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SVS Prime 5.1 Speaker System Review

All set for some primetime entertainment?

by [Ed Selley](#) Saturday at 1:06 PM

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HOME AV review



SRP: £850.00

Introduction- What is the Prime system?

Some manufacturers are so indelibly associated with making a certain style of product that the idea of them doing something radically different is hard to envisage. We don't look to Cadillac to make the next supermini, Gieves and Hawkes for beachwear or Burger King for a Michelin star. This isn't to say that if pressed, the company couldn't do such a thing but they've found their niche and doing something radically different wouldn't make a huge amount of sense.

This tends to work best in industries that aren't in the middle of a massive state of flux. Sticking rigidly to a product type in AV in 2015 is not a perfect recipe for success as conventional categories shrink and new ones take their place. This is why we've seen high end manufacturers making compact lifestyle products, speaker manufacturers making electronics and absolutely everybody making soundbars.

Amongst these changes, SVS had looked fairly unusual as a company that was sticking to its guns. This meant that the company continued to make hefty bass augmentation a priority and in fairness when you are as good at it as SVS is, there would be little reason to change. More recently, the company has added passive speakers to its range but these were all suitably hefty and in keeping with the brand perception. What you see here is a bit of a departure however. The Prime speakers are the new entry range of passive models from SVS and includes the truly tiny Prime Satellite speaker. Put five of these and the fairly compact SB1000 in one place and you have a most unSVS like compact system- does it work though?

Design



The SVS is based around five identical speakers. This is the smallest member of the Prime range, the logically named Satellite. Small is genuinely applicable here as well as the Satellite stands a mere 22cm tall and 8 wide. Impressively, SVS has managed to find the space to cram a 4.5 inch Polypropylene mid bass driver and a 1 inch aluminium tweeter into the cabinet. This means that although it is a fairly compact piece of equipment, the Prime is fitted out like many conventional bookshelf based systems and despite being a fair bit smaller than the Q Acoustics 3010 that passed through for review at a similar time, it only boasts a claimed frequency response that is 1Hz less than the rather bigger 3010.

The drivers are arranged in a conventional tweeter up, midbass down method and their response is augmented by a rear firing port. This has a fairly small 1 inch bore and in practise seems to be fairly silent even with the speakers working hard. Whether this interferes with the integral wallmount bracket that SVS fits on the back of each speaker is hard to say as getting these speakers up on the wall is outside the scope of the review but it might be that the Prime is a little happier free placed rather than right up against a vertical surface.

The more eagle eyed among you will have noticed that the Prime system as tested here does without a dedicated centre speaker. There is one in the Prime range but for simplicity, size and pricing reasons, the centre channel is handled by an identical speaker to the left and right channels. In practise, the Prime seems unfussed being placed on one side to fit into centre speaker sized alcoves and is under no greater strain being used as a centre than most satellite type rivals. .



Underpinning the Primes is the smallest SVS sub of the lot. The SB1000 is, as the completely logical naming process suggests, a sealed design with a single twelve inch forward firing driver. This is motivated by a 300 watt 'sledge' amplifier which should ensure that there is sufficient oomph for most requirements. The SB1000 is a genuinely compact design judged as a subwoofer, let alone as an SVS sub and there aren't many 12 inch designs I know of that are as small, let alone smaller than this.

Around the back, the SB1000 does without some of the DSP wizardry of the more expensive models but still gives you high level, line level and dedicated LFE connections. Unlike an increasing subset of the competition, there is no remote control but all the other controls- including a fully adjustable phase control which gives much greater flexibility than a simple 0-180 switch- are usefully comprehensive and should ensure that the SB1000 is easy enough to get going.

What's good about the Prime 5.1?



The Prime system shows off many of the positive attributes of SVS products albeit in miniature. Everything is splendidly logical in terms of design and layout and both the speakers and the sub feel extremely well assembled. The review sample was supplied in the optional high gloss finish (more of which in bit) and like other pieces I have seen from SVS so finished, the quality of the work is of a very high standard with no bumps, lumps or imperfections.

This is also a handsome looking set of speakers. SVS has taken the decision that the Prime- even at the small dimensions it has here- is never going to disappear into a room completely so little touches like the chamfered leading edge of the Satellite and

the curved corners of the SB1000 make it more than a collection of various sized boxes. Neither is this feeling of quality limited to the cosmetics. The drivers all feel extremely hefty and other fittings like speaker terminals are good quality items. Finally, it is a system that is unfussy about placement. While my reservations about backing them straight onto a wall stand, I have found that the Primes are happy on stands, on shelves and other furniture. The SB1000 is also easy enough to site thanks to the small footprint and the flexible phase adjustment. Unlike a few of the company's offerings I've tried over the years, this isn't a system that should trouble a UK lounge.

What's not so good about the Prime 5.1?

The downsides of the SVS as a system are commendably limited. The claimed sensitivity is low at 85dB/w but this doesn't seem to translate into an especially challenging speaker in practise. With regards to the rather smart gloss finish of the review samples, this adds £150 to the list price and given that the standard black ash is likely to be well finished but rather austere, it needs to be factored into the asking price of the Primes if they are going to be in a lounge or otherwise on display. I don't begrudge the price premium- it is proportionally less than the one Q Acoustics charges on the 3000 Series for example- but given that images of the Primes can show the gloss as the default finish, you need to take into account that it isn't standard.



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How was the Prime tested?

The SVS went through straight after the Q Acoustics 3000 Series and was tested with a Yamaha RX-A3040, Cambridge Audio

752BD, Sky HD and a Panasonic GT60 Plasma allowing for Netflix, iPlayer et al all in turn connected to an IsoTek Evo 3 Aquarius mains conditioner. Each Prime was placed on a Soundstyle Z60 speaker stand and the SB1000 was tested at the front and the back of the room. Material used included Blu Ray, broadcast and on demand TV material and lossless and high res FLAC as well as on demand services such as Spotify and Tidal.

What does the Prime sound like with Film and TV?



The SVS looked extremely new on arrival so it was left to run in for a few days on a veteran Yamaha RX-V3900 while the Q Acoustics went through the testing process. This did mean that the Prime had some big shoes to fill when it did take up residence in my listening room and the good news is that it holds its own. In presentation terms, the Prime is a different sort of speaker to the Q Acoustics. Where the 3000 Series is immensely refined and rather relaxed, the SVS is a detailed, fast and enthusiastic performer.

This means that re-watching *Kingsman- The Secret Service* on the SVS is a more visceral and ballistic experience. There is more high frequency energy and a slightly (and only slightly) more forward edge to the way that the SVS handles information. SVS has enough experience with their drivers to have walked a neat line between generating this excitement and not tipping over and becoming harsh or aggressive. Much of this comes down to voicing and will also depend on partnering equipment. With the wonderfully smooth and controlled Yamaha RX-A3040, the SVS is a tremendously exciting partner. If your AV Receiver is brighter or more aggressive, you may find that this is all too much of a good thing but equally one person's bright is another's

neutral so your mileage may vary.



There is no doubt that if the partnering act is right though, that the SVS can deliver a genuinely cinematic performance. With an 80Hz crossover set, the Satellite can deliver enough energy to have genuine presence and ensure that the SB1000 isn't being asked to do too much. The handover between five identical speakers is, as you might expect, seamless and the centre channel manages to handle dialogue and onscreen action perfectly well. I'm sure that a dedicated centre might be fractionally better but the compensation is a truly excellent handover between the front three speakers. Like the Q Acoustics, the Prime is quite directional and you'll most likely need to tinker with toe in and positioning to get everything just right but the results are well worth it.

Working away in the background, the SB1000 is something of a star. Given the compact design and lack of radiators or porting, the SB1000 produces genuinely deep, clean bass. If the pros and cons between the 3000 Series and Prime Satellites is a give and take of personal preference, the competition between the subs is much more one sided. The SVS is unquestionably more expensive but it delivers a performance that is at once more nuanced and detailed while at the same time allowing for more shove and impact. Thanks to the more conventional shape, it is also easier to accommodate.

No aspect of the Prime's performance really changes when you switch to broadcast TV. The SB1000 can be a little less assured with the bass from a Pro-Logic II signal rather than a dedicated LFE channel but otherwise the Prime is as happy on a dull weekday night handling *Celebrity Masterchef* as it is on movie night. There is the slightest sense that the lower sensitivity of the Prime means it can become fractionally recessed at lower levels but not chronically so.



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What does the Prime sound like with Music?

Using the Yamaha as a UPnP server, the Prime is a game of two halves in music. Even though the quoted frequency response of the Satellite is roughly the same as the Q Acoustics 3010 and thus something you might try without a sub, my experience suggests that this is not especially effective. Where the Q Acoustics manages to hide its limited bass extension rather well, the Prime seems to roll off more abruptly and leave you feeling that there should be more to the performance. The crisp top end and excellent handling of vocals don't fully compensate for this.

The performance as a 2.1 system does firmly suggest that SVS has little intention of using the Satellite as a stereo speaker without a sub. The SB1000 once again injects a real air of quality to the performance of the Prime. I still can't get truly excited about most 2.1 systems but this is fast enough, well integrated enough and above all, fun enough to deliver an enjoyable performance. If you are content to listen in 2.1, the Prime is more than up to the task of delivering good music.

Conclusion

9



OUT OF 10

Pros

- Incredibly exciting and powerful sound
- Impressive subwoofer
- Excellent finish and build

Cons

- Needs the sub to work in stereo
- Limited notional sensitivity
- Works best with a little volume behind it.

I own this 0

I want this 0

I had this 0

SVS Prime 5.1 Speaker System Review

Coming right after a truly incredible set of budget speakers in the form of the Q Acoustics, the slightly more expensive SVS system has its work cut out. It is a tribute therefore to how well sorted the Prime is that it both holds its own and- in my opinion at least- justifies the price premium over the 3000 Series. The slightly smaller dimensions and excellent finish (accepting you've paid the extra for gloss on both) give the Prime a slight edge in room friendliness and the more conventionally shaped sub is easier to stow too.

And it is the sub that does most to justify the extra asking price of the SVS. The speakers trade points in different categories and a final call on which is best would rest in part on your partnering electronics but the SB1000 gives the Prime an edge over most sub/sat rivals that it never loses. The expertise SVS has in subwoofers really shows and it means that even though this system is a bit of a departure for SVS, the things that make the brand tick really show through.



The Rundown

Sound Quality	<div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div>
Build Quality	<div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div>
Value For Money	<div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div>
Verdict	<div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div>

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