



MK Sound MP7



Fo many would-be home theatre owners or movie lovers, the prospect of filling a lounge with a full array of loudspeakers simply isn't practically feasible, or aesthetically acceptable. Those with the space and the funds may consider a dedicated home cinema, but most of us have to find a workable compromise between space, aesthetics and functionality.

As a further complication, domestic spaces are shrinking. The expansive homes of the 1970s have become clusters,

townhouses and apartments, where a smaller overall footprint is still divided into the same combination of smaller sleeping and living spaces.

In other words, the lounge that needs to host our home theatre kits has shrunk over the years, making it even more difficult to incorporate the kind of equipment required to achieve realistic surround sound.

Of course, this is the kind of challenge AV system installers revel in, and there is no shortage of potential solutions. But in the process, attaining a satisfying

balance between convenience and aesthetics on the one hand, and outright sonic quality on the other, is not always as simple.

MK Sound has long enjoyed a reputation for sonic excellence, as evidenced by the long list of cinematic luminaries and sound professionals populating its client database. And certainly, my experience of its products has revealed an ability to create cohesive and expansive sonic images with a particular focus on realism and impact.

In that context, the notion of a 'small'

MK Sound cinema speaker package seems to be a contradiction in terms, especially since the main front speakers in this system comprise relatively shallow on-wall designs.

But before we embark on a sonic journey to find out just what the MK Sound MP7 speaker system actually sounds like, let's acknowledge the specific application of a system such as this.

In a compact room, with limited floor space, and little scope for reconfiguration to suit an AV system installation, the loudspeakers will have to be compact, unobtrusive and, ideally, versatile as far as mounting options are concerned.

No wonder that home theatre sound standards authority THX has acknowledged the trend by creating a new certification programme for compact speakers, designed specifically to ensure that even this new generation of relatively small speakers is able to do realistic justice to the dynamics and tonal range of a movie soundtrack.

The THX Compact Speaker System programme sets a number of key standards to ensure acceptable performance by small home theatre speaker systems in compact rooms (see our *Of Note* panel).

MK Sound says its MP7 speaker system is the first to be specifically designed around the new THX Compact standard, suggesting that, if used in a room of the correct proportions, this collection of small speakers should still deliver the punch and presence associated with 'real' home theatre.

To find out if that's indeed the case, we installed the system in our *AV Magazine* listening room, which is perhaps a little bigger than the THX Compact standard suggests, but not too big to render the exercise useless.

As provided for review, the system under discussion here matched three M7P speakers (in a front left, centre, right configuration) with two M4-T tripoles used in a surround sound mode, while a SB12 subwoofer provided the bottom-end foundation.

VITAL STATS

M7P (Left, Right, Centre)

Enclosure type	On-wall, infinite baffle
Drive units	1x 25 mm polymer-coated silk dome tweeter, 1x 100 mm polymer-coated pulp mid/bass
Bi-wiring	No
Impedance	4 ohm
Sensitivity	88,5 dB
Frequency response	80 Hz to 20 kHz (± 2 dB)
Power handling	125 watt RMS
Dimensions (HxWxD)	540 x 125 x 90 mm
Weight	3,6 kg

M4-T (Tripole surround)

Enclosure type	On-wall, infinite baffle
Drive units	1x 25 mm polymer-coated silk dome tweeter, 1x 100 mm polymer-coated pulp mid/bass, 2x 75 mm polymer-coated pulp side-firing midrange
Bi-wiring	No
Impedance	4 ohm
Sensitivity	84,5 dB
Frequency response	100 Hz to 20 kHz
Power handling	80 watts
Dimensions (HxWxD)	188 x 152 x 171 mm
Weight	2,9 kg

SB-12 active subwoofer

Enclosure type	Sealed, front-firing
Drive units	1x 300 mm long-throw woofer
Inputs	RCA stereo
Outputs	RCA stereo
Amplifier rating	250 watt
Controls	Phase, level, low-pass (40 Hz - 200 Hz)
Dimensions (HxWxD)	381 x 381 x 438 mm
Weight	20,4 kg

SYSTEM PRICE R20 000

VERDICT

A big, smoothly integrated and dynamic sound from this compact speaker system proves that size doesn't always matter. Truly believable, impactful home theatre.

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OUR RATING: 86 / 100





Of Note

THX Compact: Big sound from small speakers

The THX Compact standard sets difficult - yet achievable - performance specifications to meet the expectations of home cinema customers seeking the dynamics, impact and realism of true surround sound, but utilising a more compact speaker array in smaller spaces.

Its definition of a compact room is 4,5 m long, 3 m wide and 2,6 m high, with a listening distance of up to 2,4 m from the screen.

Among the performance parameters set by the new THX Compact standards are high output and low distortion (up to 105 dBC SPL), a flat frequency response in the interests of clear dialogue across a wide listening area, and a specific focus on low-frequency crossover points and performance to ensure vital bass response and

smooth tonal transitions.

THX Compact is relevant across both 2.1 and 7.1 system configurations, with the subwoofer a key component, as it is required to provide extended low-frequency output with tailored equalisation for a smooth and well integrated sound when combined with

satellite speakers.

The new THX Compact standard is compatible with existing THX Select2 Plus or Ultra2 Plus-certified AV receivers, utilising an 80 Hz crossover point. A number of new-generation receivers also now offer a dedicated THX Compact set-up to ensure a perfect match.



The MP7 is based on the M7 stand-mount, but specifically configured for on-wall use. It's a slim, vertically oriented speaker, finished in glossy black (although gloss white is also on offer), and equipped with a magnetically located cloth grille.

Despite the different, shallower dimensions, the MP7 has the same internal volume as the M7, promising very similar performance characteristics. The drive units have also been retained, allowing close voice matching with the M4-T tripole surrounds.

In all cases, the speakers employ polymer-coated mid/bass drivers in sealed enclosures, with soft-dome tweeters providing the high frequencies.

Sensitivity ratings are fair, but when coupled to a relatively low nominal impedance, it's clear that these speakers deserve decent, beefy amplification, even in the THX Compact context, to ensure ample dynamics.

Hung from a wall, the aesthetic effect created by the MP7s is slim and discreet, to the point where those of us with high sonic expectations may consider these MKs just a little too compact to be taken seriously. Fortunately, we live in an era where size doesn't always count for everything.

I mounted the left and right front MP7s against the wall, equidistant from our Sony LCD panel, with the third located horizontally directly below the display, as

required by its centre channel role. The subwoofer was in the right front corner, but far enough from the rear and side walls to prevent unwanted acoustic interaction.

The M4-Ts were also wall-suspended, this time on the sides and towards the rear of the listening room. These tripoles employ a front-firing tweeter and mid/bass driver with two compact full-range drivers creating a diffused sound field that allows easier and more seamless integration of the surround channels into the overall surround soundstage.

While MK Sound suggests that a THX-certified AV receiver with THX Compact will optimise the performance of the MP7 speaker set even further, we were

unable to source one for review, which meant we evaluated the system utilising both our NAD reference receiver, and a Yamaha RX-V573 that was on test at the time.

The speakers were brand new, and were allowed to settle in over a full weekend before critical listening commenced.

Immediately apparent was the generosity of the sound, and the seamless integration of the 5.1 surround soundstage, the latter particularly remarkable because of the on-wall location of the front left and right, as well as the surround speakers.

I'd expected a more insular delivery, and was expecting to spend lots of time tweaking channel levels to achieve a measure of integration, but as it turned out, the delivery was full and cohesive from the word go.

Those MP7s have an uncanny ability to sound a lot bigger than their dimensions suggest - not only as far as frequency range is concerned, but specifically in their ability to project a wide, deep and open sound field that creates an inviting and immersive listening experience.

Similarly, the M4-Ts managed to

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augment that sound field with seamless efficiency, completely disappearing as point sources, and employing a talent for transparency to smoothly integrate with the main front speakers.

I enjoyed the clean linearity of the speaker system, which showed off a wider than expected frequency range. The tops were clear and incisive, allowing

close and accurate rendering of fine detail, with MK Sound's focus on voice-matching paying handsome dividends as far as channel integration is concerned.

The big surprise was the presence and impact of the midrange. Given the restricted size of the mid/bass drivers (and the compact dimensions of the enclosures), the mids sounded almost uncannily rich and beefy, with the impact and substance of much larger speakers.

The soundstage created by the MK Sound system was airy and generous, allowing it to create a real sense of scale and grandeur. I'd wager that anyone listening to this system without having seen the speakers would imagine an array of much larger enclosures.

Of course, one shouldn't underestimate the role of the SB-12 active sub here. Set to a 80 Hz crossover point, it contributed vital bottom-end foundation and impact, but was able to do so with an engaging agility and sense of purpose. And again, integration into the overall sound field was a particular highlight.

As a result, the MP7 system shone across a broad range of material. The train accident scene in '8mm', was rendered with wall-rattling realism,





Associated equipment

NAD T765 AV receiver
Yamaha RX-V573 AV receiver
Atlantic Technology 5.1 surround speaker system
LG BD-370 Blu-ray deck
Sony Bravia KLV 40S400A LCD TV
StraightWire and Ultralink speaker cables
Audioquest HDMI-X cables

Software

Chris Botti - 'Live In Boston' (Blu-ray)
Eric Clapton - 'Crossroads Guitar Festival' (Blu-ray)
'8mm' (Blu-ray)
David Foster And Friends Live (Blu-ray)
'Hugo' (Blu-ray)
'Inception' (Blu-ray)

both in tonal terms, and in the ability of the system speakers to resolve the complex dimensional effects.

Chris Botti's live concert in Boston was another highlight, with the MKs able to accurately recreate both the ambience and the presence of the performances. Botti's trumpet sounded sassy and real, while the scale and accessibility of the music made for a compelling AV experience.

With the MP7, MK Sound has created a speaker system that offers the best of both worlds: slim, unobtrusive dimensions coupled to the impact and delivery of a much larger speaker set. The expected compromise of scale and substance were never an issue, and while you'll need bigger speakers in a larger room, this system had no problems in that department in our listening room.

Add the smooth tonality, fine resolution of detail and a talent for transparency and dynamics to the equation, and the MK Sound MP7 system is what movie and music lovers with smaller living spaces have been waiting for.

Just don't tell the neighbours ...

Deon Schoeman

