

Each rear-ported speaker uses a 1in tweeter and 4.5in midbass driver



Something of a departure from the kings of cubic capacity, the SVS Prime Satellites make a big impression on **Ed Selley**

Prime entertainment

WHEN YOU THINK of SVS, a number of words spring to mind but 'compact' isn't often one of them. The last SVS kit I reviewed, the PB1000 sub, would have made a decent coffee table as well as an excellent woofer. The company has a reputation for serious AV gear but little of it has been anything other than big.

This makes the system you see here something of a radical departure from the normal way that company does its business. The Prime is a complete range of speakers

including floorstanders, standmounts and centre speakers, but these – the Prime Satellite – are the smallest member of the family.

The Prime Satellite is a compact, two-way bookshelf speaker that SVS will supply as a quintet with its SB1000 subwoofer to make the Prime 5.1 system. The speaker is impressively compact, standing a whisker over 22 centimetres tall. Into this fairly tight space, SVS has managed to squeeze a 1in aluminium tweeter and a 4.5in polypropylene midbass driver.

Unusually for a satellite speaker, SVS has also rear-ported the cabinet. This means that for a fairly small box, the Prime manages to

offer a claimed low-end roll off of 69Hz, which allows the Satellite to run a crossover that takes it most of the way to the use of the subwoofer being genuinely omnidirectional. It does also mean that although each satellite comes with a keyhole-style mount on its rear face, this might not be the happiest set of speakers to wall-mount.

The claimed sensitivity of 85dB is also not especially high but in reality is not appreciably less sensitive than rivals at this price point.

While there is a dedicated centre speaker in the Prime range, it is not used in this £950 bundle. But while centre duties aren't being handled by a speaker setup specifically for the task, equally there should be no issues in terms of handover from one channel to another.

12in magic act

The SB1000 sub has been reviewed individually before (*HCC #222*). It is the smallest of the SVS models and is available separately for around £450. Unlike the Satellite, 'small' does need to be used carefully here, as the SB1000 features a 12in driver motivated by a Sledge DSP 300W amplifier. This is encased in a commendably

neat-looking cubed cabinet that is only marginally wider than the driver. The connection set is up to scratch, including stereo and LFE inputs as well as a high-level input. And, in addition to the default volume and crossover controls, the SB1000 also has a continuously adjustable phase control, which can be useful depending on where you place the sub.

Installation of the system overall should not be too hard, though. Accepting that wall-mounting the speakers might not be completely effective, the cabinets are solid and SVS supplies small rubber feet that gives them extra traction when placed on a flat surface. With their small footprint, they should be easy enough to accommodate. The SB1000 is, as noted, larger than many rivals but the sealed design and impressively inert cabinet is amenable to being tucked out of the way without inviting the room to play along as well.

The fit and finish of the system is good. Our review set is dressed in gloss black, which looks much smarter than the black ash option, but raises the price. Opt for ash and this set comes in at £850 – a good

AV INFO

PRODUCT: 5.1 sub/sat system

POSITIONING: Entry-level models in the SVS Prime range

PEERS: DALI Zensor 5.1; Wharfedale 220 HCP

potential saving if you'd rather spend your money on Blu-rays.

The lacquer has no signs of imperfections or gaps and it encases cabinets that feel pleasantly robust.

Style-wise, the Prime Satellite 5.1 is quite masculine-looking, although little touches like the chamfered front edges on the speakers and curved corners on the subwoofer make an attempt at softening their impact. Keep the grilles on and they won't dominate a room.

Big ideas

In terms of sonic performance, the SVS array stops being small the moment that you put some audio through it. The decision by SVS to squeeze a 4.5in driver into the Satellite, and



Each Satellite can be wall-mounted if needed

the corresponding boost to the low-frequency response, means that each speaker is able to generate meaningful heft in its own right. When you throw in a subwoofer that is able to produce meaningful output from 20Hz and up, you have a system that manages to generate a real sense of scale.

It is also extremely entertaining. Colin Firth's stylised demolition of the church toward the end of *Kingsman: The Secret Service* (Blu-ray, see p96) is tremendously powerful and extremely well handled by this

'Despite the size, this is a set that is convincing at filling a room with a full-scale and believable sound'

sub/sat setup. The sense of their being multiple fights taking place all around you is captured impressively well, and the speakers manage to extract a significant amount of fine detail from the lossless mix.

Using an identical enclosure for the centre pays off comparatively well. While there is a sense that dialogue might be fractionally clearer on a dedicated centre speaker, the trade-off is that across the front three speakers the movement from channel to channel is extremely fluid. Being hyper-critical, I'd say that each speaker has a slightly narrow presentation (despite SVS's employment of an FEA-optimised tweeter diffuser) that tends to beam information at you, but this is no more pronounced than most satellite speakers and it reflects well that I began subconsciously considering the Prime to be a full-size model.

Presentation is also tonally spot on. The climatic drum sequence in *Whiplash* (Blu-ray)

sounds absolutely right. There is a real sense of the tremendous energy that the drumkit is releasing and thanks to the hefty output of the SB1000, this energy is felt as much as it is heard – the sub does a sterling job of ensuring that the kickdrum is multiple beats rather than a sort of monotone thud. Up at the top-end, cymbals sizzle with metallic energy and realism. The Prime system manages to capture the sharpness of these high-frequency sounds while remaining impressively civilised for the most part. There's nothing grating about its delivery.

This civility also makes the Prime 5.1 a happy partner for day-to-day TV viewing and the performance in 2.1 mode is also creditably musical, with a sound that doesn't favour one element of the frequency range paying dividends. And, on the end of my Yamaha RX-A3040, they were able to go impressively loud with no signs of strain. Just as importantly for a domestic speaker package, they still sound clear and detailed at lower listening levels.

Aiming for the middle ground

This is a system that fits into a small subsection of 5.1 packs, hovering around or below the £1,000 mark. It is a sub/sat package by name, but perhaps not by nature, as even though the Satellites are commendably small, they are still larger and more imposing than many rivals, while being smaller than most standmounts.

Sitting between the two categories manages to impart the speakers with a great many of the attributes of larger packages (particularly an impressive bass response) and this is a set that is convincing at filling a room with a full-scale and believable sound. Combined with the capable subwoofer, you have a package that performs with real authority. When it comes down to sheer sonic ability, the Primes are still thinking big ■

SPECIFICATIONS

PRIME SATELLITE

- DRIVE UNITS:** 1 x 1in aluminium tweeter, 1 x 4.5in polypropylene midbass driver
- ENCLOSURE:** Ported
- FREQUENCY RESPONSE:** 69Hz-25kHz
- SENSITIVITY:** 85dB
- POWER HANDLING:** 150W
- DIMENSIONS:** 124(w) x 223(h) x 152(d)mm
- WEIGHT:** 2.94kg

SB1000 (SUBWOOFER)

- DRIVE UNITS:** 1 x 12in long-throw woofer
- ENCLOSURE:** Sealed
- FREQUENCY RESPONSE:** 24Hz-260Hz
- ON BOARD POWER:** 300W
- REMOTE CONTROL:** No
- DIMENSIONS:** 344(w) x 344(h) x 370(d)mm
- WEIGHT:** 15.42kg
- CONNECTIONS:** Stereo in/out; LFE in/out; high-level in

HCC VERDICT



SVS Prime 5.1

→ £1,000 approx → www.karma-av.co.uk
→ Tel: 01423 358846

HIGHS: Powerful, cohesive and refined sound; excellent build quality; subwoofer is compact considering driver size

LOWS: Slightly directional in delivery; more conspicuous in size and design than some rivals

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★