

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
Floorstanding 5.1
speaker system

POSITION:
Ultra Evolution is
SVS's premium series

PEERS:
Bowers & Wilkins
700 S3;
KEF R Series Meta;
Monitor Audio Gold

Jamie Biesemans samples the time-aligned talents of SVS's Ultra Evolution range

SVS's clash of the Titans

With its affordable Prime range and bang-for-your-buck Ultra models, over the years the Ohio-based SVS has shown itself to be a worthy supplier of appealing but rarely cutting-edge loudspeakers. However, with its new Ultra Evolution range, it's upping its game considerably.

How so? Where previous models were competently built, their acoustic design didn't really push the envelope very much. Now the Ultra Evolution series introduces a novel cabinet design, curved to place drivers in optimal positions for time alignment. There's also an entirely new tweeter featuring 'a hyper-rigid diamond-like coating on an aircraft-grade aluminium dome', and a nifty idea or two nicked from the company's subs.

Introducing no less than seven models, the Ultra Evolution range also aims to be more appealing to hi-fi shoppers – while retaining the brand's love for muscular-sounding surround systems. Considering both target groups turns out to be a winning strategy in one regard at least. SVS secured two separate EISA awards this year for speakers from the same range: one celebrating the music prowess of the Ultra Evolution

Pinnacle flagship [HCC #353], and another the home theatre capabilities of the whole range.

System selector

Speaking of which, I tested a multichannel set consisting of a pair of the Ultra Evolution Titans (£4,999), the Ultra Evolution Center (£999) and two Ultra Evolution Bookshelves (£1,499). This could be considered upper-mid in the Evolution pecking order – there are more than enough other models available for building a system to suit different rooms and budgets, including an Ultra Elevation height channel speaker that can be mounted on the wall or ceiling for Dolby Atmos immersion (not on top of a cabinet as an upfitter). SVS also says you could use a few of these Elevation speakers as a combined centre, either above or below a screen. That seems a bit of a niche application, but there's no faulting the flexibility the range provides.

In practice, it's mainly the front left and right channels where the Ultra Evolution series has the most to offer. Three sturdy three-way floorstanding speakers, ranging from the large but still manageable Evolution Tower through the Titans tested here to the colossal Evolution Pinnacle, are on offer. All boast a curved baffle that places the lin 'Diamond Coated' tweeter furthest away from the listening position and smack in the centre, with pairs of midrange drivers and woofers above and below.

The idea is that placing the drivers on an arc ensures all frequencies arrive at the listener's ear at exactly the same moment. Compensating for phase shifts caused by the crossover and driver characteristics, the promised result is more clarity and accuracy. It's not completely original thinking – French brand Focal, for one, uses curved baffles in its high-end Sopra and Utopia models – but it's quite daring, not least because it gives these floorstanders an unusual aesthetic.

There's little run-of-the-mill about the back of the Ultra Evolution Titan (and the others floorstanders), either. >

1. Not included in our review system, the on-ceiling/on-wall Ultra Elevation is an option for Atmos setups



'There's also an entirely new diamond-coated tweeter, and a nifty idea or two nicked from the company's subs'

Taking a cue from SVS's dinky but powerful 3000 Micro subwoofer [HCC #321], with its opposing 8in woofers, each 6.5in bass driver on the front of the Titan has a twin on the rear. Such an arrangement is designed to cancel out cabinet vibrations produced by low frequencies while delivering a tighter bass output.

The two smaller Ultra Evolution models, the Bookshelf and the Nano, follow the same curved cabinet philosophy – albeit less pronounced – and are respectable choices for surround and rear channels. Do note, however, that the driver configuration really requires you to place these smaller models at the right height (which is good practice, anyway). And while you won't find a woofer on the rear, they are rear ported.

As for a centre channel, the three-way Ultra Evolution Center is the only option. Superficially, it seemed smaller than the DALI Rubicon Vokal that is usually parked underneath a TV in my listening room. But while it isn't as

'A robust presence in terms of bass, but there's control and definition over the whole frequency range too'

broad nor deep as some, when placing it beneath a wall-mounted screen take into account that it is relatively high at 20cm approx.

The Ultra Evolution Center features an unusual arrangement of drivers, with two 6.5in woofers flanking a 1in tweeter that's mounted above a 4.5in midrange. The baffle is tilted upwards slightly, allowing you to place the speaker on a relatively low piece of furniture.

Compared to previous SVS designs, these Ultra Evolution cabinets have more of an upmarket feel. Three seamlessly applied finishes have a big part to play in that. High gloss black and high gloss white in particular are very lush, while the black oak veneer option gives off a slight 1980s vibe. The build quality is notable, considering these SVS speakers are still relatively affordable – although a good deal more expensive than the original Ultras.

Mad for it

If your idea of US-style home theatres is one of overbearing, massive woolly bass, prepare to be surprised by the taut and detailed low-end coming out of the Ultra Evolution speakers. Yes, SVS being SVS these have a robust presence in terms of bass and sub-bass, but there's LF control and definition over the whole frequency range too. Still, these are speakers that really come into their own with action and sci-fi flicks – or grand orchestral themes – and when powered by a suitably beefy amp.

Returning for the fifth time to the less than upbeat world building of George Miller, clips from *Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga* (4K Blu-ray) are bound to become the staple of surround setup demonstrations in years to come – just as the opening minutes of *...Fury Road* were (and still are) impossible to escape. It's dystopia from the get-go, with the origin story of *Furiosa* taking the viewer on a motorbike chase through a wide-open desert. Switching from nearly silent wide shots to close-ups brimming with action, the dynamic shifting capabilities of this system were excellent. There was no faulting how the sonic contrast between the two viewpoints was handled, as the >

2



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2. New for this series is an 'acoustically centred' driver configuration

3. The Ultra Evolution Bookshelf is the larger of two compact models in the range



Ultra Evolution setup convinced with its crisp detail one moment, and the growl of motorbike engines the next. As effects blasted vividly out of the front channels, the more delicate sound of sand blowing across the desert flowed out of the smaller surround enclosures at the back, making for a thrilling but also immersive experience. The best of both worlds, you could say.

Driven by a powerful Denon AVC-A1H amp [HCC #340], SVS's speakers – and the brand's £1,199 SB-3000 sub [HCC #298] – were calibrated with Audyssey via the MultEQ app. Taking time to calibrate is doubly important with these speakers, especially if you're deploying the large floorstanders, with their rear facing woofers, closer to a wall in a small or medium-sized room.

Considering the size difference between the Titans up front and the rest of the setup, it was remarkable that the Ultra Evolution Bookshelves managed to keep up in terms of detail delivery. They're well-matched, delivering a nice continuous coverage of the room. No real disparity existed between the more compact Ultra Evolution Center and the man-sized Titans either. That ensured the megaphone-amplified threats to the Citadel uttered by Chris Hemsworth, clearly having a hoot playing evil warlord Dementus, resounded through the room, while being nuanced enough to let his cheekiness filter through.

But not surprisingly, this SVS setup is most at home with largescale, spectacular set-pieces. The besieging of the War Rig was a high point, with the dual engines of the massive truck growling away and speakers tight, controlled nature a match for the fast-paced editing. You can spend a similar amount of money and get a sound that's even more precise and articulate, but the Ultra Evolutions make up for that with more body and impact.

Gunning for trouble

The opening battle of 2012's *Rurouni Kenshin* (Blu-ray) saw the SVS setup present the DTS-HD Master Audio 5.1 soundtrack with true authority. Swords, guns and cannon all show up in the opening minutes of this live-action adaption of the celebrated period piece anime, which tells the story of samurai confronted with the rise of modernity – mainly in the form of long-range firearms. But typical for these kinds of Japanese flicks, there's a lot of quiet dialogue and inner voice sequences, which really put the onus on the Evolution Center. Considering it's not that large, it performed admirably, delivering dialogue clearly and with sufficient depth, pulling the viewer into the story.

SPECIFICATIONS

Ultra Evolution Titan

DRIVERS: 1 x 1in diamond vapour coated aluminium tweeter; 1 x 4.5in composite glass-fibre midrange; 4 x 6.5in composite glass-fibre bass (2 x rear-facing)
ENCLOSURE: Dual rear-ported **FREQ. RESP. (CLAIMED):** 27Hz-40kHz (+/-3 dB)
SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED): 88dB **IMPEDANCE (CLAIMED):** 6ohm **POWER HANDLING:** 300W **DIMENSIONS:** 1,197(h) x 249(w) x 439(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 31.6kg

Ultra Evolution Center

DRIVERS: 1 x 1in diamond vapour coated aluminium tweeter; 1 x 4.5in composite glass-fibre midrange; 2 x 6.5in composite glass-fibre bass **ENCLOSURE:** Dual rear-ported **FREQ. RESP. (CLAIMED):** 40Hz-40kHz (+/-3 dB) **SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 87dB **IMPEDANCE (CLAIMED):** 6ohm **POWER HANDLING:** 225W **DIMENSIONS:** 199(h) x 560(w) x 299(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 12.2kg

Ultra Evolution Bookshelf

DRIVERS: 1 x 1in diamond vapour coated aluminium tweeter; 1 x 6.5in composite glass-fibre bass/mid **ENCLOSURE:** Rear-ported **FREQ. RESP. (CLAIMED):** 40Hz-40kHz (+/-3 dB) **SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 87dB **IMPEDANCE (CLAIMED):** 6ohm **POWER HANDLING:** 150W **DIMENSIONS:** 378(h) x 220(w) x 285(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 8.6kg

SB-3000 (subwoofer)

DRIVERS: 1 x 13in woofer **ENCLOSURE:** Sealed **FREQ. RESP. (CLAIMED):** 18Hz-270Hz **ONBOARD POWER (CLAIMED):** 800W Sledge DSP amplifier **REMOTE CONTROL:** No. App instead **DIMENSIONS:** 397(h) x 385(w) x 451(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 24.7kg **FEATURES:** Stereo phono input/LFE input; stereo phono output; Bluetooth app; parametric EQ; room gain compensation; custom presets; USB ports for wireless unit; 12V trigger

TESTED WITH



SPIDER-MAN: ACROSS THE SPIDER-VERSE: One of the most visually striking Marvel films around, this 'toon sequel also features a diverse soundtrack as it traverses multiple alternate realities. Check out the Go Home Machine, too – when it functions there's a slew of classic sci-fi sounds layered into the mix.

As for music, Gwen's fast-paced drumming as she reviews what happened since the previous Spider-Verse film (*Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse* 4K Blu-ray), demonstrated this system's agility. The music brings the tension to this scene, expanding in scale and volume, at which point the Titan floorstanders showed they could build a wall of sound without much help from the sub, even when the bass drum notes hit rapidly.

Reading this, it might appear the surround experience was hardly all-encompassing and centred up front. On the contrary, the system felt very integrated and in balance. As cymbals were bashed frantically, they moved smoothly to the rear of the room, and, later on, the fast-moving effects of Spider-Men, Spider-Women and assorted Spider-beings swinging on their webs were handled with panache.

Made for movies

This is a speaker system that impresses not only with its big, bold, bass-rich sonics, but also its control and detail, and such a voicing makes it ideal for movies. If you can make space for the Titan floorstanders, grab an audition! ■

HCC VERDICT



SVS Ultra Evolution Titan 5.1

→ £7,500 → www.svsound.com

WE SAY: SVS's Ultra Evolution design is smart in all meanings of the word, delivering clarity and impressive bass performance. For a big, powerful sound, check these out!

4. Looking for a partnering sub? We used SVS's 12in SB-3000, but the brand also sells bigger models...