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In love with in-walls
M&K Sound’s IW150 speakers have to be heard to be believed

INSIDE BUYER’S GUIDE ➔ READER’S ROOM ➔ ELIPSON INFINITE SPEAKERS ➔ COLLECTING... POST-APOCALYPTIC MOVIES ➔ OPINION ➔ POLK 5.1 SOUNDBAR
The 5.1 package reviewed here is composed of three IW150s for front left, right and centre (£1,200 each), a pair of S150T tripoles for the surrounds (£1,750), and the X12 subwoofer (£3,200). It's probably worth pointing out that neither the S150T s nor the X12 are either in-wall or new, but M&K Sound deems them the perfect partners for its latest invention.

Of course, if you had enough space, you could use the IW150 for every channel. But the S150T's proprietary tripole configuration is specifically designed for smaller rooms, where surround speakers are often much closer to the listener. The S150T is THX Ultra-certified, has a lovely cabinet with a black satin finish, and a bracket for wall-mounting.

Further down the brand's in-wall range you'll find the IW950 (twin tweeter, single midbass); and more compact two-way IW95, IW85 and IW5 models.

The also-THX-certified X12 is a beast of a subwoofer, and uses a pair of long-stroke 12in woofers (in a push-pull configuration) in a sealed black-satin enclosure. M&K Sound knows a thing or two about building subs, and the driver array is designed to deliver a total surface area equivalent to a single 18in unit. In other words it should be more than capable of enhancing the bass performance of the relatively small passive speakers. For those seeking an all in-wall system, M&K Sound sells the passive 2 x 8in IW28S subwoofer.

Three plus two = one serious speaker

From the front, the IW150 looks exactly like the S150. It has the classic M&K Sound driver layout of three vertically aligned 1in soft fabric dome tweeters down its left-hand side, and a pair of 5.25in polypropylene woofers ranged down the right. The speakers come with white magnetic grilles that can be painted whatever colour the wall is, blending them in with the overall decor.

Since its introduction in 1995, the speaker has been installed in film and music recording studios the world over, and it may well have been involved in the mixing of some of your favourite movies and songs. M&K Sound has recently released the larger £3,000, essentially moving the S150 down to a mid-range position; but that doesn’t detract from what remains a world-class speaker.

So if the S150 has been around for so long, what’s new from the company? A new approach to installation.

Now you see me...

The original speaker uses a traditional box cabinet, which is designed to be positioned on stands or a convenient shelf. The IW50, as indicated by the prefix, is an in-wall version of the S150.

The appeal of in-wall speakers is undeniable; as soon as you can't see the source of the sound it becomes easier for the listener to be immersed in the experience. This is especially true when it comes to movies, where the whole idea is to create the sensation of actually being in the film's environment. And for some rooms/peoples, going in-wall is the only acceptable aesthetic option.

The problem with in-wall speakers is that, as the name suggests, you have to physically put them in the wall, which requires a custom installer, a gifted amateur, or the help of a friendly builder. The other problem is that by removing the speaker from its cabinet and sticking it in a wall, you might change its sonic integrity.

In the interests of full disclosure, I didn’t start attacking the walls of my home cinema with a sledgehammer in order to audition M&K Sound’s IW150s. Thankfully I didn’t need to because the speaker uses a sealed enclosure. While it didn’t look pretty, I was able to place the speakers right up against the wall on speaker stands. This will have had some effect on their overall signature, as the drivers are no longer interacting with an ‘infinite baffle’, but shouldn’t have adversely impacted the performance.

If you browse your dictionary for the word iconic, you’ll probably see a picture of the M&K Sound S150 next to the definition. The company has had its up and downs – co-founder Ken Kreisel has departed – but the S150 has been a professional studio monitor of choice for decades.

Steve Withers spends quality time with some high-performance cinema speakers

Get in with the in-wall crowd

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M&K Sound’s aim here is to reduce the internal volume to 20 to 30 per cent of a normal S150 cabinet, while...
preserving the neutrality, realism and musicality associated with its design. As a result, the company claims a frequency response for the IW150 of 80Hz to 20kHz and a sensitivity of 90dB, which is very close to the S150 despite the lack of a traditional enclosure. The cabinet is sealed to provide effective protection, and there are damping pads on the rear to eliminate vibration when in direct contact with the wall.

All the mounting hardware is pre-fitted to the enclosure, including metal clamps to fix speaker wire in the pre-cut grooves, and gold-plated push-on terminals for easy cable connection. There are torx mounting screws.

**A system with detail, clarity and transparency to spare – it’s a performance you'll instantly fall in love with**

on the front baffle that turn specialist washers for a smooth installation, along with a practical and efficient self-tightening dog-ear clamp system for a flush seal between baffle and wall.

I set the speakers up as I would any 5.1 system, with the three IW150s at the same level along the front wall, just beneath my projector screen. The S150TS were at a similar height, but to the side and slightly behind the main listening position; the X12 was at the front, located in a part of the room I knew would deliver a relatively neutral bass response. The speakers were driven by my reference Arcam AVR850 AV receiver.

**Utterly transparent**

As soon as I started listening to the IW150s, I could tell that M&K Sound had achieved the goal of retaining what makes its speakers so special, while also significantly reducing the size of the enclosure. The front three models perfectly match each other in terms of tonality, but are also utterly transparent when it comes to their delivery.

That’s what you’d expect from a speaker with a studio monitor heritage, but the fact the IW150s can do this given its speakers so special, while also significantly reducing the size of the enclosure. The front three models perfectly match each other in terms of tonality, but are also utterly transparent when it comes to their delivery.

The bold-looking X12 does this in spades, with a massive bass presence that ably delivers lower frequencies until it crosses over with the IW150s at 80Hz. It’s a top-to-bottom performance that sounds seamless in its integration, built upon a sub-sonic floor that’s evenly distributed. Dunkirk (4K Blu-ray) has an exceptional DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundtrack, and I was looking forward to hearing what the M&K Sounds could do with it. This quintet didn’t disappoint, delivering the subtly layered mix with an incredible detail that creates a genuine sense of location; be it the sound of surf on the beach, wind blowing across the decks of boats, or the battle inside a Spitfire cockpit. The system also steps up to the plate when things kick off, absolutely nailing the terrifying high-pitched scream of the Stuka dive-bombers, and the earth-shattering explosions that follow. Hans Zimmer’s deliberately sparse score is conveyed with remarkable clarity; the ticking watch motif is present throughout the soundtrack. The system’s superlative mid-range drive is apparent during the sinking of a troop ship, while the X12 adds a deliciously cinematic low-end presence to the Spitfire’s wing-mounted machine guns.

The Blu-ray of A Quiet Place (see p92) is my new favourite test disc, with an incredibly complex soundtrack that manages the near-impossible task of creating silence. Despite the protagonists’ efforts to remain unheard, the mix itself is filled with subtle audio cues, such as wind rustling through the leaves, and the hums and clicks of insects. These all come through with exceptional realism and precise localisation, immediately immersing you in the world of the film.

It’s also a film that makes creative use of dynamic range, because when someone (or something) does make a noise, my God you know about it. The transient response of these speakers is incredible, viscerally delivering the scares as the soundtrack suddenly goes from relative silence to very very loud. The tendency of sound designers...

**Specifications**

M&K Sound IW150

- **Drive Units**
  - 2 x long-stroke 12in woofers in a push-pull configuration
  - LFE input; stereo line-level phono input/output; stereo line-level XLR input/output; variable phase and low-pass filter; THX EQ; +3dB/+5dB boost

- **Dimensions**
  - 36kg
  - 440(w) x 656(h) x 453(d)mm
  - 86dB
  - 200W
  - POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED): 800W
  - FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED): 20Hz-20kHz

M&K Sound S150T

- **Drive Units**
  - 1 x 1.1in soft fabric dome tweeter; 1 x 5.25in fibreglass woofer; 2 x 3.5in twin midbass drivers

- **Dimensions**
  - 8.5kg
  - 311(w) x 354(h) x 95(d)mm
  - 90dB
  - 400W
  - POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED): 1500W
  - FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED): 40Hz-30kHz

M&K Sound X12

- **Drive Units**
  - 2 x 1.1in soft fabric dome tweeter; 1 x 5.25in fibreglass woofer; 2 x 3.5in paper pulp side-firing drivers

- **Dimensions**
  - 4.8kg
  - 311(w) x 354(h) x 95(d)mm
  - 90dB
  - 400W
  - POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED): 1500W
  - FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED): 20Hz-20kHz

**HCC Verdict**

M&K Sound IW150

- **www.mkloudspeakers.uk**

**Remix**

M&K Sound offers balanced and unbalanced inputs.

**Enhanced reputation**

M&K Sound already has a solid reputation with home cinema fans, and the company’s new in-wall range makes for an interesting development. Its ambition has been vindicated with an exceptional speaker that achieves the goal of delivering the brand’s signature sound from an incredibly discreet enclosure. Here they’ve been blended with other models culled from the M&K Sound range to produce a 5.1 system with detail, clarity and transparency to spare. It’s the kind of performance you’ll instantly fall in love with – grab yourself an audition!