

CINEPACKING A PUNCH

JBL puts together a speaker package requiring you to keep a firm hold on your hosiery...

JBL ES1000 Cinepack home theatre speaker system



In the ES1000 Cinepack, JBL has put together a fine system that seems designed primarily for home theatre performance. As usual, the company has gone its own way in the design stakes, but we might as well give the game away right now and say — heck, this is a great set of home theatre loudspeakers.

EQUIPMENT

The system comprises six units. The front stereo pair of speakers are the ES100 floorstanders. Between them is an ES25C centre channel unit. Surround is delivered by a pair of relatively compact ES20 speakers. LFE is powered by an ES250P subwoofer.

This system is the second in this issue of *Sound+Image* to come loaded with drivers. Between the five main speakers and the sub there are 21 of them! Ten are there to handle high frequencies, since each of the five main speakers has a pair of gently horn-loaded tweeters. The two are different: what JBL calls the 'Ultrahigh-Frequency Transducer' is a 19mm polyester-film ring-radiator,

which handles frequencies above 12kHz. This actually does have a ring cone around what looks like a prominent phase plug. Below this is a more conventional 19mm titanium dome tweeter.

Starting at the back, the 318mm-tall ES20 speakers each have a 130mm bass/midrange driver to support the high frequency assembly. JBL rates the sensitivity of these speakers at 86dB/W/m, their continuous power handling at 60W, their impedance at eight ohms, and their frequency response at 60Hz to 40,000Hz (-6dB).

The centre channel scores two of those 130mm bass/midrange drivers and a significant increase in sensitivity to 90dB/W/m, with power handling to 75W, although the impedance remains the same at eight ohms, and the bass-end extension falls off to 80Hz. It seems that JBL traded off a bit of bass for increased efficiency for this unit.

Meanwhile at the front stand the two large floorstanders. The ES100 speakers are 1149mm tall, 305mm wide and 422mm deep, and they weigh 29kg each. These can

certainly dominate a room. Each carries a 100mm midrange driver underneath the high frequency assembly and, remarkably, two 250mm bass drivers. JBL rates the sensitivity of the ES100 speakers at 91dB/W/m, their continuous power handling at 125W, their impedance at eight ohms, and their frequency response at 32 to 40,000Hz (-6dB).

The ES250P subwoofer packs a 300mm driver with 400W continuous power to deliver claimed frequency response of 25-150Hz.

PERFORMANCE

Say what you like about subtleties, revelations of deep interior content in music and the like, there's a lot to be said for sheer power.

Not that this package is completely devoid of those 'higher' virtues. But the ES1000 Cinepack seems to have been designed to dominate, both visually and aurally. Obviously, in this section, I am dealing with the latter.

The first thing I noticed when allowing my home theatre receiver to do its automatic set-up was the nice tight sound of the subwoofer. ▶

No nasty and unwanted overtones here. Once this set-up process had been completed (the system set the crossover between the centre channel speaker and the subwoofer at 160Hz), I started playing some randomly-chosen material.

Here one thing became immediately obvious: this speaker system is rather more efficient than most. It's remarkable how a two or three decibel increase in sensitivity makes so obvious a difference in loudness for any particular setting of the volume control knob. But it seems to be the way.

Later I conducted my own in-room loudspeaker sensitivity test on the ES100 floorstanders. Using a pink noise signal, bandwidth limited to the two octaves from 500 to 2000Hz and average 2.83V in level, my SPL meter showed between 90 and 91dB at one metre — very impressive, between two and three decibels higher than the average of speakers I measure. To put that another way, with these you only need about half the power available to achieve the same volume level as the average high fidelity loudspeaker.

But these speakers have got plenty of power handling capacity as well. JBL says 125W continuous. This became obvious in context when I tried a DVD Audio/CD two-disc set of *Love*, the Beatles reworking (done for the Cirque du Soleil show) under the control of George Martin and son, and with approval of the surviving Beatles, so it's OK! I put the former into my DVD Audio player and pressed 'play', forgetting that I had the system's volume control well advanced due to some tests I had been conducting.

That's the kind of thing I do all the time, so I'm regularly diving for volume controls and remote controls. And I started to with this one, but then I hesitated and let it go. The speakers were taking it fine and producing the clean, unaccompanied (aside from twittering surround-sound birds) harmonies of the Liverpool lads as they sang *Because*. Then Track 2 started, *Get Back*, opening with a strong chord taken from *A Hard Day's Night* followed by a brief drum solo from somewhere on *Abbey Road*. This was rather more aggressive, but still the speakers lapped it up. I advanced the volume by a few more decibels. It was only when I found some more frenetic tracks that things started to get a touch hairy, but that was with my SPL meter showing an average of nearly 100dB.

Turning to the famous street gun-battle scene from *Heat*, it became obvious that for movie viewing, this speaker system was definitely a cut above the average. The imaging was nicely handled in all directions. The rattling echoes down the long streets

"The first thing I noticed when allowing my home theatre receiver to do its automatic set-up was the nice tight sound of the subwoofer. No nasty and unwanted overtones here..."

immersed you in the event. The punch and thud and crackle of the system were brilliant.

So I flicked over towards the airport scene near the end of the movie, a superb scene for testing out the subwoofer and sustained high volumes as Pacino chases De Niro close to the airplanes and various other machines. Here the system maintained its performance, yielding the screaming of the jet engines at levels that were nothing like reality.

Didn't expect me to say that, did you? Let's face it, there is probably no off-the-shelf home theatre speaker system that can deliver the 150-ish decibels with which you would be confronted in the real situation. What this loudspeaker system did do was shake me, and my room, as thoroughly as any system ever has during this scene. And that's all that you can ask for.

What about those subtler aspects of performance? The sound balance was very good, with just a slight edge in the upper register to let you know that the music had bite. So it wasn't as wonderfully sweet as some of the more refined systems, but still plenty accurate enough even for small-ensemble classical music.

The stereo imaging was perhaps not quite as razor sharp, nor did there seem to be quite as much depth in the image, as with my regular (much more expensive) loudspeakers. Still, I found the overall performance solid here. There are alternatives if your primary love is refined music, and cinema performance merely an afterthought. But for a balance between the two functions, this system does the trick nicely.

My in-room measurements showed the system delivering a very extended frequency range, down to 32Hz at the -6dB point for the ES100 floorstanding loudspeakers. They had a surprisingly gentle roll-off, so that even at 20Hz they were down by only 12dB from

the average. There was an odd anomaly at 14,600Hz, where there was a spike down in output, before the level jumped back up to about three decibels above the average. Odd. But if this affected the sound adversely, it was beyond my ability to detect it. I thought that perhaps it had something to do with the crossover between the two tweeters, but this is supposedly at 12,000Hz.

Meanwhile, the subwoofer delivered a superbly flat output level from 27.5Hz to 100Hz, and within my ± 6 dB envelope delivered from 23Hz to 152Hz.

CONCLUSION

So if your speaker budget is around this mark, and your prime need is for home theatre performance with decent sounding music between times, check out the ES1000 Cinepack from JBL. You may be quite shaken. *Stephen Dawson* +

VERDICT

JBL ES1000 Cinepack home theatre speaker system

Price: \$3699



- Powerful performance
- Plenty of bass
- High volumes for relatively low power demands



- Visually dominating
- A good balance, but better, perhaps, on home theatre than stereo music

WARRANTY: Five years (Two years on subwoofer)

CONTACT: Convoy International

TEL: 02 9700 0111

WEB: www.e-hifi.com.au

