

ASCENDO PASSIVE 7.2.4 / £12,900

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System builders will love the cinematic sound of these on-wall models from Ascendo, says **Mark Craven**

Speakers made for movies

You might be familiar with the German audio brand Ascendo for one thing: subwoofers. The company is the proud maker of The 80 (see *HCC* #343), an 80in single-figure-Hz beast, and plenty of other ultra-premium designs. But it's also a speaker maker aiming for home cinema heaven with its Passive on-wall series.

As with its subwoofers, this Ascendo range dreams big, peaking at the 15 Pro, a 32.5kg model designed primarily for LCR duty in 'large theatres'. But there are smaller options too that – when paired with one of its more 'down-to-earth' subwoofers – facilitate an immersive setup that needn't be a) stupidly expensive or b) only fit for a barn.

Okay, the issue of price still needs addressing, because the system here will cost £12,900 all in. But that's in part because we auditioned eleven speaker cabinets and two subwoofers (and I should add this was at the premises of Ascendo's UK distributor Karma AV). Go for 5.1 and the cost comes down considerably.

The inside story

Ascendo's Passive speakers even manage to look a lot like its subwoofers, courtesy of coaxial driver arrangements that mount tweeters inside the centre of bass/mid cones. Such a technique has benefits regards timing, directivity and off-axis response, and enables a two-way crossover (simpler than that of a three-way speaker), but also requires careful consideration of the interaction between the two units, as the larger woofer is also acting as a waveguide for the tweeter within.

As well as the aforementioned Passive 15 Pro, which has a monster 15in bass/mid driver, Ascendo's lineup offers 12in, 10in, 6in and 5in (or thereabouts) on-wall models. There are premium Pro versions of the 12 and 6 speaker, and 'standard' versions of each.

The system auditioned here features three of the Passive 10 models, which retail for £1,529 a piece, for the LCR stage. These use twin front-ported cabinets, made from birch ply and internally braced, and finished in a home cinema-friendly matt black. Dimensions of 50cm high and 30cm wide mean they aren't the slinkiest of on-wall speaker around – but then they do have a 10in woofer – and Ascendo's design allows the 14.5cm deep cabinet to be mounted horizontally or vertically by both keyhole fixing points and VESA standard screwholes.

Handling surround channels are four of the step-down Passive 6s (standard rather than Pro, £900), which look similar but vent their 6in bass/mid driver via a single slot port. Additionally, this model, and the Passive 5 (£600), four of which are used here for height channels, can also be mounted via holes through the front baffle. Also note that these both use shallower (and smaller overall) cabinets: 8.8cm deep for the Passive 6, 7.5cm for the Passive 5.

Two of Ascendo's The Sub 12 subwoofers (£1,150) bring up the rear in what is a traditional sub/sat system, as even the big Passive 10's low-frequency response is only rated down to 75Hz (so not comparable to a typical floorstander). Previously reviewed in *HCC* #338, The 12 Sub is the entry-level woofer in the company's lineup, but still not dinky, placing its custom 12in woofer in a front-ported 48cm high, 40cm wide cabinet, and driving it with a beefy 500W Class D amplifier. Again, the styling can be considered functional, but beauty is more than skin deep...

Doing Snyder justice

So what was I expecting of an immersive system from a company famed for its subwoofers? Well, loads of bass, certainly, and that's exactly what this setup delivers, not just in terms of deep, ominous lows but texture and presence all through the lower-frequencies. And from this foundation Ascendo's array builds an exciting, cinematic soundstage and sounds effortless while doing it. The mid-range has impressive detail and body, highs are crisp, and it utterly envelops you in what you're watching.

The soundmix to the moody *Zack Snyder's Justice League* (4K Blu-ray) seemed right in this system's wheel house. In the film's 'Part 2: Age of Heroes', we see Steppenwolf land in Russia and begin setting his Parademons to work. When he hits the floor the bass response from the two 12in subs was delicious, creating a rapid deep thud that subtly decayed away, while his winged minions flitted and buzzed around the soundfield. Later, when the Amazonians fire their big Arrow of Danger >

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
7.2.4-channel on-wall speaker system

POSITION:
Passive 5 is Ascendo's entry-level, as is The 12 Sub

PEERS:
M&K Sound D series; Artcoustic SL series

1. The £600 Passive 5 is Ascendo's smallest on-wall speaker

2. Both the '5 and '6 can be bought in a white finish with grey (rather than black) fabric grille

3. Rear of the Passive 10 shows its keyhole fixings and VESA holes

REVIEWS

(or whatever it's called), there were tight, upper-bass sounds as they opened its case, and a choral score that seemed open and free from the speakers – a tonally rich wall of sound without a gap. Then as we follow the arrow's journey to the Acropolis, it steered smoothly front to back and then back to front as the POV changed.

Indeed, this system is nothing if not immersive, and it's not just a case of there being a lot of speakers in play. The smooth transition from one cabinet to another is key, as is the precise, detailed nature of the sound. Moreover, it excelled with the dialogue timbres on show: Ben Affleck slightly throaty, Jeremy Irons' Alfred clipped and nuanced, Gal Gadot softer but still well projected.

In the sequence where Barry Allen/The Flash rescues Iris West from a car crash, the shift to slo-mo is heralded by a huge, dynamic slam from the subwoofers, but then we're in music territory as Rose Betts' cover of 'Song to the Siren'

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rings out with soft-touch piano and delicate vocals. This is pinned to the front channels but gently echoes around, clean, smooth sounds seeming to emerge from nowhere and hanging in space. Spine-tingling stuff, in other words.

What's your emergency?

While the *Justice League* soundtrack is a banger, it has a distinct lack of automatic weapons fire. That can't be said about the Atmos mix for Michael Bay's *Ambulance* (4K Blu-ray), which the Ascendo system threw around the room with glee. In its pivotal bank robbery scene, there were low, bassy thuds to create a feeling of beating-heart tension, and Lorne Balfe's score sounded superb as it resonated all around the surround and height channels. The following *Heat*-esque gunfight was convincingly crafted, gun-fire crackling in the left and right surrounds, and a great feeling of bullets flying overhead. Amidst all the chaos, there was no unwanted overhang from The 12 Subs, just hard-hitting, meaty impacts.

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SPECIFICATIONS

Passive 10 On-Wall

DRIVERS: 1 x 10in bass/mid driver and 1 x 1in HF compression driver in a 'time coherent coax point source' configuration **ENCLOSURE:** On-wall, front-ported **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 75Hz-20kHz **SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 97dB **IMPEDANCE (CLAIMED):** 8ohm **POWER HANDLING:** 500W **DIMENSIONS:** 300(w) x 500(w) x 145(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 17kg

Passive 6 On-Wall

DRIVERS: 1 x 6.5in bass/mid driver and 1 x 1in soft dome tweeter, coax configuration **ENCLOSURE:** On-wall, front-ported **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 100Hz-20kHz **SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 93dB **IMPEDANCE (CLAIMED):** 8ohm **POWER HANDLING:** 200W **DIMENSIONS:** 260(w) x 440(h) x 88(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 5.2kg

Passive 5 On-Wall

DRIVERS: 1 x 5.25in bass/mid driver and 1 x 1in soft dome tweeter, coax configuration **ENCLOSURE:** On-wall, front-ported **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 85Hz-20kHz **SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 88dB **IMPEDANCE (CLAIMED):** 8ohm **POWER HANDLING:** 200W **DIMENSIONS:** 250(w) x 400(w) x 75(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 4kg

The 12 Sub

DRIVERS: 1 x 12in composite cone woofer **ONBOARD POWER (CLAIMED):** 500W Class D amp **ENCLOSURE:** Twin front-ported **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 25Hz-150Hz **REMOTE CONTROL:** No **DIMENSIONS:** 400(w) x 480(h) x 400(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 22kg **FEATURES:** XLR balanced and RCA LFE input; XLR/RCA loop-out; line-level stereo RCA in; variable 0-180 phase; 40Hz-150Hz crossover; auto power off/on

TESTED WITH



ZACK SNYDER'S JUSTICE LEAGUE: This 2021 edition is a different kettle of fish altogether compared to 2017's *Justice League* – not least because it runs for four hours and is framed in 4:3. Its epic-scale narrative is also far more involving, and helping it along is a barnstorming Dolby Atmos soundtrack that provides consistent aural thrills.

Go for something more atmospheric, such as the Live Aid gig from *Bohemian Rhapsody* (4K BD), and this speaker system again dazzles. This scene is all about ambience and the change in sound from the crowd to the stage. The title song unfurls with a focus on the piano and Freddie Mercury (Rami Malek)'s vocals, while the drum kit is clearly defined further back and thousands of fans whoop and sing along from the rears. 'Radio Ga-Ga' is more upbeat, and through Ascendo's speakers becomes a grin-inducing moment of triumph, just as it should.

Superhero sonics

From top to bottom this Ascendo array sounds superb, and surely ranks as value for money – you could easily spend more on a full-fat Dolby Atmos system and not get the same mix of bass energy, mid-range muscle and cinematic attack. It's a sound made for home cinema fun, delivered by on-wall (or in-wall) cabinets that – while not diminutive – will free up more floorspace than a conventional speaker array. An absolute must-audition if you're planning a new system ■

HCC VERDICT



Ascendo Passive 7.2.4

→ £12,900 → www.aia-cinema.com

WE SAY: Ascendo's on-wall speakers and 12in subwoofer(s) hit all the right notes, from bass weight and dynamics, to nuance, scale and imaging. Seriously impressive.

4. In The 12 Sub, a 500W Class D amp powers a custom 12in woofer, facing front in a ported cabinet