll certainly get the best from new Dolby TrueHD soundtracks via Blu-ray discs.)

Overkill or not, Whatmough's PAV-2 system sounded wonderful! It's at its most impressive when playing back musicals and live concert footage, because the clean sound and incredible dynamics are immediately apparent. Use such a disc and you'll be left in no doubt that you're in the presence of greatness.

Conclusion

Just as this system's sound and size are impressive, so too is the price. But we can assure you that you're getting real value for money, and the ability to buy individual speakers means you don't necessarily have to buy everything at once.

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Warranty Five years