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SVS SB16-Ultra Subwoofer Reviewed

By Brent Butterworth (/brent-butterworths-associated-equipment/) | January 16, 2017



HTR Product Rating for SVS SB16-Ultra Subwoofer

Criteria Rating

Performance ***

Value ***

Overall

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ve always wondered why SVS, long one of the top names in subwoofers, didn't offer a sub with a driver bigger than 13 inches. Sure, smaller cones have a rep for delivering a more tuneful sound, but many judge a sub solely on the size of its woofer. With the new \$1,999 sealed-enclosure SB16-Ultra reviewed here--and its ported brother, the \$2,499 PB16-Ultra--SVS can now score as many points on size as it always has on quality. Each

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The voice coil diameter of the driver on these subs is eight inches. Normally a four-inch voice coil is considered impressive. The voice coil is the wire coil that the electrical signal from the amp passes through. It's wound on a cylindrical former and attached to the back of the cone. The force from the voice coil pushes and pulls on the cone to make sound. In drivers with

the cone, making the cone stiffer and less prone to distortion.



smaller voice coils, almost all of the cone surface sits between where the voice coil is attached to the cone and where the cone is attached to the surround (which is affixed to the driver's frame). There's nothing to support the cone in this area, and with so much of its surface unsupported, the cone is left to flex and, if pushed hard enough, to distort. In the SB16-Ultra and PB16-Ultra, the voice coil is attached at the approximate midpoint of

The other unusual feature on these subs is the new SVS smartphone control app. The app lets you set the usual functions, such as the low-pass filter (crossover) point, phase and volume, and it also offers a parametric EQ feature that lets you adjust the sub's response to compensate for the effects of room acoustics. The EQ offers three adjustment bands. Each can be set for a center frequency between 20 and 200 Hz in one-Hz increments; boost or cut in a range of +6/-12 dB; and a Q (bandwidth) of 0.2 to 10.

Augmenting the EQ is a room gain compensation feature, which reduces buildup of lowfrequency energy in small rooms. It reduces bass at either -6 or -12 dB per octave, below a frequency adjustable from 25 to 40 Hz. There are also Music and Movie modes: the Music mode is basically flat response, and the Movie mode introduces a mild boost in the midbass.

There's no automatic function. You set these controls manually, preferably with the help of an audio spectrum analyzer--a tool that every audio enthusiast should have. Fortunately, these analyzers now cost very little. All you need is a **Dayton Audio UMM-**6 measurement microphone (http://www.daytonaudio.com/index.php/umm-6-usbmeasurement-microphone.html) (under \$100) and a PC running the free Room EQ Wizard software package (http://www.roomeqwizard.com/). You could cheap out with a spectrum analyzer smartphone app such as **Audio Tool** (https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.julian.apps.AudioTool&hl=en), but this isn't as accurate and doesn't provide a large-enough display for fine adjustments.

All of the functions available through the app can also be adjusted through the sub's angled front panel. A creditcard-sized remote controls volume, accesses the frontpanel menu system for adjustments, allows selection of three presets, and turns the front-panel display on and

The SB16-Ultra is a roughly 20-inch cube, so it isn't large compared with many of the ported subs I've reviewed. However, its beefy driver and doublethickness MDF enclosure make it heavy: 122 pounds. It



includes XLR and RCA line-level inputs and outputs, although no high-pass filtering is available for the outputs. So, if you want to filter the bass out of the main speakers, you'll need to use a surround processor/receiver or a stereo preamp with a subwoofer crossover built in.

As of this writing, SVS is offering \$200 off if you buy a pair of SB16-Ultra subs.

The Hookup

As usual, I put the SB16-Ultra in my room's subwoofer sweet spot, the place where most subs tend to sound best from my usual listening position. (In my room, that's just to the left of the right-channel speaker.) I used two different systems. The first was a twochannel system using a Classé CP-800 preamp/DAC and a Classé CA-2300 stereo amp, alternating between Revel Concerta2 F36 and MarkAudio-SOTA Viotti One speakers, connected using Wireworld Eclipse 7 interconnect and speaker cables. The second was a home theater system using a Sony STR-ZA5000ES AV receiver and Sunfire CRM-2 and CRM-2BIP speakers. Subwoofer crossover points were 80 Hz for the stereo system and 100 Hz for the home theater system.



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Monitor Audio Silver 100 Speaker System Reviewed

(https://hometheaterreview.com/monitor/https://home audio-silver-100-speaker-systemreviewed/) Sean Killebrew explores Monitor Audio's Silver 100

bookshelf speaker, plus other models from the Silver Series lineup: the Silver C150 center, Silver 50 bookshelf speaker, and Silver W-12 subwoofer

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SVS PB-4000 Subwoofer Reviewed

(https://hometheaterreview.com/svspb-4000-subwoofer-reviewed/)

Perhaps the most banal thing I could do in the introduction to a review of SVS's new PB-4000 subwoofer would



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Home Theater Review's Best of 2017 Awards

(https://hometheaterreview.com/hometheater-reviews-best-of-2017-

awards/) It's that time of year again--when the HomeTheaterReview.com staff looks at all of the products we reviewed this year and picks the best of the best. We've tried to hit all the product categories and price points. We hope you enjoy our Best of 2017



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FEB 20 RSL Speedwoofer 10S Subwoofer

(https://hometheaterreview.com/rsl-

speedwoofer-10s-subwoofer-

reviewed/) Dennis Burger auditions RSL's Speedwoofer 10S subwoofer, which houses a 10-inch woofer and 350-watt Class D amp in a modestly sized, ported cabinet. Also modest is the sub's asking price: \$399.



(http://dexydposladverloandeanah/nestalel/thiels205e2app, adjusting the sub's functions is easy and

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measurement microphone and an M-Audio Mobile Pre USB interface to measure the bass response in my listening chair. With about five minutes of adjustment, using the parametric EQ and room gain compensation, I had the response pretty close to flat. If you're not yet familiar with the way parametric EQs work, the process will take much longer, but it's fun because you can see the effects of your adjustments immediately.



I later experimented with the room gain compensation adjustment by ear to get the low-frequency response exactly where I liked it. It is possible to adjust all of these controls by ear; but, unless you're very good at identifying the sounds of the different bass bands, you're flying blind if you make these adjustments without using a decent spectrum analyzer.

Performance

I've heard almost all of the top subwoofers currently on the market. The SB16-Ultra sounds like none of them. It's almost in a whole different category of low-frequency sound

The deep bass notes that begin Kanye West's "Love Lockdown" tend to distort at least a little bit through almost any system when played at a moderately loud volume. With the SB16-Ultra, I could hear no distortion at all, even with the system cranked to the limits of what the main speakers could handle. It's the first time I've heard the bass tones fill the room on this tune, pressurizing the entire space with intense low-frequency energy. Normally, a subwoofer would distort on these tones, producing higher-frequency distortion harmonics that draw my attention to the subwoofer. But with this sub, I felt truly enveloped, and I got the feeling that I was hearing the tune the "right" way for the first time. I also noted more subtlety in the bass tones. I assume they're generated electronically, through synthesis or sampling, then heavily processed to create the desired effect; however, with the SB16-Ultra, I could hear subtleties that gave the bass a more natural tone, somewhat like that of a Japanese taiko drum.

Holly Cole's recording of the 1970s hit "Good Time Charlie's Got the Blues" from the Night CD starts with a really nice double bass lick that tests the definition of a sub (and the low-frequency output of small subs, but that doesn't apply here). The SB16-Ultra hit the lowest notes on this tune hard and tight, and I could hear both the fullness of the bass and the subtle effects of the bassist's fingering. The sound was something like if you put your ear near to the F-holes on a double bass, which is really the only way to hear all the fullness of the instrument's deepest notes when it's played pizzicato (i.e., plucked, not bowed) without an amp.

JAN 16 SVS

SVS SB16-Ultra Subwoofer

2&default=false&ranfd0m=49257174×tamp=20 (https://hometheaterreview.com/svshigh-fidelity-speakers/n2-faria-9000)fer-reviewed/)

With the new 16-Ultra Series, SVS
has introduced its most powerful
subwoofers to date. Brent
Butterworth tests the new SB16Ultra, a sealed-box design with a 16inch woofer and a 1,500-watt Class

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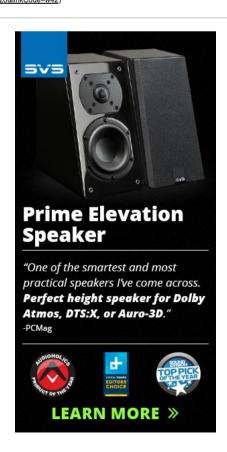
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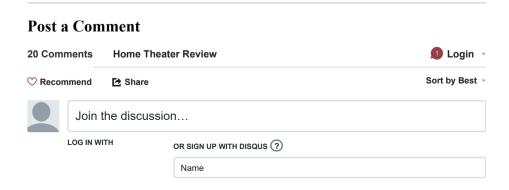
VTF-15H MK2 Audioholics Top AV Gear Guide for 2015 "High End Value Pick" Sound & Vision "TOP PICK AWARD"

When this sub is in the system, one may get a strong urge to play EDM and hip-hop, just because its output is so powerful and its sound so tight. I especially loved hearing the Deadmau5 remix of Medina's "You and I" through this sub. It's a shame that more people can't hear this type of music through the SB16-Ultra because it's really something different. I've never heard a subwoofer this powerful that starts and, perhaps more important, stops so quickly. On "You and I," I heard not a trace of ringing or overhang, which gave the tune a rhythmic precision and power I've never before experienced with either home systems or even with the incredibly powerful sound reinforcement system at the Deadmau5 show I saw a couple of years ago.

The classic submarine movie U-571 is one of my favorite bass tests, especially in the "Face to Face" chapter where the sub confronts a German destroyer. This movie's known for its scenes involving depth charges, but the snippet where the submarine goes under the destroyer and the destroyer's propellers start turning contains more intense deep bass than the depth charges--although most people don't hear it because their systems can't reproduce it cleanly. Like only a couple of other ultra-high-performance subs I've tested, the SB16-Ultra actually seems quieter on this scene than lesser subs do because it doesn't distort significantly, and thus it doesn't produce the higher-frequency distortion harmonics that are much easier to hear than the fundamental bass tones.

Click over to Page Two for more Performance notes, as well as Measurements, The Downside, Comparison & Competiton, and Conclusion...

Continue to Page 2 (?page=2)



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1 ^ V • Reply • Share >

Roger Skoff • a year ago Congrats, Brent, on the very best subwoofer review I've ever read, Brilliant, well-written,

complete, and well-illustrated, it's of a caliber and quality I would hope to achieve (but probably not be able to) if I were to go back to product reviewing. One small question, though, have you ever heard the big Kinergetics SW-800 woofers? Those were a twin tower sealed-box system with five 10" SEAS driver per side, and just slightly under twice the driver area per side of these 16 inchers and they were FAST. Their minus 3db point, as I recall, was something like 15Hz and (also as I recall) they had a built-in cut-off at around 10 Hz to avoid screwing-up any record player on the same planet (record-player nominal resonance point, as I know you know, is normally set to around 8Hz.)

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Vince • a year ago

I have a question. Why do we need such big bass producing subwoofers. I have two \$100 Dayton 10" subwoofers and if I turn the volume on the back of the subs more than a quarter of the way up then they are producing too much bass relative to the rest of the sound. The music and effects should be in proportion should it not?

JonFB → Vince • a year ago

You probably need to tune the subs. They no doubt have very strong bass in the 50Hz -80Hz region, so they sound very loud on those passages, and there may be loud "peaks" in the frequency response of your room that emphasize certain frequencies. If you eliminated the peaks, then the bass would be much smoother, and you would get a better feel (literally) for how strong they are, and they would sound much more in proportion to the other speakers. But you're probably missing most of the bass in the 20Hz-50Hz region. Tuning subs can become quite a hobby, but you could start by getting a Dayton Audio iMM-6 microphone and FFT analyzer on your phone or tablet and looking at some pink noise in different spots around your listening area.

Vince → JonFB • a year ago

How should a person such as myself who has regular subwoofers go about tuning the bass output? I've now changed my receiver to my old, very powerful Yamaha receiver (130 watts p/ch into 8 ohms at 0.08 THD) and even with me unplugging the subwoofers and running my Nohr 9.0 marble speakers full range (minus 3dB point is 33-34Hz) I often feel like the bass is too much for the small upstairs theater room that they are in. I know about room nodes of cancellation and reinforcement but changing the speaker and seating position that I have now is not a good option as the soundstage is excellent now.

JonFB → Vince • a year ago If your receiver doesn't have an automatic sub-tuning feature (like

Audyssey MultiEQ, which a Yamaha won't), then you need a way to go in and equalize the peaks. The best way is with a device called a "Behringer

Feedback Destroyer" or BFD. This page has a lot of info on that:

http://forum.blu-ray.com/sh...

You'll need a calibration mic, and (free) software for your phone, tablet or PC (use Room EQ Wizard for your PC). This will make a huge difference in the quality of your bass. Just remember that if you can't move your subwoofers, you may have dips in the response at the listening position and you should never try to "raise" the dips with EQ. Just focus on reducing the peaks.

1 ^ | V • Reply • Share >

Bryan • a year ago

Great review. I've always liked the deep, tight sound. This sub is rather expensive though, compared to other ID subs. It may justify its cost by sounding amazing and offering some cool features.

Have you ever tried a Rythmik sub? If not, it might be worth seeking one out for review . . .

Brent Butterworth A Bryan • a year ago

I would like to. I tried a while back, but they were between models at the time.

∧ V • Reply • Share >

sb16-ultra-s ofer-reviewed%2F&redirect=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.focal.com%2Fen%2Fhome-audio%2Fhigh-fidelity-speakers%2Faria-900)

I don't see why you can't use an analog microphone for Room EQ Wizard. The analog noise even on a junky laptop is going to be -70 dB or so, which isn't a factor. It has to be measurement mic, though. Most of those are electret condenser and have a built-in preamp that requires phantom power. What mic are you thinking about using? Probably even the ones used for A/V receiver setup would work fine. Electret condensers are TMK all flat below 1 kHz.

I made a mistake in the text. The chart is correct. I'll ask Adrienne to fix it. Thanks for the catch!

Whether there's an advantage in buying this sub versus a smaller one for lower-volume applications is a tough question. This one will play cleaner at low frequencies, as I noted when I wrote about the U-571 clip. It depends on how often you play deep-bass material. For most people, a smaller sub would be fine -- but if you're reading this, you're probably not "most people." The SB16-Ultra is designed for enthusiasts who want to push the pedal to the metal.

Glenn Benidt → Brent Butterworth • a year ago

Rrent

Are the Focal SW 1000be subs any good?

Should one get one of those if they have Focal speakers?

Thanks

Glenn

This comment was deleted.

Brent Butterworth → Guest • 2 years ago

Yes, if that mic will put out a signal when you plug it into your computer, that will be a great choice. I once measured the mic that came with a Denon receiver and it was very close to my \$400 Clio measurement mic. Often they use similar elements, sometimes even the same element.

Jonathan Pacheco • 2 years ago

Hi great review as always but I would love to hear your opinion between this sub and the PSA S3600I that has a more similar price range. Is not fare to compare this \$2000 against 15s that is only \$900.

Brent Butterworth → Jonathan Pacheco • 2 years ago

To me the S3600i, while closer to the SB16-Ultra's price, is a very different sub, which is why I didn't think to compare them. The S3600i has great definition and output, plays lower than the SB16-Ultra, and is of course much larger. The S3600i sounds a little more like a ported sub to me; it doesn't have that extreme punch of the SB-series subs. As I stated in the article, I have come to prefer the sound of ported subs, and the S3600i is closer to that so it would be my personal preference — IF I had space for it, which I really don't. Once you're getting into a sub that large, the physical considerations can become daunting.

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David Musoke • 2 years ago

How does the sound quality of the SB16U compare to that of the SB13U?

Brent Butterworth → David Musoke • 2 years ago

Can't say for sure because I didn't review the SB13-Ultra. But I did the previous model and the character of that one's sound is similar to the SB16-Ultra. The 16 just plays lower and louder.

David Musoke → Brent Butterworth • 2 years ago

OK... I based my question off your comment in the review where you said "....that the SB16-Ultra sounds like no other subwoofer, but that doesn't necessarily mean its sound will suit your tastes". That was the statement that concerned me alot. After-all, the reason why a person doesn't like the sound of a subwoofer would mainly be due to the nature of its design.

So, if I've misunderstood you, I'm sorry. Would be correct to say that you found its sound extremely accurate (due to less distortion than normal?) that some may dislike it for this reason, as they may be used to predominant 2nd/3rd/4th order harmonics their favorite subscare producing?

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Well, it's very low distortion, very low boom, almost no overhang. But it's very punchy. Punchier than any bass amp, punchier than my double bass ;). This sound is common to high-excursion sealed-box (not passive radiator) subs with \sim 1 kW amps. SVS told me the SB13-Ultra outsells the PB13-Ultra by a wide margin, so either people really like that punchy sound or they like the small size. Accurate ... it's hard to say. I don't think there's a pro studio sub on the market that can do what this thing does, so there's nothing to compare it to to say whether or not it's accurate. Definitely if you like that tight, punchy sealed-box sound, you will love this sub.

∧ | ∨ • Reply • Share ›

David Musoke → Brent Butterworth • a year ago

Thanks Brent. Appreciate your well thought out answer.

Glenn Benidt → David Musoke • a year ago

How do these subs compare to Focal SW 1000be? Thanks

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