

B&W CM1

By Ty Pendlebury on 14/05/2008

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THE GOOD:

- + Light, airy sound
- + Able to play a wide range of music
- + Discrete size
- + Distinct leap from B&W's 6 series
- + Funky magnetic covers

THE BAD:

- Not especially neutral
- Limited bass output

THE BOTTOMLINE: More "hi-fi" than "neutral", the B&W CM1s pack a lot of punch into such a tiny enclosure — great for smaller listening rooms.

EDITORS' RATING:  8/10

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Design and Features

The CM1 was purportedly developed in conjunction with the company's flagship 805s stand mount which goes for the princely sum of AU\$5,000. The speaker shares that model's driver and crossover technology, although the kevlar mid/bass driver is a little smaller at 130mm. The dimensions of the box belie its big sound, coming in at a diminutive 280mm high by 165mm wide and 276mm depth. This also means it will fit in spaces where floor-standers like the 684s never could.

Of course, to get the full benefit you'll need to sit them on decent stands such as the mass-loadable Omnimount Cosmic 24s that the distributor supplied them with. Mass-loading means filling the stands with a material such as sand to stop them from ringing sympathetically and colouring the sound.

Some of B&W's more budget-oriented speakers have been notoriously difficult for amplifiers to drive. However, this shouldn't be a problem for the CM1s as the minimum impedance is only five ohms, but check your amp's minimum impedance rating first anyway.

Style-wise the CM1s are certainly striking, with the tweeter and its surrounds taking up half of the speakers façade. While black is not a colour option, the real wood veneers of Wenge, Rosenut and Maple lend a certain sophistication to the set.

Performance

We experimented with the speakers to find the best placement, and found that at least a metre from walls with a slight toe-in towards the listening position gives the best results. If you have a small listening area, or want to put it on a wall-mount, then B&W does supply foam bungs to reduce boom arising from wall proximity.

We found the CM1s to be quite engaging speakers with an open-yet-tight mid-range and a surprising amount of bass for the size. In general, we found them to be mellower than the 600 series as the treble was a lot more focused and less attacking.

We gave them a variety of hi-fi tasks to complete and whether it was Apple Lossless or DVD-A, the CM1 set was able to handle high-resolution audio particularly well.

We've been looking forward to the SACD reissue of the first Pixies album, *Surfer Rosa*, for a long time and so tossed it at the B&W's to see how they'd cope. The album — engineered by staunch analog audiophile Steve Albini (Nirvana, Urge Overkill) — comes out well on the CM1s, even if the left-of-centre vocals (both literally and figuratively) do make for a confused stereo image. Best of all, though, was the opening guitar jangle of "Something Against You" which had a "right there with you" sound.

We also found that the spacious character of the speaker was well-suited to walls found in sound productions, such as the *Yoshimi Battles the Pink Robots* DVD-Audio, giving them the amount of room they need.

While B&W makes a centre speaker (CM Centre) and floor-standers (CM7) for the range there are no plans to bring them into the country, and so the local distributor is pitching these models as stereo speakers.

Home theatre dialogue was good and very intelligible — and was even able to pick up some dialogue from the *King Kong* DVD we'd missed previously. Of course, due to their size thumps, bumps and explosions weren't as bowel-trembling as a subwoofer is capable of being.

Conclusion

If you want neutrality, the CM1s won't give it to you. They're too small to create any earth-moving frequencies, and so if a smooth frequency response is what you're after then it pays to think big — [JBL's Studio L890](#), for example. But if you're looking at something that's a touch more "hi-fi" than [B&W's 6 series](#) then they're well worth an audition.