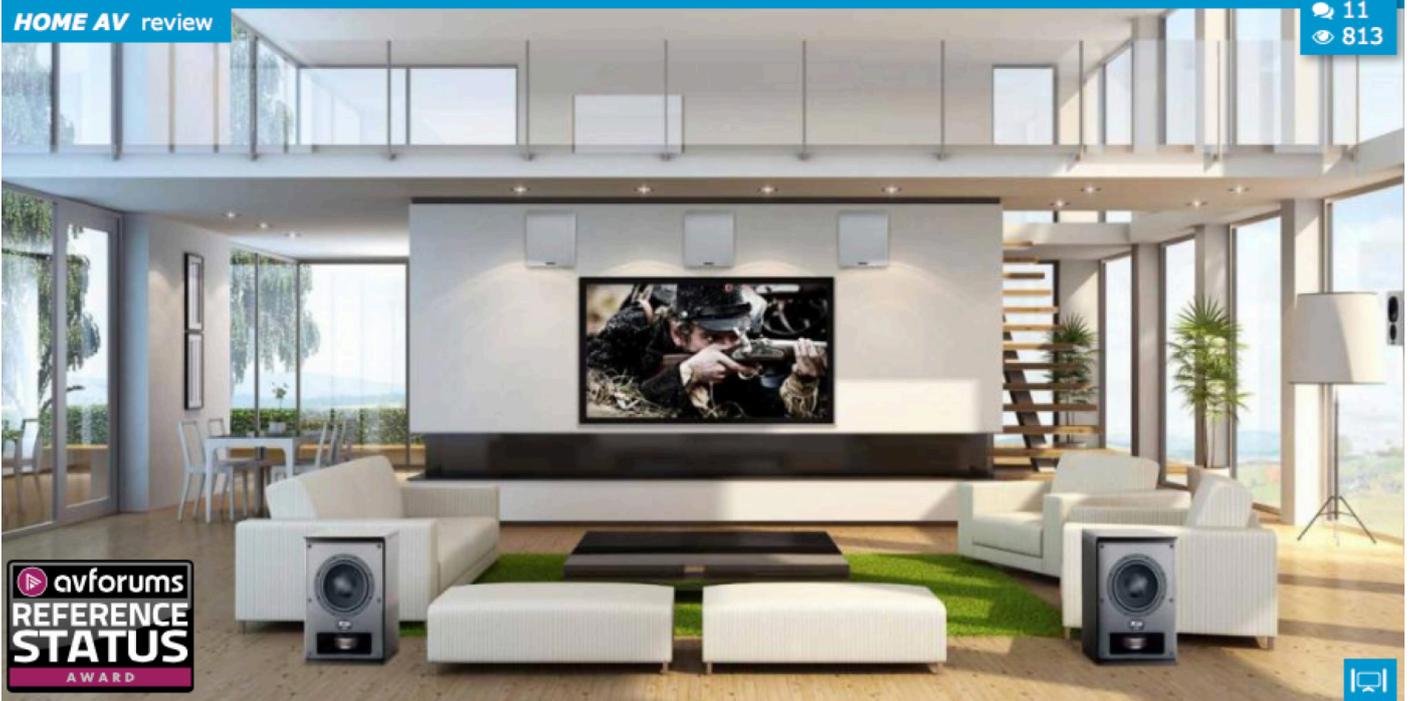


The ultimate sub/sat speaker package?

by Phil Hinton

HOME AV review

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MK MP300 S300T AND X12 SPEAKER

SRP: £17,000.00

What is the MK MP300 Speaker Package?

The system we have here for review is based on the MP300 wall mountable reference speakers designed for LCR duties, along with a pair of S300T tripole surrounds and two X12 subwoofers. All the speakers are THX Ultra 2 certified and are the ultimate version of the very popular S150 speaker design. We have reviewed the S150MkII system and the MP150MkII wall mountable versions in the recent past and they moved the game on from the original designs. The S300 series are based on the instantly recognisable driver configuration of two woofers and three tweeters within small, yet inert enclosures and designed to be paired with at least one subwoofer in the system.

The S300 differs from the S150 series in a number of areas while remaining similar in looks. The main obvious difference is when you pick them up and realise just how heavy the MP300 cabinet is. This points to a deliberate design to make the cabinets have as little resonance as possible and provide a solid platform for the

best in possible sound quality. The drivers are also slightly larger with small redesigns, yet the three tweeter and mid driver layout stays very much the same. The tripoles are also built to the same high standard with large drivers, heavy cabinets and voiced to match perfectly with the MP300's across the front channels, providing a wide and encompassing sound field. Add in two powerful double 12-inch push-pull subwoofers in the shape of the X12 and we have a very serious 5.2 home cinema system that costs a whopping £17K! That's a big step up from the S150 systems we have covered in the past, so just what does the extra outlay buy you and can the difference in performance justify the cost?

We set out to long term test this speaker system and over the last six months we have tested it with some expensive processor and power amps along with a few AV Receivers in our review system. So is this the ultimate expression of the sub/sat home cinema system? Let's find out.

MP300 LCR Speakers

The MK S150 series of speakers were famous the world over for being used in professional environments such as mix and dubbing rooms at the top studios and production facilities. They were famous for being amongst the first THX Ultra certified domestic speakers and used in the creation of some of the biggest blockbuster soundtracks, such as the Star Wars Prequels with none other than Ben Burt. So where do the S300 series of speakers fit in all this?



With over 40 years of pro audio experience and the introduction of the S150 all the way back in 1995, MK Sound thought it was about time with the introduction of digital audio and near lossless playback of movie soundtracks in the home, for a new reference loudspeaker to improve on the well-known icon and add more power, a larger enclosure and even more accurate sound based on new larger custom designed drivers. The goal, as with the original speaker, is to be an accurate, neutral conduit to the mastered audio mix. The idea is to present the soundtrack or music mix as it is meant to be heard, as if you are standing in the venue stage or dubbing room. That's no easy task, especially when the original and MKII versions of the S150 are so good in those tasks to begin with.

When designing the S300 series the iconic driver layout of the S150 front baffle was retained and improved upon, so even with a quick glance of the speaker you know exactly what it is. The improvement is the lack of any visible screws or fixings for the drive units on the front baffle. The new design has separate woofer and tweeter block mounting brackets that not only isolate from the new enclosure cabinet, but with the driver's rear mounted to the brackets internally, the baffle face is flush with the drivers and tweeter block eliminating any reflections from edges where the woofers meet the front baffle and stopping colouration to the sound. As such the design and fit and finish is absolutely first class with a build quality that oozes high-end. Thankfully each speaker comes with a pair of white gloves so you can lift and mount the speakers without getting greasy fingerprints all over that gloss black finish.

With the MP300 we are using here, MK Sound reduced the size of the cabinet (much in the same way as the recently reviewed MP150 speaker) when compared to the normal S300 speaker. This means that while there is a significant reduction in the size of the cabinet, especially at one end, the design uses the effect of wall mounting, or close placement to the wall so that there is no perceivable effect on cabinet volume. We ran tests on the S150 vs. MP150 when we had them in for review and with correct placement we found there to be no major difference in speaker voicing or volume between the two designs; certainly nothing that we would flag up as a negative. The advantage of the MP300 cabinet design is in placement and interior acceptability. The normal S300 speaker, like the S150, is best placed in a bat cave cinema room where the lights are switched off all the time. That's not to say they are ugly but rather they are an acquired taste normally not shared with the other half. However the MP300 is an altogether better looking cabinet design and because it is available in not only black, but also white, it fits in to domestic surroundings easier. Add wall mounting or hiding them behind an acoustically transparent screen (out of the way completely) and they are a far more appealing proposition. Another nice design touch that fits well with the cabinet gloss finish is the magnetic attachments for the front grille and the rather tasteful Miller & Kreisel badge to the bottom of the grille.

The cabinet of the MP300 is a complex box-inside-a-box design with an unusual approach of using a 3mm strip of tar joining the two MDF cabinets creating damping between them. All six sides use the same rigid highly damped approach. The inner panels are 9mm thick and the outer are 12mm joined with the 3mm sandwich of tar to rigidly dampen the entire cabinet. This layer sandwich, according to MK, dissipates vibration by absorbing kinetic energy and converting it into low-grade frictional heat effectively and harmlessly. This also combats the issues of standing waves inside the cabinet, vibrating cabinet walls and reflections off the front baffle, all of which would affect the sound quality in such a way as to smear and slur details and low level cues the brain uses to recreate the size and shape of sounds. There is no doubt the time and dedication taken to develop the cabinets, works extremely well as there is a very obvious size and weight difference between the MP300 and MP150 with the rigid and solid cabinet certainly capable of reducing resonance that would distract from the performance these speakers are capable of. The tar and the two MDF panels of unequal thickness have different resonant characteristics that help dissipate resonances before they excite unwanted motion in the cabinet panels. Plus the other advantage in terms of producing a clear and precise sound is that the MP300 doesn't need to worry about reproducing the lower bass frequencies which are handled by at least one subwoofer in a sub/sat system. This allows the cabinets to be smaller in size which also helps with their internal bracing adding to the structure integrity. Behind the two drivers are carefully placed sheets of Polyethylene Terephthalate (PET) which break up internal standing waves and stop sound passing through the drivers. A complete white paper exists on the MK Sound website if you want to learn more about the process and the thinking behind the cabinet design and the drivers used.

Obviously the placement of the two drivers and vertical triple tweeter alignment is not just for looks and hark back to the S150; there is real acoustical theory behind it all as well. According to MK Sound the 1.5Khz crossover point and precise driver positioning are critical to achieving their goals of fast, accurate and neutral audio reproduction. With the 6.5-inch dual drivers recessed in the baffle and each tweeter mounted in the vertical waveguide carefully, the acoustical centres of all the drivers can be aligned for the ideal phase/time relationships. By positioning like this it enhances the time signature of the speaker allowing better reproduction of the sound according to MK Sound in their white paper. Certainly the advantages of this approach have been known for some time with the S150 and now the advanced design of the S/MP300 which draws on decades of research. The triple vertical dome tweeter approach has also been given a 21st century twist with all three now part of one waveguide unit which helps yet again with performance. Using three tweeters in this way allows a wider and more accurate horizontal dispersion while also cutting down on vertical directivity and reflected sound from ceilings and floors reaching the listening position. This is critical for the reproduction of a wide stereo image and soundstage depth. Another advantage of using the vertical tweeter array is that you only need to use 1/3

of the total power load of each tweeter, cutting down on possible damage but also increasing the combined power performance and spread; and with the clever crossover it reduces phase issues, acts as one unit and provides smoother transitions between the tweeters and drivers. Frequency issues are also handled with the use of two high-impedance tweeters top and bottom and a low

one in the central position with a specially designed circuit allowing the three to perform as one single unit. Another advantage of using dual 6.5-inch drivers is that in this configuration they move air with a claimed surface area larger than a single 9-inch woofer, but with claimed greater speed, precision, power handling and dynamic agility.

“The MP300 is a real step up from the MP150 in weight, size and build quality”

Each MP300 weighs in at 12Kg and measures 15.5x13.4x6.3 inches at the top and 15.5x13.4x4.7 inches (HxWxD) at the bottom and is available in black or white satin finishes. The single speaker connectors are placed in a recessed sealed unit to the rear of the sealed cabinet and the grille is magnetically attached to the front of the speaker. Power handling ranges from 25-500 Watts with 92db sensitivity which means the MP300 can be driven by

most decent AV Receivers and Amplifiers quite easily. Frequency response is a claimed 80 Hz to 22 kHz +-3dB and the impedance is 4 Ohm. Each MP300 retails for £2,400 at the time of writing (August 2016) and we are using three of them stand mounted against the screen wall under our 10ft scope projection screen in this system.



make it easy to set up correctly on the side walls included out of the box. The grille is also magnetically held in place on the front of the unit with the side drivers covered with a flush grille that is harder to remove.

Unlike the MP300, when you remove the front grille you are met with the same driver and tweeter used in the MP300 but they are screwed into the front baffle with the screw heads on show and not internally fixed to the back of the enclosure like the MP300 with flush mounting of the drivers and tweeters. Some may find that disappointing if planning on having all the grilles off in their system, but the majority will probably never notice this.

The object of the surround speaker is to expand the ambient soundfield created by using identical speakers across the front left, right and centre speakers and trying to continue this approach to the side and rear. With tripoles placed at the side of the listening position you create not only a focus point for pin-point effects but with drivers at each side firing up and down the room, it replicates an array of surround speakers you would normally find in a large auditorium. Plus in a sub/sat system you are also not worrying

S300T Tripole Speakers

Much in the same way as the MP300 is a big step up over the MP150, the S300T is far larger, heavier and better built than the S150T. They are also just under £3,000 a pair at the time of writing (August 2016) so you are quickly reminded again that this system in total is more aspirational than budget in nature.

The size and design of the tripole certainly mean business with each unit almost the same size as the main MP300 units. Build quality is superb once again with an integrated wall bracket to about the lower frequencies so can concentrate on voicing the speakers the same as the front channels so there is a cohesive tone and realism to the ambient soundfield and effects. With the S300T the same driver and tweeters from the MP300 are utilized for the front of the tripole and to the sides are a further two 4-inch drivers per side. The cabinet is also identical in construction method as the MP300 but with the addition of isolated chambers for each of the six drive units and careful attention is taken to voice the S300T with the MP300. With the side drive units a small network is used to ensure that the side driver closest to the front tweeter does not interfere with dispersion of that tweeter.

The S300T measures in at 13.5x13.5x7 inches to the rear of the cabinet and 13.5x8.8x7 inches to the front baffle. It weighs the same 12Kg as the MP300 and is available in black or white satin finishes. Recommended power handling is 25-400 Watts with a 4 Ohm load and 88dB sensitivity and a frequency response of 80hz – 22 kHz +-3dB. Each pair of S300T tripole speakers retail for £3,400 (August 2016) and in the review system here we used one pair placed on the side walls next to the listening position at a height of 4.5ft.



X12 Subwoofers

Simply put, MK Sound calls the X12 THE Subwoofer. They do have a long history with making sub/sat systems and indeed the subwoofer is one of their forte's. The X12 is designed to carry on the concept first developed for the company's MX-1000 subwoofer with the use of dual push-pull drivers in a sealed enclosure. The unusual configuration of a front and bottom driver reduces harmonic noise and with dual 12-inch drivers working together it is the equivalent to a surface area of a single 18-inch driver, that's 226sq.in of cone area to move and control according to MK Sound.

MK Sound say that the push-pull concept allows for a smaller cabinet volume, while providing faster, more powerful and deeper bass than other designs, along with far less distortion. Of course there is a lot of marketing in that claim, but at the same time the proof is most definitely in the pudding. The way the drivers work creating a pistonic action and constant air pressure inside the cabinet, along with the phase and placement of the drivers also provides noise cancellation which MK Sound claims is substantially superior to any servo-controlled system. Indeed MK go to great lengths to dismiss servo-based designs in favour of creating a subwoofer that is correct from the ground up without any technical fixes being required, like a servo. Another claimed benefit of using the push-pull dual driver approach is the elimination of harmonic distortion and a doubling of the output by 6dB. Plus other claims are made about the improvement in bass detail, articulation, authority and impact.

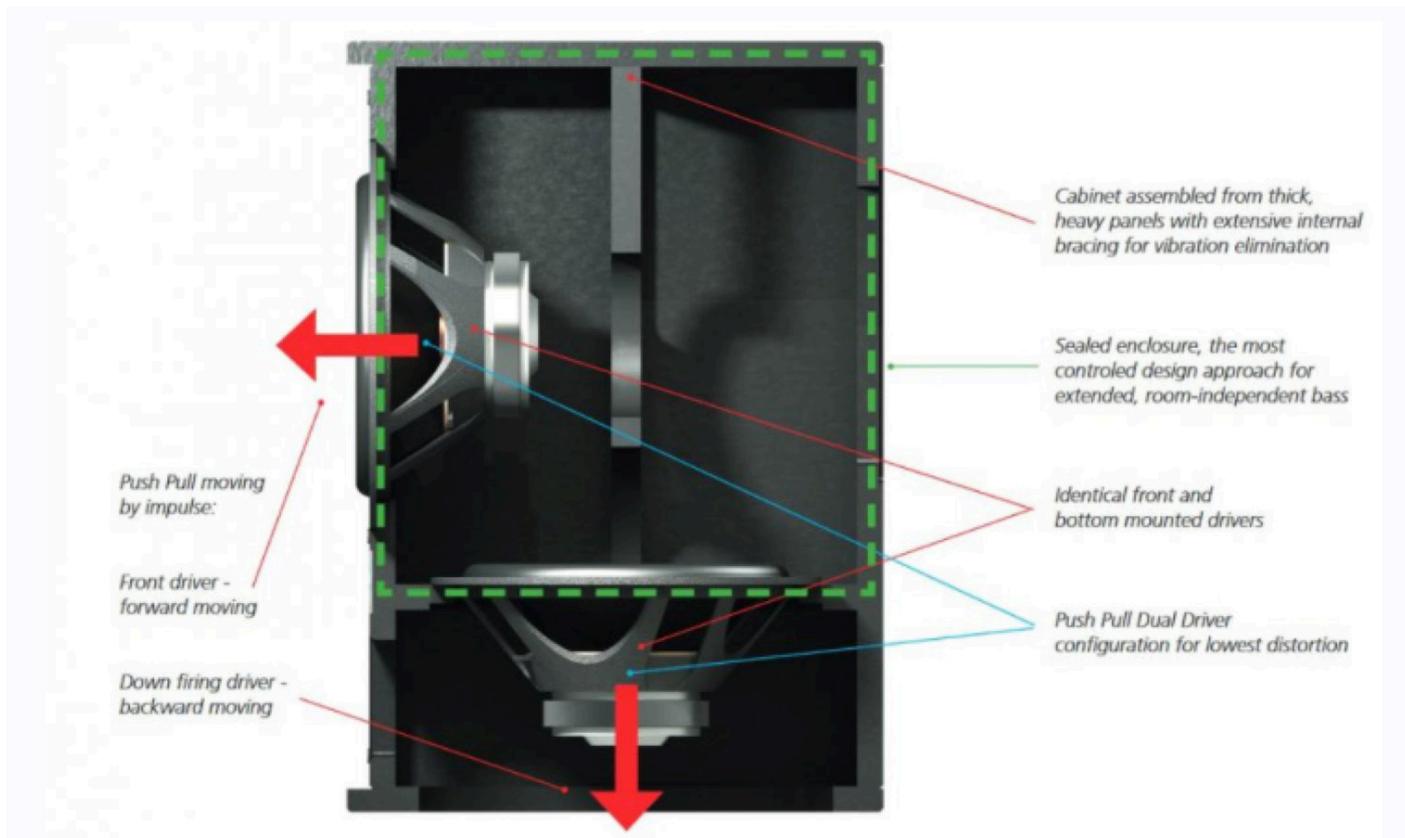
“The push-pull drivers and sealed enclosure produces less distortion and cleaner, deeper bass”

The diagram next page shows in the simplest terms what the design of the X12 is trying to achieve with the front mounted 12-inch driver, like a conventional subwoofer design, and the second identical 12-inch driver inverted in the bottom panel. This is surrounded by the cabinet which forms a stand so the driver is just above the floor with a cut out to the front; this is not a port or ported design - that is just a stand area to protect the driver. The front of the bottom driver faces the inside of the enclosed cabinet, and the rear to the outside bottom as described. Both drivers operate mechanically out of phase relative to each other's magnetic structure and therefore, according the MK, each cone is always the exact opposite position from the other in its travel, relative to its own magnet. So essentially in a push-pull configuration like this, distortions generated by the drivers are effectively cancelled out and that provides improved harmonic distortion results and cleaner, tighter bass is the result.

The cabinet also follows the rest of the speakers in the 300 system, in not only the finish on the outside, but great care is taken in the design and build quality of the enclosure. It is built from 22mm thick dense MDF panels with extremely thick and well positioned internal bracing creating a heavy and resonance free,

sealed enclosure. MK state that by using a sealed cabinet enclosure, which is correctly tuned, it is twice as fast as conventional ported designs with a superb start/stop transient response. Add in the dual push-pull design to this and they claim an unparalleled sub bass system with extremely low distortion and fast low frequency authority. If you are interested in finding out more about the technical approach taken by MK sound and their claims about the performance advantages you can read a full white paper on the X-series of subwoofers on their website.

Moving away from the design and the rest of the package consists of a Class D digital switching amplifier capable of 400 Watts continuously and up to 600 Watts peak. MK say they integrate woofer and amplification design from the earliest stages of development to ensure the best design and power package without resorting to over powering for drivers that are too big for the purpose. They also don't believe in the recent approach of adding digital signal processing (DSP) to their subwoofer design, instead they stick to the tried and tested combination of true discrete analog technology and switch mode amplification after many tests with other techniques and technologies. Their preferred approach won out every time in their testing for musicality and



deep accurate bass. They do include precision EQ filters which are designed to match and complement the driver specification, enclosure design and as a result they claim to have ideal measured target response curves, which also preserve the subtleties of deep accurate bass response.

Also included with the X12 design is what MK Sound call the Headroom Maximizer. This monitors incoming signals to maximise the headroom of the signal but also prevent large driver excursions without affecting the dynamic impact or response of the incoming signal. It achieves this by keeping the driver within its linear stroke range to minimise distortion that can be caused by extreme cone excursion. It monitors content peak values and detects dynamic changes that would need more amplification power and before such levels are reached, the Headroom Maximizer

adjusts things in an unnoticeable manner protecting the driver, yet it doesn't get in the way of the dynamic performance.

Around the back of the X12 we have a number of control dip switches and dials for selecting low pass filters, phase, three EQ settings and the THX fixed or variable level controls. Under these we have stereo balanced XLR inputs and pass thru as well as unbalanced RCA slots for the same use. Each X12 subwoofer measures in at 17.3x26x18.1 inches (WxHxD) and weighs 36Kg. It is THX Ultra2 certified and has a claimed frequency response of 20Hz – 200Hz +-3dB with 400W of continuous power and a peak of 600W. For this review we used two X12 subwoofers in two locations within the review room.

How we tested the MK MP300 System

As this is a long term review and we have had the system for a number of months it has given us the perfect opportunity to use it with all manner of AV Receivers, power amps and processors we have had in for review. This approach has certainly allowed us to test the capabilities of not only the MP300 system, but with the nature of how the speakers sound, it also allows excellent reference results with just how well the Amp or AVR performs with them.

We fully tested with our Reference Yamaha A3050 AVR, a Denon AVR-X6200W AVR and Yamaha's CX-A5100 Processor and MX-A5000 11-Channel Amp. Although the MP300's are rated at 4 Ohm they are also very sensitive and as such none of the AVRs or power amps struggled to provide them with decent enough power. Sources featured a Samsung UBD-K8500 4K Ultra HD Blu-ray Player for discs and streaming content, a NAS drive full of high quality audio rips and images were handled by a JVC DLA-X7000 DILA projector.

Sound Quality

The beauty of a sub/sat speaker system is the fact that with satellite speakers you can have each cabinet the same size and orientation across the front channels. This is vitally important to create a cohesive soundstage that can accurately pan voices and sound effects at the same tonality, timbre and volume. This adds in realism to the size and width of the sound stage which is vital with multichannel film soundtracks. Add in similar sized and accurately voiced surrounds, in this case some superb tripole speakers, positioned correctly, and you further enhance the realism of ambient sounds and a feeling of genuine envelopment. The other advantage is the use of extremely capable subwoofers to fill in the bottom end under 80Hz which leaves the satellites free to handle everything else without straining to produce low bass grunt. This frees up the performance envelope somewhat and with excellent seamless handover between the subs and sats you get a hugely dynamic full range system that is very, very capable indeed.

As I mentioned earlier in the review you have to be aware of the MK Sound. They aim to provide every nuance of the recorded content or performance in a clinical, neutral and forthright manner. Put crap in, get crap out is the best way to describe it. As such if you feed these speakers a below par recording it will sound below par, they don't try to cover over the cracks and warm things up. There is no real sound signature to the MKs as in there is no colouration or warmth added in to please the ears, like some brands insist on. What you get is a very accurate and open presentation of the movie soundtrack or music track. This may not appeal to some users out there, but it will also be the first thing on many lists for performance terms. Coming from a background of using high-end studio based speakers from the likes of Genelec and Mackie, to name two, I like the MK sound and what they present to the end user. That's not to say they are 'right' for everyone but if you are looking for speakers that will bring out every nuance, change in tone and forward sounding high end effect without muffling the impact or being overly sibilant, the MK sound will be right up your street.

The difference between the MP300 and MP150 is noticeable with added grunt from the X12 and the bigger drivers used in the MP300, giving the sound more solidity and punch and fuller tones to voices for example. Higher frequencies are very similar with a nice crispness without ever distorting or becoming harsh and overall there is a nice step up in the whole system. Is it worth the price difference? That's for you to decide, really. But there is no doubt that there is just more headroom, more dynamic presence and more subtlety and nuance. The X12's certainly add some serious low end grunt, but also an underlying feel for lower frequencies with the amount of air they are capable of moving, even in the quieter passages of a mix. Take the absolutely brilliant Stranger Things on Netflix for an example of this. Yes, it is a streamed TV show and 'only' has a Dolby Digital Plus soundtrack. Yet, even with the reduced and compressed codec compared to Blu-ray

there is a really nice dynamic feel to the sound mix and great care has been taken to create an effective atmosphere with it. Sound is an excellent story telling device and with a Sci-Fi drama like this it has to be realistic, even though we are dealing with subjects that are not from this world and we have no natural basis for how they should sound. Yet the sound mixers have been very creative and use low frequency sounds to great effect when something strange is on screen but we can't quite see it. It is that low frequency breathing of the sound mix that is subtle yet ultimately effective in upping the pulse rate. With this type of subject matter we also go from this subtle breathing low frequency effect, to silence and nothing but someone breathing, to full on all hell breaking loose. The transient performance of the MK system is breathtaking with that massive headroom capable of going from 0dB to 90db and back in a split second with no overhang. Thump is thump, not tthhuump. The cohesion of the system is also first class and you soon sink into the drama on screen with the mix feeling naturally enveloping.

Another TV favourite at the moment is Mr Robot and again it has a streamed compressed codec soundtrack, but it always feels full bodied and natural in its presentation. It also has a fantastic electronic music score, a forward sounding voice over and a mix of real world locations and sound effects, including firearms. Once again the MK System just eats this kind of mix up with ease revealing nice little nuance in the mix and the different layers to the soundtrack or environment. When it needs to ramp things up the system doesn't break a sweat with the superb dynamics and full bodied grunt available for the more challenging assaults. In S2.0 there is the use of gun fire in one scene and without any spoilers, it goes from normal ambient everyday room environment to you feeling every hit of gun fire, every whoosh of the bullets flying past and the utterly realistic feel of the scene being forced right in your face. The change in dynamics, volume and envelopment is utterly frightening as it happens so fast that it succeeds in telling the story in a dramatic and in your face manner as intended.

It is the forward sounding nature of the MKs that so utterly blow you away with today's dynamic film soundtracks, but even tried and tested classics are presented in stunning and revealing detail. One scene that I have used ever since the days of LaserDisc to test my systems and then review items is Jurassic Park and the T-Rex enclosure. I have heard it so many times on countless systems that I know it back to front and inside out. I know every little quirk of the sound mix for those 10 mins of classic cinema soundtrack. The MK didn't seem like they were trying as they ate up every single nuance, mistake and dialog replacement clip and revealed all as expected. The X12's also excellent with the dynamic shifts and bass from the breathing of the T-rex and it's foot falls, with chest pounding blasts of air pressure and enough power to move floorboards which again just adds to the experience of the scene. It is so effortless yet downright scary with how much headroom is on

offer during such scenes. There are very few speakers I have had in this test room that have seemed so effortless in providing heart stopping power and dynamics to film soundtracks.

With the long term nature of this review we have used the MK system to full effect and watched far too many great Blu-ray's to go into detail here, but suffice to say we have been using the system as our reference point for not only equipment reviews, but also assessing soundtracks and so on. On the equipment front we used a high-end Yamaha AV Processor and power amp combination for the first month of testing before swapping for a mid-level budget Denon AVR and then for the last three months we have been using our Yamaha A3050 AVR. The speakers might be a 4 Ohm load but they are also sensitive enough to not be flustered at all with the lower end AVRs. In fact the only realistic thing missing from the use of the separate power amp is a little subtlety at higher volumes and a little of the available headroom is missing. But that is to be entirely expected. With the Yamaha A3050 at our normal comfortable listening volume (-8dB under reference 0dB) we are more than satisfied with the dynamics and power available from the MK system in this configuration. Would we want to add more power? Hell yeah and if you can afford £17K for a set of these, you can afford the power amps and processor to run them. It's just the circumstances of a review room where things keep getting swapped in and out, that we don't always have high-end amps and processors to hand all the time. But you can be reassured that if you decide to build the system piece by piece as funds allow (and that's another advantage of the sub/sat approach) you won't be suffering if you can only use a high-end AVR as opposed to expensive power amps.

The abiding things that you clearly take away from the movie performance of the MK system is the cohesion, the enveloping nature of the soundfield they create and the transient power on tap. You hear every nuance of the sound mix. Every hidden gem in The Force Awakens is there to hear from Ray's force dream to the easter egg sound effects in the many battle scenes. The power on tap is also outstanding from the X12 subwoofers which provide atmosphere and genuine fear with the power of their delivery in certain scenes. I have jumped and gone for the remote initially on

a few occasions thinking things were about to be damaged such as the movement available. You soon realise to relax as much as you can when that happens, but it is the way the system has so much headroom and can change so quickly that is genuinely astonishing at times. Very few systems I have set up over the years can manage that successfully. As a movie package this is quite frankly the best sub/sat system I have ever tested. Period.

So to wrap up, what about music? Well believe it or not in stereo and using the subs (you have to use the subs) the MK system manages a very convincing wide stereo soundstage. Vocals are placed centrally and with some depth on certain tracks and the forward, neutral presentation doesn't get in the way of most tracks I have listened to over the last few months. If you are used to a more warm sound from more traditional Hi-Fi brands you may find the presentation a little too forward for your tastes, but give it some time and you start to appreciate the way in which the MKs manage to provide a very detailed and layered presentation.

Favourites like Annie Lennox's Diva, which I have used just as long as the Jurassic Park soundtrack for system testing, sounds really full bodied and sublimely spacious with her vocals sounding crisp in 'Cold' but without any sibilance, even when pushed loud. You can pick up breathing between the lines and the layers of instruments positioned around the central vocal. There is a nice feeling of space and separation with other well-trodden tracks (in my rubbish music collection) and even streaming from Tidal is an experience. DJ Shadow's new album The Mountain Will Fall is a mix of 70's funk drum breaks reconstructed with electronic chords, scratchy vocals and deep bass sweeps. Tracks like Three Ralphs have the type of bass sweeps so low down that many subs couldn't hope to ever produce them with any authority or volume – not an issue for the X12's and the blend with the MP300 satellites is always perfectly balanced. While the real brilliance of this system is with movie soundtracks where they are designed to work in a professional environment as well as the home, with music this system is also very accomplished indeed. We look forward to some serious Hi-Fi coming this way soon and using the MKs to test those products, they certainly have a strong starting position.

“This is quite frankly the best sub/sat system I have ever tested. Period.”

Conclusion

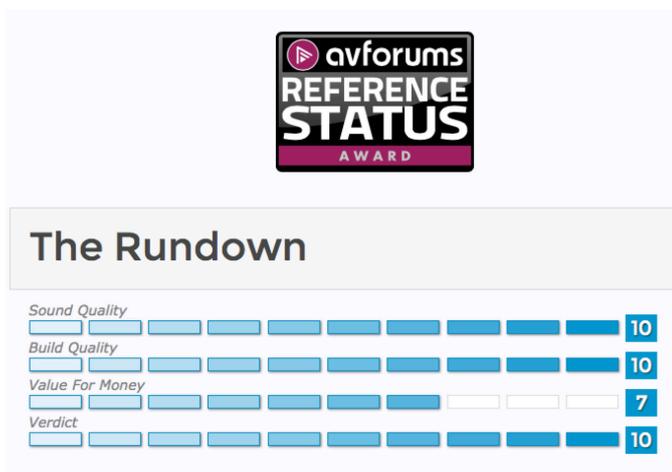
You can't help but look at the price point of this package and think about how that could equate to a very decent new family hatchback. This sub/sat speaker system is not cheap at all and £17,000 is an enormous sum of money to anyone. So, there is no doubt this is an aspirational product and the whole value for money equation needs to be left to the individual to justify or not. Given the performance available on tap and having spent at least 6 months with this system so far, there is no doubting in my mind the performance on offer for such a compact, well-built sound system is astonishing. But in the cold light of day if it wasn't here for review purposes there is no way I could afford it. Sometimes reviewers can get caught in the trap of not really thinking about the actual cost of an item when we see so many high-end, high costs systems. Value for money has been a very tough score to give, and has been taken seriously with a view to being fair and balanced. But there is no doubt this is a serious speaker system!

The previously reviewed S150 and MP150 systems really did hit the nail on the head for accurate, neutral and dynamic sound playback. Obviously the MK approach to being able to bring out everything in the mix and the clinical nature of its sound, may put off those who prefer the more coloured or warm sound of other brands. The MK sound is to reproduce what is actually there and present it as close as possible to the source. Put something crap in, you get the same out. The MK brand doesn't flatter badly recorded or mixed movies or music; it plays it back warts and all. So what the MP150 and S150 do so well is just amplified yet higher with the MP300. Whether that is worth the huge jump in cost is more of a personal question. But taking down the MP150's from our review room and then unboxing the MP300 certainly highlighted the differences in build quality, weight and size. There are real differences in the design, materials used and the engineering that has gone into the MP300 series. These changes have resulted

in a big performance leap above the S150 range where all the major plus points of the former range are magnified to produce the best sub/sat system we have ever tested.

Music and movies are brought to life with exceptional accuracy and detail with stunning dynamics backed up by the two super X12 subwoofers. The soundstage is massive with superb depth and outstanding cohesion and envelopment, mixed with frighteningly fast transitional changes in volume and dynamics. It never gets tiring to listen to this system and it doesn't take tens of thousands of pounds in amplification to get the best out of it either. Even modest AVRs can drive this sub/sat system with confidence thanks to the unique nature of such systems. The low end is handled by the two outstanding X12 subwoofers which leaves just 80Hz and higher to the MP300 and S300T speakers. Even with a 4 Ohm load the sensitivity of the speakers means that they can be easily driven properly. Obviously feed these speakers more power and they respond in kind. Our testing with the Yamaha 11-channel power amp highlighted just how good the MP300s can sound when there is the added headroom of a separate power amp and those transitions have all the more impact with faster stops and greater dynamics.

I am actually struggling to think of suggested alternatives given the performance and price point. We have been lucky enough to use the MP300s for all our review content testing over the last few months and they have proven to be neutral, transparent and clinical enough to show up performance issues with other items in the chain, making them the perfect reference speaker package and as such, that is just how we have been using them as they no doubt perform to such a high standard that they are a Reference product. Just be nice to the bank manager and switch to beans on toast.



10 SCORE OUT OF 10

The Good

- Reference quality sound
- Stunning dynamics
- Superb system cohesion and tonal matching
- Huge headroom and transient performance
- Stunningly good subwoofers
- Excellent build quality and finish
- The ultimate sub/sat system

The Bad

- Very expensive!
- Very, very expensive!