

audition

equipment review

Sonique Boom Subwoofer

I was in a friend's home not long ago and heard a subwoofer bought for \$1,000 around six years ago. Although there was nothing wrong with it, it would not have been at all competitive in the same price bracket today. In almost every parameter with which one measures subs, it was inferior to what we now expect from product at that price point.

It brought home the fact that subwoofers have definitely been getting better over the last few years. Furthermore, this improvement has been occurring at all price points. The growth of home theatre is the general reason behind this. The two main digital

sound format's inclusion of a Low Frequency Effects (LFE) channel is the more specific reason. Add to this Hollywood's continued extensive use of deep bass in their blockbuster movies. These things have meant a lot of companies have been putting some serious R&D into coaxing out those difficult to create but impressive low frequencies. They are also achieving this out of ever-smaller enclosures.

The cleverly named Sonique Boom is just such an example of this trend. Adelaide-based Sonique Audio features a team of designers that have been involved with some of the most respected speakers ever built.

Most respectable subwoofers today are usually large affairs, whereas the Sonique Boom is all about a big sound from a very small enclosure. In fact, the Sonique Boom is even smaller than the company's very popular Thunderbox 1200 subwoofer. This goes against the trend of most sub manufacturers who make their more expensive models larger.

At \$ there are some pretty serious competitors out there and you have to have guts to call a small subwoofer a name like this. So, what makes this Sonique really 'Boom'?

Unlike many sub models in the marketplace, Sonique Audio has designed a subwoofer without a port. However, unlike some of these 'portless' subs which use a completely sealed enclosure, Sonique has opted for a two-driver system with the second speaker

Sonique's new compact sub proves it can mix it with the big box boys

By Gavin Womersley

Vital Statistics

Dimensions:

420 x 410 x 390mm

Weight:

27kg

Distributor:

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being a passive radiator. Such a subwoofer will have the benefits of output from the second driver without the penalty of port noise associated with a traditional ported enclosure.

Use of a passive radiator has in the past attracted criticism from some who think such designs do not sound as tight as sealed designs. However, the sound of a sub is much more than a straightforward reflection of the manufacturer's choice of enclosure type.

Delving into the particulars of the unit we find the two drivers are very serious looking 10 inch (250mm) cones and are high-end units manufactured by Scandinavian driver company, Peerless, and are positioned at both ends of the Sonique Boom. The active driver has a very long stroke, as you would guess by the huge surround. The amplifier is a standard unit (rather than a class D design) rated at 300 watts. The sub comes with both clipping and compression protection so you don't damage it during very enthusiastic use.

On the control section, phase is adjustable via a rotary dial and adjustments cover the full 180° ensuring you should be able to get a good blend with your main speakers.

The normal array of line-level and speaker-level inputs and outputs are present for those that want to hook the sub en-route to their main speakers.

Although there is not a dedicated .1 input the manual instructs the user in the correct settings required for this connection method.

The Sonique Boom can be set to turn itself off after 20 minutes like most other subwoofers.

The sub's cabinet is very small and is beautifully finished in real timber. This is about as good looking a subwoofer as I have seen. Its construction has no weakness and I could just not fault its construction.

For those who must, there is a Special Edition version of this model for an extra \$ that comes with a lead-lined cabinet and hardened floor spikes. The unit supplied for review here was

finished in Jarrah although black and American Oak are available.

I admit that at first I was sceptical about how the little Sonique would fare, so soon after a much larger subwoofer had sat in the corner of my lounge room. It has been hard to get good quality bass at healthy volumes from small enclosures.

After running a battery of tests on it including maximum output level I had to admit I was pleasantly surprised. No, the output was not as great as some, but it was not that far behind either. In my large (3,000 cubic foot) room the Boom attained 112dB at 45Hz, and at 35Hz, produced 101dB. Below these frequencies, the Sonique was still capable of producing some useful output in the 20Hz region, where the real low bass resides.

It should be noted that these are in-room figures and thus are affected by room gain and should just be used as a rough indication of performance. Any way you look at it though, these are big figures for a sub this size!

Once the sub was set up and its volume control adjusted so that its output matched the other speakers on my level meter (using test tones from the *Video Essentials* DVD) we were ready to rumble.

First up was the Sci-Fi thriller *Event Horizon* - an eerie film full of sudden frightening jolts and subterranean rumbles, all of which was handled without fault or strain by the Sonique. This was promising so I moved on to different fare. I could not help myself, I had to play the *Dream is Alive*. This is a fantastic Imax feature on the space shuttle and its crew. It features a knockout soundtrack. Near the start is a huge sonic boom created by the shuttle that can really rattle the rafters. The Sonique did a great job with the sonic onslaught, although the soundwave did not hit me quite as hard as I am used to from my huge Velodyne 18 inch (457mm) subwoofer, it definitely made its presence felt. I have heard other small powerful subs from overseas makers produce similar results but normally only at very much higher prices.

Rattling through my regular assortment of bass torture discs at reference level, I found that during film use the Boom never once gave audible protests or made nasty noises because of my unforgiving punishment. Its overdrive protection must work well.

Technotalk

Product Type:

Active subwoofer

Amplifier Power:

300 watts

Frequency Response:

26Hz - 160Hz

Matched Driver Complement:

2 x 250mm Peerless long stroke

Driver Arrangement:

1 x active, 1 x passive radiator

Enclosure Type:

Sealed with passive radiator

Inputs:

Line and speaker level (stereo)

Outputs:

Line and speaker level (stereo)

Finishes:

Black, American Oak, Jarrah

Crossover:

100Hz, 2nd order Butterworth

Impedance:

8 ohms

Technotalk specifications and recommended retail prices are supplied by the manufacturer

Owners of all but the very largest of rooms will be pleased at its ability to fill the room with powerful low frequencies.

Playing the great new DVD *Diana Krall: Live in Paris* brought about a new experience for me. Sitting down beside me, Keryn, my lovely partner, stated that the bass sounded very good and realistic. This comment was completely unprompted and I had not mentioned the sub at all. The double-bass to which she was referring - from John Clayton - was indeed sounding very good and was very well rendered by the Sonique.

It melded seamlessly in with my other speakers while I played a variety of classical music. Pace and timing were fantastic from a sub of this design. It will work well with those who want a fuller bottom than is presented by their normal stereo speakers. It was with only the most demanding material played at high levels that posed a challenge.

While playing the title track from Union Jack's *There Will Be No Armageddon* CD I found the Sonique's presentation of the deepest bass in this torture track lacked the physicality which I know exists in the mix. Its quality of presentation did sound very good though and for many people

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considering the Aussie-made Sonique Boom will not be disappointed.

What we have here is a sub that is very high in sound quality, very impressive in its capacity to play loudly and goes low enough for the vast majority of recorded material. It is small enough to fit into rooms and spaces the other subs can't. Build quality is beyond criticism and it looks a lot better than any other sub I have played with. The real wood finish makes it more like a piece of furniture than just another speaker. Offering almost as much wallop as much bigger subwoofers but in a package much more domestically acceptable, the Sonique Boom is definitely not a misnomer. **AVL**

Ancillary Equipment: Rotel RCD-965BX Discrete CD player, Rotel RSP-965 AV preamplifier, NAD 208 THX & Parasound HCA2003 power amplifiers, Toshiba SD-2109 DVD player, Toshiba 46WH08 Widescreen rear projection TV, Celestion A3, A2 & A4c speakers

Opinion

The 'Opinion' expressed here is that of the reviewer, summarised in the form of a 5-star rating system, and should be considered as an integral part of the full contents of this Audition Equipment Review. As such, each category should be judged on its own merits and not necessarily used as a comparison with other equipment reviews in this, or other editions of Audio & Video Lifestyle magazine.

★ Shocker
★★ Average
★★★ Good
★★★★ Excellent
★★★★★ Perfection

“...at first I was sceptical about how the little Sonique would fare so soon after a much larger subwoofer had sat in the corner of my lounge room.”

Performance
★★★★½
Build Quality
★★★★★
Compatibility
★★★★★
Value For Money
★★★★★